RCMOS – Revista Científica Multidisciplinar O Saber.
ISSN: 2675-9128. São Paulo - SP.
Year VII, v.1 2026 | Submission: 02/07/2026 | Accepted: 05/07/2026 | Publication: 08/07/2026

Storytelling in Times of Artificial Intelligence: in search of meanings for living and human experience

Contações de Histórias em Tempos de Inteligências Artificiais: em busca de sentidos para o viver e a experiência humana

Narraciones de Historias en Tiempos de Inteligencias Artificiales: en busca de sentidos para el vivir y la experiencia humana

Maria Cristina Sagário – Universidade Federal de Uberlândia, mcsagrio@ufu.br – Pós - doutoranda em História Social no Programa de Pós-Graduação em História (PPGHIS) da Universidade Federal de Uberlândia.
Sérgio Paulo Morais – Universidade Federal de Uberlândia, sergio.paulo@ufu.br - Docente do Programa de Pós-Graduação em História (PPGHIS), na linha de pesquisa em História Social, da Universidade Federal de Uberlândia.

Abstract:
This article reflects on the role of storytellers and artificial intelligence in contemporary society. To this end, it establishes a dialogue between the song Cérebro Eletrônico, by Gilberto Gil, René Descartes' notion of thought, Walter Benjamin's conception of narrative, and Paul Zumthor's reflection on orality. Based on this dialogue, the practice of storytelling is understood as the sharing of experiences and an exercise of thought that promotes the socialization of the individual through narrative. The text also draws on the contributions of Karl Marx and György Lukács to discuss the constitution of social being in its collective dimension in light of the emergence of algorithms, articulating narrative creation, language, and the world of work.

Keywords:
Thought. Narratives. Artificial intelligence. Experiences. Work.

Resumo:
Este artigo reflete sobre o papel dos narradores de histórias e das inteligências artificiais na contemporaneidade. Para isso, estabelece um diálogo entre a canção Cérebro Eletrônico, de Gilberto Gil, a noção de pensamento em René Descartes, a concepção de narrativa em Walter Benjamin e a reflexão sobre oralidade em Paul Zumthor. A partir desse diálogo, a prática de contar histórias é compreendida como partilha de experiências e exercício de pensamento que promove a socialização do indivíduo por meio da narrativa. O texto também mobiliza as contribuições de Karl Marx e György Lukács para discutir a constituição do ser social em sua dimensão coletiva diante da emergência dos algoritmos, articulando criação narrativa, linguagem e mundo do trabalho.

Palavras-chave:
Pensamento. Narrativas. Inteligências artificiais. Experiências. Trabalho.

Resumen:
Este artículo reflexiona sobre el papel de los narradores de historias y de las inteligencias artificiales en la contemporaneidad. Para ello, establece un diálogo entre la canción Cérebro Eletrônico, de Gilberto Gil, la noción de pensamiento en René Descartes, la concepción de narrativa en Walter Benjamin y la reflexión sobre la oralidad en Paul Zumthor. A partir de este diálogo, la práctica de contar historias se comprende como intercambio de experiencias y ejercicio de pensamiento que promueve la socialización del individuo por medio de la narrativa. El texto también moviliza las contribuciones de Karl Marx y György Lukács para discutir la

constitución del ser social en su dimensión colectiva ante la emergencia de los algoritmos, articulando creación narrativa, lenguaje y mundo del trabajo.

Palabras clave:
Pensamiento. Narrativas. Inteligencias artificiales. Experiencias. Trabajo.

The electronic brain and its limitations.

In the song 'Electronic Brain', composed and performed by Gilberto Gil in 1969, we can see that even then there was a concern about what could distinguish man from machines. The song can be understood as an aesthetic reflection that anticipates central hypotheses of the contemporary debate on technology, Artificial Intelligence (AI), and the human being. Far from being restricted to a casual critique of technical advancement, the music is inscribed within a notion of thought that questions the limits between instrumental rationality and human experience, between logical processing and reflective consciousness.

By addressing the possibility of a mechanical and artificial "brain," the song problematizes the distinction between technical operation and thought. In this sense, the poetic text suggests an essential difference between programmed action, dependent on external commands and stimuli, and human thought, understood as a centered activity, traversed by memory, historicity, and affectivity. The machine operates according to patterns and instructions; the human, in turn, interprets, attributes meaning, and transforms experience into narrative.

This distinction shifts the discussion from a merely functional plane—what is the machine capable of doing—to a cognitive and existential plane. What does it mean to think? Thus, the song problematizes and anticipates a critique of the conception of intelligence as simple information processing, because, under the command of our brain, we are capable of performing various actions, such as walking, talking, and seeing, things that machines, with their electronic brains, cannot do. By evoking dimensions such as emotion, self-awareness, and communicative spontaneity, the text reaffirms that the human being is not exhausted by an operational logic.

From this perspective, "Electronic Brain" can be read as a comparison of the risks of equating intelligence with technical performance. By creating this tension, the song contributes to a debate that is intensifying today in the face of generative artificial intelligence: if machines simulate language and produce narratives, to what extent does this equate to experience, intention, or consciousness? The answer hinted at by the song suggests that there is a

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fundamental difference between simulation and experience, a difference that remains at the center of philosophical and cultural discussions about technology today. The song problematizes:

> The electronic brain does everything.
> It does almost everything. It does almost everything.
> But it's mute.
> The electronic brain commands. It orders and countermands. It's the one in charge. But it doesn't walk. Only I can think. If God exists.
> Only I. Only I can cry when I'm sad. Only I.
> I, here with my thoughts
> of flesh and blood, speak and listen. Hmm. I think and I can. I can decide if I live or die, why? Because I am alive
> . Alive . For a dog, and I know
> that no electronic brain can help me on my inevitable path to death, because I am alive, I am very much alive, and I know that death is our primitive impulse, and I know that no electronic brain can help me with its iron buttons and its glass eyes – (Gil, 1969)

As already highlighted, by stating that the "electronic brain does almost everything," but is "mute" and "doesn't walk," the lyrics establish a basic distinction between the operational efficiency of the machine and the existential experience of the human being. The poetic self contrasts with the technological apparatus, claiming for itself the capacity to think, feel, decide, and recognize its own finitude. In this way, thinking, crying, choosing between living or dying are presented as acts that transcend automatism and refer to self-awareness. The machine can execute complex commands; the human being, however, knows that it lives and that it will die, thus recognizing one of the great anxieties experienced only by living beings, which is death. It is in this awareness of its own condition of existence and finitude that its singularity resides.

This reflection directly engages with the thought of René Descartes, who, in 1637, in his work "Discourse on the Method," formulated the famous maxim "I think, therefore I am." Faced with a world marked by doubt and uncertainty, Descartes identified in the act of thinking the first undeniable evidence of existence. By doubting everything, the subject discovers that he cannot doubt that he thinks, and therefore, that he exists.

Thus, in both song and Cartesian philosophy, freedom of thought appears as the basis of our existence and as a characteristic mark of the human being. In a contemporary context marked by the advancement of AI , this distinction becomes even more provocative: if machines calculate, process data, simulate language and reasoning, it would be legitimate to question: Could AI one day surpass limits that we currently consider insurmountable and that constitute

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for us one of the benchmarks of our existence? The questions not only remain open, but intensify in the face of technological transformations that reconfigure the very meanings of thinking and existing.

It is precisely at this point that the figure of the storyteller takes center stage. Unlike the machine, which organizes data and combines narrative patterns through algorithmic commands [1]– we live in the algorithmic age – the storyteller reclaims, through their actions, memories, experiences, and emotions. Their narratives are not reduced to a textual arrangement, but constitute a living event, traversed by silences, breaths, hesitations, and affections. They thus establish a unique relationship with the people who listen to them, because these people, as receivers, will also use all their senses to absorb the messages emitted by the narrator.

Therefore, if in "Discourse on the Method" (1637), René Descartes argues that to exist is to think, the practice of storytelling expands this idea: to exist is also to narrate, to share meanings and symbolism through imagination, to transmute thought from a solitary exercise into a collective experience.

In a context marked by the advancement of artificial intelligence and the consolidation of an algorithmic era, in which machines, when activated by *prompts* , become capable of conceiving plots and simulating narrative voices, storytelling reaffirms the uniqueness of human experience not only as a cognitive faculty, but as a relational event. Unlike the algorithmic generation of texts, oral narrative constitutes a practice permeated by memory, corporeality, and affections, in which the act of narrating is not limited to the transmission of content, but involves the sharing of presences, experiences, and feelings.

Thus, more than producing stories, the storyteller transforms experience into shared meaning, converting the imaginary into living word and establishing a space for listening and symbolic co-authorship. It is in this organization where individual memory and collective experiences intertwine that human narrative distinguishes itself, not as a mere organization of

[1] Algorithms are mathematical languages created to process data, perform calculations, make automated decisions, and execute specific tasks. “Algorithms are a key component of machine learning and generative AI-based models. In addition to helping machines ‘learn’ from data, algorithms are also used to optimize the accuracy of results and make decisions or recommendations based on input data.” (LEAL, p.10, 2026). Although developed by humans, algorithms play a central role in the organization, selection, and distribution of information on contemporary digital platforms. The expression 'algorithmic era' refers to the historical period in which algorithms have increasingly mediated social, economic, cultural, and political life, influencing everything from access to information to consumption patterns, communication, and social interaction. In this context, automated decisions and recommendation systems become central elements in the daily experience of individuals. (Ibid., 2026)

data, but as a construction of the world, continuously (re)created in the encounter between the narrator and the listener.

Thus, as can be observed, in both song/poetry and Cartesian philosophy, thought appears as the basis of our existence, being a characteristic mark of the human being. However, when we shift this discussion to the field of orality and narratives, it becomes evident that thinking goes beyond a logical or purely rational act. Thinking, in the tradition of oral narrative, also involves a shared action, a wisdom accumulated and refined by individual and collective experiences; it mobilizes in its practice sensory, affective, and social elements that act in benefit of reflecting, pondering, and experiencing. Thought, in this horizon, is not merely an abstract mental operation, but an embodied and relational practice.

> [...] the true narrative [...] always has within it, sometimes latently, a utilitarian dimension. This utility may consist of a moral lesson, a practical suggestion, a proverb, or a rule of life—in any case, the narrator is a man who knows how to give advice. [...] The narrator draws what he recounts from experience: his own experience or that related by others. And he incorporates the narrated things into the experience of his listeners. (Benjamin, 1985, pp. 200 and 201)

It is within this context that Walter Benjamin's reflections, especially in the essay 'The Storyteller' (1985), illuminate the discussion. By arguing that true narrative always has a practical dimension, Benjamin distinguishes shared experience from mere immediate information. For the author, the storyteller does not transmit isolated data, but dense experiences, sedimented over time, imbued with wisdom and open to interpretation, whether through advice, moral teachings or implicit guidance for life; the storyteller draws from his own experience or from the experience of others that has become his own what he recounts, intertwining his memory with that of his listeners.

When we place this perspective in dialogue with artificial intelligence, the distinction becomes even more significant, because, when stimulated and prompted, *AIs* are capable of organizing data, recognizing patterns, producing coherent narrative texts, and even telling stories; however, they do not draw from their experience what they narrate. They act mechanically, devoid of emotions, and not because they have lived or observed what they report. If, for Benjamin, the narrator's authority arises from shareable experience, algorithmic production reveals another regime of narrative elaboration: informational, statistical, and combinatorial.

In this way, narrative constitutes a privileged space for shared construction, in which existing and thinking are not dissociated from lived and transmitted experience, a dimension

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that challenges the automated modes of story generation, and places the singularity of the storyteller as a subject who carries and propagates experiences for life back at the center of this discussion.

> Narrative, which for so long flourished in an artisan environment—in the countryside, at sea, and in the city—is itself, in a certain sense, a craft form of communication. It is not interested in transmitting the "pure essence" of the narrated thing as information or a report. It immerses the thing in the narrator's life only to then extract it from him. Thus, the narrator's mark is imprinted on the narrative, like the potter's hand on the clay of the vase. (Ibid., p. 205, 1985)

In this movement, between storytellers and their narratives, the narration is not done in an imposing, directed, or controlled way, but emerges naturally on the horizon of both the one who reproduces it and the one who listens to it, generating reflections, continuities, and (re)elaborations in their thoughts.

Orality, experience, and narrative performance

Therefore, narration constitutes a historical and collective practice: a privileged space in which living, thinking, and transmitting experience are articulated in an inseparable way, configuring narration as a form of constructing meaning for life. “Our 'senses,' in the most corporeal meaning of the word—sight, hearing—are not only tools for recording, they are organs of knowledge. Now, all knowledge is at the service of the living, whom it allows to persevere in their being.” (Zumthor , p. 81, 2007).

According to Zumthor (1993), orality is not limited to the use of voice as opposed to writing; it constitutes a mode of transmission and performance of language in which the presence of the body, the voice, the situation of enunciation, and the interaction between sender and listeners participate in the production of meaning. The oral text is configured as a performative event, variable and updated with each performance. For this reason, a story will never be narrated in the same way when told by a storyteller.

Thus, Paul Zumthor (2007) emphasizes that orality is not reduced to the transmission of content, but constitutes an event that involves performance, corporeality, and presence. The narrating voice does not function merely as a vehicle for a message: it establishes a sensitive event, situated in time and space, in which body, gestures, and listening intertwine, producing meanings that emerge from the interaction between narrator, narrative, and listeners. Each performance is, therefore, unique and unrepeatable, as it is constructed in the concrete

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circumstances of the encounter and in the shared experience between those who tell and those who listen.

In this sense, although artificial intelligence systems are capable of structuring complex plots and generating formally coherent narratives, they do not fully reproduce the performative dimension of narration. Marked by breath, rhythm, improvisation, and the emotions that emerge from the encounter between narrator and listeners, this dimension transcends verbal content and is inscribed in a shared human experience, historically constructed through the transmission of stories, memories, and knowledge between generations.

In this context, daily pressures and the overproduction of data and information tend to impoverish experience, reducing the time of living to the time of doing. By neglecting simple gestures, such as the act of looking attentively, we renounce a contemplative dimension fundamental to the constitution of the human being. After all, as highlighted in Byung-Chul Han's (2015) reflections in "The Burnout Society," where the author alerts us to the effects of a social logic oriented towards performance, incessant productivity, and continuous acceleration, we need to "Learn to see means 'accustoming the eye to rest, to patience, to letting-itself-approach-itself,' that is, enabling the eye to deep and contemplative attention, to a lingering and slow gaze" (p. 28). The capacity to "enable the gaze" is an action possible only for human beings and not for machines with their artificial vision and intelligence.

Thus, in a time marked by the intensification of digital technologies and the expansion of artificial intelligence, the very updated conception of "living" is once again being challenged. As the execution of tasks, decisions, and even densely symbolic practices, such as the ancestral art of storytelling, is progressively delegated to machines, there is a risk of transferring to devices what constitutes the most elementary dimension of human experience: living as presence, reflection, and sharing.

By “giving life” to machines so that they do everything for us, we can, paradoxically, empty our own lives. This movement tends to weaken the exercise of thought, to dull our sensitive attention to the world around us, and to reduce our capacity to observe, listen to, and attribute meaning to individual and collective experiences. Thus, we lose the possibility of pausing, that necessary interval from daily pressures, which leads us, in serenity, to age-old practices such as listening to and telling stories—a privileged space for symbolic elaboration, memory, and the construction of meaning.

In this clash between mechanical “thinking” and human thought, it becomes crucial to observe how algorithmic rationality not only organizes tasks but also influences and, at times, overrides human action itself. Headlines highlighting the growing emotional dependence on

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machines are multiplying: many people find, in interactions with algorithms, an attempt to overcome loneliness or to obtain advice for their choices and decisions. What is at stake, however, is not only the instrumental use of technology but a reconfiguration of the place of listening, guidance, and the sharing of experiences.

It is precisely at this point that the figure of the storyteller acquires renewed centrality. Unlike the algorithm, which operates through statistical correlations and language simulations, the storyteller offers presence, memory, and embodied experience. Their narrative does not merely respond to commands, but emerges from their lived or observed experiences; they are capable of establishing concrete affective bonds with their listeners. If machines can produce coherent statements, the storyteller creates encounters; if the algorithm suggests answers, the narrator shares meanings. In a scenario where advice tends to be delegated by many to artificial intelligences, reaffirming the value of human narration is also reaffirming the ethical and social dimension of the act of telling and listening to stories.

Between efficiency and living: work in the age of algorithms

As an example, a headline was recently published titled: "'Phantom GDP' and mass unemployment: the apocalyptic predictions of an AI text that went viral and scared markets," where several stocks of technology companies – those in *software* – plummeted after an AI made catastrophic predictions about the future, he reports:

> The text that went viral speaks of a "phantom GDP," the idea that artificial intelligence will increase productivity and even the size of some economies, but that it would simultaneously cause mass unemployment by replacing humans. Therefore, this increase in wealth would be merely illusory. [...] According to the authors, artificial intelligence would cause mass unemployment among white-collar workers—those involved in administration and management. Company productivity would increase dramatically with robots being more efficient than workers—since AI agents *"don't sleep, don't take sick days off, and don't need health insurance* ." (GALLAS, 2026 – Emphasis added)

Therefore, it is crucial to note that the report not only describes the replacement of human tasks by machines, but also highlights the emergence of narratives produced by artificial intelligence capable of influencing decisions and reorienting human action itself. This is not merely technical automation, but an algorithmic rationality that begins to impact the social and affective realm, shaping expectations, producing insecurity, and reconfiguring the perception of the future. The " machinic thinking ," by projecting scenarios of increased productivity and mass unemployment, becomes a concrete mediation of human action, generating real material effects in markets and subjective impacts on workers.

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In a capitalist society, this dynamic intensifies as labor power is conceived primarily as a commodity, whose continuous availability tends to override the vital needs of individuals: rest, leisure, free time, and well-being. Valuation shifts from life in its entirety to its capacity to produce and generate income. As highlighted in the report, artificial intelligences "don't sleep, don't take sick days off, and don't need health insurance" (Gallas, 2026, n.p.), which demonstrates how the productivist logic exalts uninterrupted performance as an ideal of efficiency. In this context, the parameter of comparison ceases to be the concrete, situated, and finite human being, and instead approaches a machine model of continuous operation, deepening the tension between the demands of capital and the real conditions of human existence. Karl Marx argues that:

> [...] the capitalist brings about the combination of the objective and personal factors of production, insofar as these factors consist of commodities. If money is first transformed into productive capital, or if it first functions for its possessor as monetary capital, then he must first buy the means of production—workplaces, machinery, etc.—before buying labor power; for as soon as the latter comes under his control, *the means of production must be available so that it can be used as labor power* . This is how things stand from the capitalist's side. (Marx, 1985, p. 28)

Thus, when the headline emphasizes that robots would be "more efficient" because they "don't sleep, don't take sick days off, and don't need health insurance," under this parameter, human life with its rhythms, limitations, and needs comes to be conceived as an obstacle.

It is within this context that a kind of war between machines and humans is symbolically established, not as a literal armed conflict, but as a structural tension surrounding the meaning of action and the value of existence. As Georg Lukács observes, "today, the struggle for peace or war has become the axis of all human practice in the present. Its ideological consequences manifest themselves, slowly and contradictorily, in all fields of thought, feeling, and creation" (Lukács, 2020, p. 5). Thus, the exaltation of the machine as an ideal of efficiency not only reorganizes the world of work but also silently reconfigures the criteria by which we understand the human.

In this way, humans come to be evaluated according to the parameters of machines and their algorithms, as if their dignity could be translated into performance metrics. Objectification is no longer limited to the production process: it infiltrates the realm of consciousness, insofar as the worker internalizes the logic of the machine as a parameter for their actions. Mechanical "thinking," guided by strictly quantitative efficiency and productivity indices, converts human experiences, relationships, and capabilities into calculable data. What was once configured as

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shared experience becomes reduced to statistics; what was an expression of subjectivity becomes an indicator of performance.

In a capitalist society, this dynamic tends to become more radical, since labor power is conceived, first and foremost, as a commodity whose permanent availability takes precedence over the vital needs of individuals: rest, leisure, free time, and self-care. The focus shifts from life in its entirety to its productive, measurable, and profitable capacity. As previously noted in the report:

> [...] artificial intelligence would cause mass unemployment among white-collar workers — those involved in administration and management. Company productivity would increase dramatically with robots being more efficient than workers — since AI agents "don't sleep, don't take sick leave, and don't need health insurance" (Ibid., 2026).

Therefore, for those who own the means of production, there is an idealization of continuous worker performance, devoid of biological and social limitations. By naturalizing the logic of unlimited productivity, the sensitive, historical, and relational dimensions that constitute life are obscured, reinforcing a rationality that prioritizes efficiency at the expense of experience and human time.

In this context, the indiscriminate delegation of our actions and choices to machines can accentuate this impoverishment, insofar as it weakens our capacity for thought, our presence, our listening, and our connection with ourselves and with others. Recovering the experience of lingering gaze and, by extension, attentive listening, becomes an act of resistance against the automation of life and the productivist logic that marks the present day.

In a world driven by efficiency, speed, and performance, pause, silence, and listening—central elements of orality—are becoming increasingly scarce. In this scenario, the storyteller not only transmits narratives but also becomes an agent of resistance to the logic of acceleration, reinstating the time for reflection, listening, and sharing. Given this context, the need arises to reflect on the ways in which storytelling can maintain its relevance and uniqueness while simultaneously engaging with the technological and cultural transformations of the algorithmic age.

Final considerations

AI is here to stay. Digital technologies and, more recently, generative artificial intelligence have produced profound transformations in the ways we create, narrate, and share

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stories. If, in other times, the storyteller's main instruments were their voice, body , and lived experience, today we are witnessing the emergence of narratives mediated by algorithms, applications, and storytelling robots. In this scenario, "thinking" no longer seems to be an exclusive attribute of human beings.

This shift can be symbolically anchored in Gilberto Gil's song ″ Electronic Brain , ″ which, back in the 1960s, intuited the rise of an algorithmic rationality capable of "doing everything, doing almost everything." However, by reminding us that "it is mute," the song points to a crucial boundary: between calculating and living, between processing information and producing experience. Thus, although artificial intelligences exponentially expand the possibilities of narrative creation, the question remains open as to what distinguishes human thought—historical, sensitive, and situated—from the algorithmic processing that simulates it.

The power of storytellers lies precisely in their ability to mobilize the listener's imagination, inviting them to mentally construct scenarios, characters, and atmospheres, while simultaneously elaborating mediations between the real and the imaginary, the possible and the impossible. It is a relational process in which the narrative is not simply transmitted, but shared in and through presence: in the gaze that meets the other, in the timbre and rhythm of the voice, in the pauses, gestures, and body language. The storyteller thus establishes a unique sensory and aesthetic experience, constituted in the encounter and reciprocity of listening.

When we anchor this practice in the world of work, its difference from the logic of productivity that guides much of contemporary activity—focused on productivity and the absence of breaks—becomes evident. Storytelling does not fully submit to the parameters of efficiency, acceleration, or measurable performance; it demands time, shared attention, and affective availability, dimensions that escape productivist rationality. In this sense, the embodied dimension of narrative, founded on presence and exchange, affirms a way of doing that resists the reduction of experience to quantifiable results. In the end, storytelling is not just a legacy of the past, but a practice that continues to produce meaning in the algorithmic age.

It is precisely this existential density—historical, sensitive, and relational—that remains a distinctive trait of human experience and which, to date, artificial intelligences have been unable to reproduce in its complexity. Although they can generate texts and simulate voices, they lack the concrete insertion into the fabric of social relations and lived time that constitute human work as a meaningful and meaning-producing activity.

In this context of coexistence between ancestral practices and emerging technologies, the central issue is not limited to the technical competence of producing texts, but to the status of the experience that sustains the act of narrating. Ancestral practices are understood as the

oral transmission of stories, memories, and knowledge that, although continuously updated in different social and technological contexts, preserve their function of creating bonds, sharing experiences, and producing collective meanings. Understanding the role of the storyteller in the algorithmic age implies reaffirming the value of presence, sensitive listening, and emotional involvement in a time when narratives can be generated by machines and disseminated by data-driven systems.

While artificial intelligence expands the possibilities for creating and circulating narratives, it is storytellers who preserve the ethical and relational dimension of storytelling, reminding us that telling stories is, above all, a gesture of sharing and constructing collective meaning. Thus, more than a tension between human and machine, what is at stake is the defense of storytellers and their narratives, observing in this practice a space where lived experience, living and feeling, remain irreplaceable. Therefore, the question is not about determining who can tell stories, but about understanding where they emerge from and what meanings they produce. In the algorithmic age, the uniqueness of storytelling lies precisely in this ability to transform lived experiences into narratives that strengthen bonds, promote listening, and reaffirm the human dimension of narration.

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