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SURVIVOR TESTIMONIES IN THE AGE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE: ETHICAL, LEGAL, AND TECHNICAL BOUNDARIES OF DIGITAL REPRESENTATION

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ABSTRACT: This paper examines the ethical, legal, and technical conditions under which artificial intelligence may be used to interpret collective testimonies of victims of genocide, concentration camps, and wartime atrocities. The central issue concerns the capacity of digital systems to represent historical experiences accurately without compromising the dignity of victims, generating fabricated statements, or facilitating revisionist misuse. The analytical framework distinguishes between AI models that emulate or simulate the testimonies of real individuals and systems that employ fictional composite narrators grounded in verified archival material and transparent provenance. Within this conceptual context, the paper presents the author's pilot project Great School Class, a chatbot designed as a fictional schoolboy narrator inspired by historically documented experiences of children executed in Kragujevac in October, 1941. The system employs retrieval-based access to verified historical sources combined with constrained generative methods to maintain contextual accuracy and prevent the fabrication of testimony. The chatbot is currently under development and serves as a pilot environment for examining the possibilities and limitations of fictional digital narrators in representing historical contexts. It was first tested in a controlled setting at the Kralj Petar I Karađorđević Elementary School in Kragujevac. The broader significance of this approach lies in pedagogical, museological, and public-history practices, where interactive digital systems increasingly mediate collective memory. The paper proposes a framework for

the transparent, ethically responsible, and methodologically grounded use of fictional digital narrators, highlighting their potential to enhance engagement while acknowledging the risks of narrative distortion and misinterpretation.

KEYWORDS: artificial intelligence; collective testimonies; ethical frameworks; digital narration; historical interpretation

INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary digital age, the development and implementation of artificial intelligence (AI) in the domain of historical interpretation and cultural heritage present both novel opportunities and substantial ethical and methodological challenges. The issue of representing the collective memories of victims of genocide, concentration camps, and war crimes is particularly sensitive [Spennemann, 2024]. In this context, any distortion or fabrication of testimonies can lead to a violation of the dignity of victims and the potential misuse of historical data. In this context, digital systems must ensure a high degree of credibility, transparency, and respect for ethical standards when interpreting historical experiences. A fundamental theoretical distinction exists between AI models that emulate the testimonies of real individuals and systems that utilize fictional composite narrators based on verifiable archival materials. The initial model entails the potential for invalidated replication of personal testimonies, which can result in ethical dilemmas and legal concerns regarding copyright and personal rights. Conversely, fictional narrators embody a synthetic narrative, which synthesizes broad historical experiences. In this regard, each component of such a narrative is required to be grounded in verifiable sources and meticulously documented.

This methodological approach facilitates the development of interactive narratives that are pedagogically, museologically, and publicly historically acceptable, while maintaining ethical responsibility and accuracy. The broader significance of this approach is reflected in the opportunities that interactive digital systems offer for pedagogical practice, museological installations, and public history. These interactive digital systems facilitate an empathic connection with collective memory, while ensuring that the narrative remains ethically, methodologically, and historically grounded. The paper presents a structured approach to the conscientious and evidentiary utilization of fictional digital narrators, underscoring their capacity for inciting change.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The fictional narrator serves as a model of artificial intelligence, representing a novel and controversial approach to the interpretation of cultural heritage and the production of memorial narratives. Instead of reproducing real-life figures or directly reconstructing their alleged confessions, this narrator possesses a fictional identity and biography, speaks in the first person, and embodies aggregated experiences [Antoniou et al., 2025]. These experiences are typical, common patterns of life, everyday life, or social phenomena that are charac-

teristic of a certain historical, cultural, or social environment. This approach enables the narrator to serve as an interpretive intermediary, tasked with conveying the "dimensions" of collective memory, without the pitfalls of authentic, personal testimony [He et al., 2024].

These "fictional memorial figures" have the potential to enrich the audience experience in various settings, including museums, digital exhibitions, educational programs, and digital heritage applications. They facilitate a personalized, narratively engaging, and emotionally accessible presentation of complex historical, social, and cultural issues. However, for this model to be ethically, scientifically, and methodologically responsible, strict criteria and controls must be implemented. Specifically, every fact (date, circumstance, description of a scene) must be verifiably grounded in documentation, archives, or expert sources; fictional elements must be clearly labeled as narrative constructions; and there must be no mixing of facts and interpretations, nor a replacement of documentation with fiction. Appropriate frameworks of ethical use, transparency, and provenance become crucial in the application of this model [Riedl and Bulitko, 2013].

The implementation of this model is technically feasible through a combination of generative algorithms (LLMs) and factual accuracy assurance technologies, such as retrieval-augmented generation (RAG) architectures, or integration with semantic web-based systems and cultural heritage databases. This infrastructure enables narratives to exist in a state of both narratively engaging and strictly fact-based, verifiable existence. Recent approaches in the field of digital heritage demonstrate the feasibility of developing "digital heritage twins" and interactive three-dimensional displays, enriched with narrative, that can integrate archival data, metadata, visual representation, and narrative interpretation. This integration enhances accessibility, educational value, and audience engagement potential [Barzaghi et al., 2025]. Concurrently, there are critical arguments that must be addressed. The creation of a technical architecture is insufficient; the development of institutional, ethical, and professional practices is also necessary.

These practices must guarantee that narrative does not become an instrument of manipulation, simplification, or historical reduction. In this sense, the responsibility falls on both the creators namely, curators, historians, and designers of digital exhibitions and the technologies. Algorithms must remain transparent, and human oversight and expert control are necessary [Rizvić et al., 2024]. A fictional composite AI narrator represents a promising form of digital memory and cultural interpretation if implemented with clearly defined principles, ethical and methodological mechanisms. This technology has the potential to serve as a pivotal instrument for museums, educational institutions, digital heritage platforms, and public history, facilitating the revitalization of the past in a manner that is comprehensible, captivating, and conscientious.

SOCIAL AND HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The composite narrator, as a model of artificial intelligence, occupies a domain where cultural heritage, memory, and digital technology intersect.

Despite the narrators' self-declaration of non-representation of a particular historical figure, the environments and communities they craft, working classes, ethnic groups, artisans, small communities, or cultural practices are firmly anchored in a genuine historical, social, and demographic milieu. It is imperative to thoroughly research, archivally substantiate, and culturally analyze the context to mitigate the risk of introducing a distorted and simplified account of the past, albeit fictional, into the narrative. This risk can significantly affect collective memory and social perception of the past. Additionally, given that generative AI models frequently operate on extensive training sets comprising various biases, there is a risk that the narrative reproduces or even reinforces stereotypes, unfair or unverified ideas about specific groups and social strata [Kuo and Baghban, 2025].

Analyzing sensitive social phenomena such as poverty, migration, discrimination, political repression, and war requires careful contextualization. Fictionalization must avoid trivializing systemic issues or exaggerating drama, and digital formats may blur the boundary between fiction and reality. Generative tools, while useful for narrative creation, often struggle to accurately convey cultural, ethnic, architectural, and local details, which can affect credibility [Gu et al., 2023]. This highlights the need for strict methodological controls, thorough data verification, peer review, and clear labeling as "interpretive narrative" rather than documentary evidence.

Recent research highlights the potential of AI-generated narratives (textual, visual, or audio) to become part of cultural heritage. However, it is imperative that their use remains responsible, transparent, and ethically guided [Kuo and Baghban, 2025]. Research on AI-driven "digital heritage twins" in virtual museums emphasizes the critical role of expert involvement in ensuring accurate and informative representations [Rizvić et al., 2024].

The integration of generative models with heritage custodianship has the potential to significantly expand access to archival resources, support interactive reconstruction, and enable new forms of collective memory, especially for intangible heritage and communities with limited physical documentation [UNESCO, 2025]. In this framework, it is essential to clearly define the fictional composite narrator as a narrative construct rather than a historical source. The effective utilization of this approach necessitates stringent methodological oversight, ethical accountability, and expert collaboration. This ensures the preservation of historical authenticity while facilitating novel modes of engagement and interpretation for a diverse audience [He et al., 2024].

ETHICAL PRINCIPLES AND LEGAL GUIDELINES

The integration of fictional narrators into digital cultural heritage is predicated on a meticulously delineated ethical framework, as these narrators, while circumventing the moral concerns associated with the depiction of real individuals, concomitantly introduce novel ethical and methodological challenges in the portrayal of authentic historical and social contexts. The key guiding principle for projects that employ fictional narrators is the protection of human

dignity, which requires avoiding sensationalism, stereotypes, and romanticized depictions of historical suffering [Pansoni et al., 2023]. Transparency is equally essential: users must be explicitly informed that the narrator is fictional and represents collective or typical experiences rather than an individual biography [Tiribelli et al., 2024]. Contextual accuracy demands that all narrative components: social structures, material conditions, cultural practices, and demographics derive exclusively from verifiable sources such as archives, ethnographic research, and historical studies [Wang et al., 2025]. Community consultation is required when depicting culturally or socially specific groups to ensure sensitivity, avoid misrepresentation, and foster collaboration with experts and local stakeholders [Tiribelli et al., 2024]. The protection of privacy further requires that fictional composite narrators exclude identifiable personal data and do not recreate individual life stories; instead, they must rely on generalized, collective patterns to prevent privacy violations and uphold ethical accountability.

In light of the aforementioned principles, it is imperative that any project employing fictional narrators adhere to the following minimum ethical and institutional measures:

- it is essential to consult with experts in the domains of heritage, history, culture, education, and local communities through advisory committees;
- all media forms must be distinctly marked as fictional;
- a systematic mechanism should be in place to address complaints, requests for correction, or reviews of the narrative in the event that users identify errors or inaccuracies;
- it is crucial to adopt and document an ethical protocol that delineates the boundaries of fictionalization, the manner of utilizing sources, the responsibilities of participants, and their rights [Tiribelli et al., 2024].

The legal framework for digital systems representing collective memories, especially in the context of genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity, is based on multiple layers of international norms and standards. A foundational text in this area is the International Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (UN, 1948), which defines the protection of the dignity of victims as part of a broader framework for preventing the misuse of historical narratives. Similarly, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (UN, 1966) in Article 17 protects the right to privacy and the integrity of the person – which includes posthumous reputation, especially when digital models come close to simulating real individuals. Another significant source is the guidelines established by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance [IHRA, 2021], which recommend that digital interpretations of the Holocaust must adhere to principles of transparency regarding their sources, demonstrate ethical responsibility, and be resistant to manipulation by revisionists. In a similar vein, the World Jewish Congress [WJC, 2020] underscores the imperative for digital memorial projects to meticulously delineate between historical fact and narrative reconstruction. The utilization of technology, it asserts, must not result in the relativization of atrocities. In the domain of artificial intelligence, the UNESCO Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence [2021] holds legal relevance, mandating transparency, explainability,

and the explicit labeling of fictional components in systems that engage with sensitive historical material.

Artificial Intelligence systems that simulate the experiences of victims encounter legal challenges related to the protection of personality, dignity, and copyright. These challenges include post-mortem protection in some legislation, as evidenced by the German *Kunsturhebergesetz*. The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) does not apply to deceased persons. However, the EU AI Act (2024) stipulates transparency and notification requirements for users interacting with synthetic narratives. Research has demonstrated that AI narratives have the potential to lead to misinterpretations or confusions regarding historical sources [Riedl and Bulitko, 2013; Gu et al., 2023]. This underscores the necessity for verification procedures, methodological transparency, and technological measures that are designed to prevent the misuse and falsification of history.

METHODOLOGY FOR DEVELOPING FICTIONAL COMPOSITE NARRATORS – A PRACTICAL APPROACH

The development of composite narrators in digital cultural heritage requires integrating historical research, narrative design, and technical constraints. Such a narrator functions as a synthetic voice that interprets collective social, cultural, or historical experiences rather than serving as a documentary witness to individual lives. The practical process includes defining the thematic and temporal scope, identifying reliable data sources, constructing narrative patterns, and verifying historical accuracy in line with established ethical standards [Wang et al., 2025].

The formulation of narratives relies on diverse data sources, including demographic records, economic and sociological surveys, ethnographic research, and academic literature on everyday life, social structures, and cultural practices, supplemented by museum and archival materials. These sources enable the reconstruction of social environments and cultural patterns while ensuring compliance with ethical and privacy standards [Champion, 2017]. Demographic data and statistics support the portrayal of archetypal life patterns across specific temporal and spatial contexts such as household composition, education, labor participation, and migration [Rizvić et al., 2024]. Economic and sociological surveys further illuminate material conditions and inequalities, helping prevent romanticized or aestheticized representations of difficult living circumstances [He et al., 2024].

Ensuring the authenticity of ethnographic studies and literature on cultural practices, in conjunction with museum and archival sources, is paramount in depicting customs, rituals, language, architecture, and social interactions without identifying individuals [Tiribelli et al., 2024]. The integration of generative algorithms with retrieval-augmented generation (RAG) enables the fictional narrator to convey narratives that are both verifiable and ethically grounded [Münster et al., 2024]. The methodology employed in this study is based on a multidisciplinary approach, with experts from various fields, including

history, sociology, ethnology, museology, and digital humanities, contributing to the selection of sources, the creation of narratives, and the verification process. This approach is founded on the principles of accuracy, ethical compliance, and cultural sensitivity [Tribelli et al., 2024]. Fictional narrators facilitate interactive engagement with historical and cultural contexts while respecting privacy and factual integrity. These narrators serve as a conduit between digital technology and cultural heritage for educational and museological purposes.

The Potential Utility of Fictional Composite Narrators in the Context of Cultural Heritage

The employment of composite narrators within cultural and educational contexts can, when meticulously formulated and ethically implemented, serve to augment engagement and comprehension. In museums, these narrators function as "fictional inhabitants", elucidating social life and material culture, transforming static exhibits into interactive experiences, and cultivating audience empathy and comprehension. AI-supported systems have been shown to enhance accessibility and personalization, thereby benefiting diverse and younger audiences [Antoniou et al., 2025].

As posited by Kiourexidou and Stamou, the "Holo-Artisan" system exemplifies the potential for technological integration into museum exhibitions, thereby rendering them holistic, multi-user, and personalized [Kiourexidou and Stamou, 2025]. This technological advancement enables visitors to engage with digital narratives and artistic elements in real time, thereby expanding the possibilities of the exhibition narrative. However, this does not supplant the role of the curator [Kuo and Baghban, 2025]. Reputable international institutions such as UNESCO have clearly indicated that the integration of AI into museum practice must be accompanied by ethical control, protection of authenticity, and sensitivity to cultural, historical, and social realities [UNESCO, 2025].

The fictional narrator in education and libraries serves as a digital mediator of storytelling, thereby rendering historical narratives more accessible and engaging. It establishes a connection between the past, material culture, and social structures, facilitating comprehension of economic and family relationships and enabling experiential learning. In libraries and cultural centers, the narrator can be utilized in thematic exhibitions, educational programs, and oral tradition, thereby connecting young people with available knowledge and resources.

From a humanities perspective, the fictional narrator functions primarily as a means of reconstructing social environments and simulating historical contexts, rather than as a documentary source. In the context of digital-heritage and GA-AI projects, such narrators serve as interfaces that facilitate access to archives, demographic data, and sociological analyses, thereby translating complex material into more accessible forms for a broader audience [Martusciello et al., 2025]. When appropriately contextualized, this approach has been shown to enhance engagement and support clearer understanding of historical and social structures, while maintaining academic rigor. Research has demonstrated that fictional narrators, when transparently labeled and ethically supervised, have

the capacity to enhance visitor engagement and facilitate learning within cultural and educational institutions [Canet Sola and Guljajeva, 2025].

PILOT PROJECT "THE GREAT SCHOOL CLASS"

The pilot project, "The Great School Class", offers a distinctive illustration of the implementation of artificial intelligence in the interpretation of the historical experiences of children who perished during World War II. The system operates as a chatbot, accompanied by a fictional narrator – a schoolboy, modeled after documented historical experiences of children shot in Kragujevac in October 1941. The system employs a hybrid approach that integrates a retrieval-based access strategy with constrained generative methods. This approach ensures the maintenance of contextual accuracy and thwarts the fabrication of statements. The initial testing of the pilot was conducted in an Information Technology (IT) class at the "Kralj Petar I Karađorđević" institution. The Primary School in Kragujevac served as a controlled environment for the examination of the possibilities and limitations of fictional digital narrators in presenting historical contexts. This project is one of the few in its conceptual uniqueness within the region, as the majority of analogous initiatives are confined to the Holocaust and genocidal events, predominantly situated within prominent museums and foundations.

For the purpose of illustration, a comparative analysis of international approaches and technologies is warranted. The USC Shoah Foundation has developed two series, "Dimensions in Testimony" and "New Dimensions in Testimony", which utilize interactive holograms of Holocaust survivors, such as Pinchas Gutter, to facilitate interaction with museum visitors. These holograms employ Natural Language Processing (NLP) technology to select an appropriate pre-recorded video response. The Illinois Holocaust Museum (Skokie) has recently introduced the "Survivor Stories Experience", which employs a similar model. In this interactive exhibit, visitors have the opportunity to direct their inquiries to the system, which subsequently plays relevant segments from recorded testimonies. Notably, this initiative has recently been expanded to encompass victims of the Rwandan genocide [Illinois Holocaust Museum, 2021]. The Museum of Jewish Heritage in New York facilitates an interactive dialogue with ten survivors through a similar mechanism ("Survivor Stories: An Interactive Dialogue"). Similarly, the British project Testimony 360 (Holocaust Educational Trust) employs a VR/AI interface to interact with a digital Manfred Goldberg based on pre-recorded testimonies. An Israeli project described in the UNESCO report "AI and the Holocaust: Rewriting History?" utilizes three-dimensional animation of survivors, integrated with an artificial intelligence layer that facilitates interaction. However, it remains strictly constrained within the boundaries of documented testimonies [WJC, 2020].

In all these cases, the systems articulate their discourse in the first-person perspective as survivors. However, they do not technically "invent" new testimonies; rather, they select segments from already recorded material or control digital replicas. Conversely, generative LLM models that spontaneously im-

provise as victims and generate new testimonies present an ethical dilemma and are not currently incorporated into official museum-education initiatives [IHRA, 2021] "The Great School Class" is an innovative regional example that combines a generative AI approach with strictly controlled historical sources, respecting ethical principles. It simultaneously enables educational and interactive use in a school environment.

CONCLUSION

The analysis of the pilot project "The Great School Class" clearly indicates the potential and unique value of generative digital narrators in the context of memorial and educational work in Serbia. This chatbot represents an innovative approach to the application of artificial intelligence in the culture of remembrance, as it combines retrieval-augmented generation (RAG) architecture with strictly controlled generative methods within a limited corpus of historical sources. This achieves a balance between engaging students and the public through interactive narration, while simultaneously preserving historical accuracy and ethical standards, which is a key challenge when working with sensitive and traumatic content.

A seminal aspect of the project is its implementation in a formal educational environment. To date, most international initiatives of this type, such as Dimensions in Testimony (USC Shoah Foundation), Survivor Stories Experience (Illinois Holocaust Museum), and the Museum of Jewish Heritage Interactive Dialogue, have relied on pre-recorded statements from survivors, while generative models remain in the realm of ethical caveats or research experiments. In contrast, "The Great School Class" utilizes authentic historical materials as the foundation for a generative narrative flow, without replicating the experiences of individual real witnesses. This approach enables the simultaneous maintenance of historical credibility, pedagogical functionality, and ethical responsibility. The project exemplifies the practical implementation of the principles of transparency, respect for human dignity, contextual accuracy, and consultation with experts in history and education, which are fundamental ethical principles in the design of digital narrators.

In this way, the project is regarded as a paradigm of best practice for the integration of artificial intelligence in educational, museological, and public-historical contexts. The subsequent development of the project, encompassing the augmentation of the archival database, the refinement of the RAG architecture, and the formalization of the ethical framework, signifies a pivotal step in the establishment of a sustainable and replicable model of a generative memorial narrator. This approach not only contributes to innovative education about traumatic events, but also sets the standard for the responsible application of artificial intelligence in working with collective memories. It also recalls the importance of a precise demarcation between historical documentation and narrative fiction.

"The Great School Class" represents a pioneering model in the region, and one of a limited number worldwide that integrates generative AI, RAG

architecture, and historically documented sources within a structured educational setting. The implementation of this system demonstrates the feasibility of developing an ethically, pedagogically, and methodologically sound system that facilitates interactive digital representation of collective historical experiences, while ensuring the dignity of victims is preserved and the integrity of testimonies is maintained. This development represents a novel paradigm within the realm of artificial intelligence application, particularly in the domains of commemoration, education, and public history. It unveils a landscape of possibilities for further research, enhancement, and extensive implementation within the region and beyond.

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ОРИГИНАЛНИ НАУЧНИ РАД
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СВЕДОЧАНСТВА ПРЕЖИВЕЛИХ У ЕРИ ВЕШТАЧКЕ ИНТЕЛИГЕНЦИЈЕ: ЕТИЧКЕ, ПРАВНЕ И ТЕХНИЧКЕ ГРАНИЦЕ ДИГИТАЛНЕ ПРЕДСТАВЕ

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РЕЗИМЕ: Рад испитује етичке, правне и техничке услове примене вештачке интелигенције за тумачење колективних сведочења жртава геноцида и ратних злочина, посебно преко фикционалних композитних наратора заснованих на проверљивим архивским изворима. Представљен је пилот-пројекат „Велики школски час” – четбот дечак Петар, који користи RAG архитектуру за очување контекстуалне прецизности. Он је инспирисан историјски документованим чињеницама о деци стрељаној у Крагујевцу, октобра 1941. године, Пројекат је први генеративни меморијални ВИ систем у региону и први пут тестиран у формалном школском окружењу.

„Велики школски час” пружа јединствен етички и методолошки оквир, омогућава интерактивно учење о историјским и социјалним контекстима и успоставља мост између дигиталне технологије и културног наслеђа, показујући да фикционални композитни наратори могу бити едукативни и контекстуално прецизни алати за тумачење колективне историје.

КЉУЧНЕ РЕЧИ: вештачка интелигенција; колективна сведочења; етички оквири; дигитални наратив; историјска интерпретација