



Sustainable, Usable and Visible Digital Cultural Heritage: Twinning for Excellence (DIGHT-Net)

Syllabus:

Digital Cultural Heritage:

Memory, Archives, and

Storytelling in the Digital

Age (6 ECTS)

(January 2026)

Lead Institution: Tallinn University

Partners: University of Bologna, University of Amsterdam, University of Turku

Institution(s): Tallinn University (lead) with the University of Amsterdam, University of Turku, and University of Bologna

Programme fit: Core for MA in Contemporary Culture; elective for other MA programmes

Format and timing: 14 sessions × 90 minutes; Thursdays at 16:15 (Tallinn University, room A-325)

Convenors: prof. Marek Tamm (TLU) and Marjolein Uittenbogaard (TLU/UvA)

Website of the course: <https://moodle.tlu.ee/course/view.php?id=6502> (needs registration)

Course description

This course is an interdisciplinary, seminar-led course that examines how memory, heritage and historical knowledge are produced, curated and re-imagined in data-driven, networked environments. Led by Tallinn University in partnership with the University of Amsterdam, the University of Turku and the University of Bologna under the DIGHT-Net umbrella, the course brings together perspectives from memory and (critical) heritage studies, cultural semiotics, archival studies and digital humanities/cultural analytics.

Teaching is organised into four blocks that build cumulatively. A theoretical block establishes shared conceptual ground, covering canons and controversies in memory/heritage studies, cultural/digital semiotics, archival theory in the digital age, and digital humanities/cultural analytics, followed by an ethics session addressing power, consent, IP, gender-aware and decolonial practices, and environmental sustainability. Two thematic blocks translate theory into case-based learning: one focuses on archiving and audiovisual heritage (including a behind-the-scenes visit to the Juri Lotman Semiotics Repository), and the other on museums and digital storytelling (culminating in a site visit to the Virtual Time Travel Experience: VR Tallinn 1939/44). A practical block equips students with transferable methods: lightweight text/image analysis, metadata curation, provenance auditing, and introductory 3D/AR/VR workflows, together with reflective “paradata” documenting how results are produced.

Assessment balances critical reading and short applied tasks with a research project presented at a student symposium and a final paper featuring a reproducibility appendix. By the end of the course, students will be able to evaluate digital heritage infrastructures and narratives, apply appropriate methods to real collections, and communicate ethically grounded findings to scholarly and public audiences.

Learning outcomes

By the end of the course students will be able to:

1. Explain key concepts in memory studies, (critical) heritage studies, cultural semiotics, archival studies and cultural analytics, and articulate their relevance to digital cultural heritage.

2. Critically evaluate digital collections, platforms and tools with respect to authenticity, integrity, accessibility, bias, IP and sustainability.
3. Apply at least two digital methods (e.g., basic text, image or network analysis; metadata work; 3D/AR/VR storytelling) to a heritage case.
4. Design a small-scale research project that integrates theory, methods and ethics, and communicate findings to scholarly and public audiences.
5. Collaborate across disciplines and institutions, demonstrating reflective practice and research integrity, including responsible use of generative AI.

Graduate attributes developed: critical and ethical reasoning; methodological literacy; collaborative project work; scholarly communication.

Assessment and workload (6 ECTS)

Summative

- **A. Reading diaries (4 × ca 300 words) – 20%**

Short personal reflections (each ca 300 words) of the prescribed readings; each reflection corresponds to one thematic block of the course and should engage with all prescribed readings listed for that block (for more details, see the separate guidelines for reading diary).

- **B. Micro-tasks (4 × ca 200 words) – 10%**

Short applied prompts tied to the week's methods/ethics (e.g., metadata audit; prompt-audit of a model; paradata note).

- **C. Research paper's abstract and bibliography (ca 400 words) – 10%**

Due Week 7 (16 March); includes research question, corpus/collection, method(s), ethics and feasibility.

- **D. Symposium presentation (10 minutes + 5 minutes Q&A) – 20%**

Delivered Week 13.

- **E. Final research paper (ca 3,000 words) – 40%**

Due two week after Week 14 (21 May 2026). See the separate document for guidelines of the research paper.

Grading criteria (summary)

- Conceptual rigour (30%): clarity and accuracy of theoretical framing.
- Methodological adequacy (25%): fitness of methods, transparency, limitations.

- Critical/ethical reflection (20%): engagement with bias, consent, IP, sustainability, decolonial and gender-aware practice.
- Evidence and analysis (15%): quality of data selection, analysis, and interpretation.
- Communication (10%): structure, style, citations, visuals/tables, time management.

Late submissions: -5 percentage points per 24h (max 5 days), unless prior arrangement or documented extenuating circumstances.

Readings

All readings are indicative and may be updated. One core text per first 10 weeks (+ some optional ones). PDFs/links will be provided.

- **Week 1** Assmann, A. “Memory, Individual and Collective.” In *The Oxford Handbook of Contextual Political Analysis*. Eds. R. Goodin and C. Tilly. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006, pp. 210–224. **Suggested reading:** Smith, L. “Heritage as a Cultural Process.” In *The Uses of Heritage*. London: Routledge, 2006, pp. 44–84.
- **Week 2** Mandolessi, S. “The digital turn in memory studies.” *Memory Studies* 16, no. 6 (2023): 1513–1528. **Suggested reading:** Garde-Hansen, J. “Digital Memories: The Democratisation of Archives”. In *Media and Memory*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011, pp. 70–88.
- **Week 3** Jeurgens, C. “The scent of the digital archive: Dilemmas with archive digitisation.” *BMGN – Low Countries Historical Review*, 128(4) (2013): 30–54.
- **Week 4** Lotman, J. “Memory in a Culturological Perspective”. In *Culture, Memory and History*, ed. by M. Tamm. Palgrave Macmillan, 2019, pp. 133–137. **Suggested reading:** Eco, U. “From Internet to Gutenberg”, Lecture at the Italian Academy for Advanced Studies in America, 1996; https://joevans.pbworks.com/f/eco_internet_gutenberg.pdf.
- **Week 5** Ibrus, I., M. Schich, and M. Tamm. “Cultural Science Meets Cultural Data Analytics.” *Cultural Science* 13, no. 1 (2021): 1–15. <https://reference-global.com/article/10.2478/csj-2021-0001>.
- **Week 6** Tiidenberg, K. “Ethics in Digital Research.” In U. Flick (ed.), *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Data Collection*, Los Angeles et al., SAGE Publications, 2017, pp. 466–481.
- **Week 7** Fossati, G. “Framing Film (in Transition): An Introduction.” In *From Grain to Pixel: The Archival Life of Film in Transition*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2009, pp. 21–36. **Suggested reading:** Aasman, S. et al. “Tales of a Tool Encounter: Exploring Video Annotation for Doing Media History.” *View* (Utrecht) 7.14 (2018): 73; <https://viewjournal.eu/articles/JETHC154>.
- **Week 9** Grace-Walden, V. “The Memorial Museum in the Digital Age.” In V. Grace-Walden (ed.), *The Memorial Museum in the Digital Age*. REFRAME Books, 2022, pp. 20–53.

- **Week 10** Huurdeman, H., and C. Piccoli. “3D Reconstructions as Research Hubs: Geospatial Interfaces for Real-Time Data Exploration of Seventeenth-Century Amsterdam Domestic Interiors.” *Open archaeology (Berlin, Germany)* 7.1 (2021): 314–336; <https://doi.org/10.1515/opar-2020-0142>.

Weekly schedule (14 weeks)

Block I. Theoretical foundations

1. Introduction. Memory and Critical Heritage Studies (29 January 2026)

Lecturers: prof. Marek Tamm (TLU) and Marjolein Uittenbogaard (TLU/UvA)

Orientation; assignment and assessment overview; concise introduction to memory and heritage studies.

2. Digital Memory and Digital Cultural Heritage (5 February 2026)

Lecturer: Marjolein Uittenbogaard (TLU/UvA)

Development of memory and heritage studies in the digital age. Remediation, participation, platforms, politics of digitization.

3. Archival Studies in the Digital Age (12 February 2026)

Lecturer: prof. Charles Jeurgens (UvA), online

Digital technologies and archival transformation; changing archival ontologies; digitised versus born-digital records; provenance and contextual integrity; implications for archival theory, concepts, and methods in a hyperconnected environment.

Deliverable: Reading diary #1 due.

4. Cultural Semiotics and Digital Semiosphere (19 February 2026)

Lecturers: prof. Daniele Monticelli (TLU) and prof. Francesco Mazzuchelli (UNIBO)

Sign systems, modelling, digital semiosphere, cultural semiotics, Juri Lotman and Umberto Eco, meaning making in digital cultural heritage.

5. Digital Humanities/Cultural Analytics and Digital Cultural Heritage (26 February 2026)

Lecturer: prof. Indrek Ibrus (TLU)

Introduction to digital humanities and cultural analytics; datafication of culture; methods landscape; knowledge graphs; examples from the CUDAN's research.

6. Research Ethics and Digital Cultural Heritage: Decolonial, Gender-aware and Sustainable Practice (5 March 2026)

Lecturer: prof. Katrin Tiidenberg (TLU)

Digital research ethics; situational ethics; feminist ethics of care; critical thinking; power relations; gender; decolonial perspectives; resource politics; sustainability; responsible research practices.

Deliverable: Reading diary #2 due.

Block II. Thematic focus I: Archiving and Audiovisual

7. Audiovisual Archives (12 March 2026)

Lecturer: prof. Christian Olesen (UvA), online

Infrastructures and access of audiovisual archives (including digital catalogues and data enrichment); video annotation.

Deliverable: Project abstract (Week 7, end of week).

8. Site Visit 1: Juri Lotman Semiotics Repository (TLU) (19 March 2026)

Lecturer: Merit Maran (TLU)

Introduction to the Juri Lotman and Zara Mints Archive: overview of the collection and its scholarly significance; back-of-house digitisation workflows; metadata standards; ethical considerations and rights management; emerging AI applications for digital archives.

Micro-task: Create a paradata note from the visit (1 page).

Deliverable: Reading diary #3 due.

Block III. Thematic focus I: Museums and Storytelling

9. Museums in the Digital Age: Approaches & Storytelling (2 April 2026)

Lecturer: Mario Panico (UNIBO), online

Digital cultural memory in museums; digital tools and technologies; memory-making and authenticity; museum storytelling; comparative case studies; geographical and historical contexts; memory politics; opportunities and risks of digital mediation of the past.

10. Seminar: VR/AR & 3D Modelling for Storytelling (9 April)

Lecturer: Chiara Piccoli (UvA), online

Introduction to 3D modelling and rapid prototyping; digital storytelling; authoring tools and publishing platforms.

Micro-task: Concept sketch of a digital story (1 page).

Deliverable: Reading diary #4 due.

Block IV. Practical methods

11. Seminar: Digital Methods for Historical Data (16 April 2026)

Lecturer: prof. Hannu Salmi (UTU)

Working with newspapers/audiovisual corpora; OCR/ASR caveats, LLM tools.

Micro-task: Source criticism worksheet + reproducibility checklist.

12. Seminar: Digital Heritage and Generative AI (23 April 2026)

Lecturers: Mar Canet Sola (TLU)

Prompting as method; bias tracing; model cards; synthetic heritage; AI and artistic research.

Micro-task: Prompt-audit + reflection (bias, mitigation).

13. Student Symposium (30 April)

Lecturers: prof. Marek Tamm (TLU) and Marjolein Uittenbogaard (TLU/UvA)

10-minute presentations + Q&A; peer feedback forms; panel wrap-up.

Deliverable: Slide deck.

14. Site Visit 2: Virtual Time Travel Experience: VR Tallinn 1939/44 (7 May)

Lecturers: Marjolein Uittenbogaard (TLU/UvA) and Merit Maran (TLU)

Virtual Time Travel Experience: VR Tallinn 1939/44; methods for evaluating immersion, learning, and affect; closing discussion.

Deliverable: Final paper due two weeks after Week 14 (21 May 2026).

Academic integrity and accessibility

- We follow TLU policies on academic honesty. All AI, software and collaborators must be acknowledged. Undeclared AI-generated text/analysis is misconduct.
- We aim for accessible teaching. Please contact the convenors early to discuss accommodations. All slides will be shared within 24 hours when feasible.

Generative AI policy (course-specific)

- Allowed with disclosure for brainstorming, outlining, code snippets, metadata cleaning suggestions, and visual mock-ups.
- Not allowed for wholesale ghost-writing of assessed text, fabrication of sources/data, or unlicensed scraping/ingestion of protected materials.
- Critical use is part of assessment: students should demonstrate awareness of model bias, data provenance, and legal/ethical constraints.

Site visits and logistics

- Transport within Tallinn is self-organised.
- No fees anticipated; if special equipment is required, it will be provided on site.

Communication and etiquette

- Bring a laptop to practical sessions.
- Respectful debate is expected; we work under the Chatham House Rule during class discussions when sensitive content arises.

Data management and copyright

- Use only datasets licensed for teaching/research or provided by partners.
- Store materials in the course repository; keep personal data anonymised.
- Cite collections, curators, and software properly.

Key milestones at a glance

- **W1–W10:** Reading diaries (four)
- **W7:** Abstract and annotated bibliography of the research paper
- **W11–W14:** Methods micro-tasks (four)
- **W13:** Symposium presentation (with slide deck)
- **+2 weeks after W14:** Final research paper (21 May 2026)