Poster presentation abstract

Digital Humanities in the Nordic Countries 2018, Helsinki, Finland

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Albert Edelfelts brev

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# Shearing letters and art as digital cultural heritage, co-operation and basic research

*Albert Edelfelts brev* (edelfelt.fi) is a web publication developed at the Society of Swedish Literature in Finland. In co-operation with the Finnish National Gallery, we publish letters of the Finnish artist Albert Edelfelt (1854–1905) combined with pictures of his artworks. *Albert Edelfelts brev* received in 2016 the State Award for dissemination of information. In 2017 Albert Edelfelt’s letter collections were adopted as a Cultural Heritage in the National Register of Unesco’s Memory of the World (<http://www.maailmanmuisti.fi/p/suomen-kansallinen-maailman-muisti.html>). The co-operation between institutions and basic research of the material has enabled a unique reconstruction of Edelfelt’s artistry and his time, for the service of researchers and other users. I will present how we have done it and how we plan to further develop the website.

The nature of the publication project encompasses two communities that have emerged in digital arts and humanities research. The Society of Swedish Literature draws its tradition of web publications mainly from Digital Humanities, which has appeared preoccupied with transforming the traditions of text-based humanities computing, drawn from scholarly practice. The material in *Albert Edelfelts brev* is, on the other hand, also connected to Digital Heritage, which has drawn more from theories and practices in the digital representation of material culture. As a third element in developing the project emerges the users, and how they in a relevant way are able to use the material. (Benardou, Champion, Dallas, Hughes, 2018).

The website *Albert Edelfelts brev* launched in September 2014, with a sample of Edelfelt’s letters and paintings. Our intention is to publish all the letters Albert Edelfelt wrote to his mother Alexandra (1833–1901). The collection consists of 1 310 letters, that range over 30 years and cover most of Edelfelt’s adult life. The letters are in the care of the Society of Swedish Literature in Finland. We also have to our disposal close to 7 000 pictures of Edelfelt’s paintings and sketches in the care of the Finnish National Gallery.

In a digital context, the volume of the material at hand is manageable. However, for researchers who think that they might have use of the material, but are unsure of exactly where or what to look for, it might be labour intensive to go through all the letters and pictures. We have combined professional expertise and basic research of the material with digital solutions to make it as easy as possible to take part of what the content can offer.

As editor of the web publication, I spend a considerable part of my work on basic research in identifying people, and pinpointing paintings and places that Edelfelt mentions in his letters. By linking the content of a letter to *artworks*, *persons*, *places* and *subjects/reference words* users can easily navigate in the material. Each letter, artwork and person has a page of its own. Even places and subjects are searchable and listed.

The letters are available as facsimile pictures of the handwritten pages. Each letter has a permanent web resource identifier (URN:NBN). In order to make it easier for users to decide if a letter is of interest, we have tagged subjects using reference words from ALLÄRS (common thesaurus in Swedish). We have also written abstracts of the content, divided them into separate “events” and tagged mentioned artworks, people and places to these events.

Each artwork of Edelfelt has a page of its own. Here, users find a picture of the artwork (if available) and earlier sketches of the artwork (if available). By looking at the pictures, they can see how the working process of the painting has developed. Users can also follow the process through Edelfelt’s writings in his letters. All the events from the letter abstracts that are tagged to the specific artwork are listed in chronological order on the artwork-page.

Persons tagged in the letter abstracts also have pages of their own. On a person-page, users find basic facts and links to other webpages with information about the person. Any events from the letter abstracts mentioning the person are listed as well. In other words, through a one-click-solution users can find an overview on everything Edelfelt’s letters have to say about a specific person. Tagging persons to events, has also made it possible to build graphs of a person’s social network; based on how many times other persons are tagged to the same events as the specific person. There is a link to these graphs on every person-page.

Apart from researchers who have a direct interest in the material, we have also wanted to open up the cultural heritage to a broader public and group of users. Each month the editorial staff writes a blog-post on *SLS-bloggen* (<http://www.sls.fi/sv/blogg/tag/edelfelt-0>). *Albert Edelfelts brev* also has a profile on Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/albertedelfeltsbrev/>) where we post excerpts of letters on the same date as Edelfelt wrote the original letter. This way, we hope to give the public an insight in the life of Edelfelt and the material, and involve them in the progress of the project.

The web publication has open access. The mix of different sources and the co-operation with other heritage institutions has led to a mix of licenses for how users can copy and redistribute the published material. The Finnish National Gallery (FNG) owns copyright on its pictures in the publication and users need permission from FNG to copy and redistribute their material. The artwork-pages contain descriptions of the paintings written by the art historian Bertel Hintze, who published a catalogue of Edelfelt’s art in 1942. These texts are licensed with a Creative Commons Attribution-NoDerivs 4.0 Generic (CC BY-ND 4.0). Edelfelt’s letters, as well as the texts and metadata produced by the editorial staff at the Society of Swedish Literature in Finland, have a Creative Commons CC0 1.0 Universal-license. Data with Creative Commons-license is also freely available as open data through a REST API (<http://edelfelt.sls.fi/apiinfo/>).

In the future, we would like to find a common practice for the user rights; if possible, that all the material would have the same license. We intend to invite other institutions with artworks of Edelfelt to co-operate, offering the same kind of partnership as the web publication has with the Finnish National Gallery. Thus, we are striving to a complete as possible site with the artworks of Edelfelt.

Albert Edelfelt is of national interest and his letters, which he mostly wrote during his stays abroad, contain information of also international interest. Therefore, we plan to offer the metadata and some of the source material in Finnish and, hopefully, English translations. So far, the letters are only available as facsimile. The development of transcription programs for handwritten texts has made it probable that we in the future include transcriptions of the letters in the web publication. Linguists especially have an interest in getting a searchable letter transcription for their researches, and the transcriptions would also be helpful for users who might have problem reading the handwritten text.

References:

*Albert Edelfelts brev. Elektronisk brev- och konstutgåva*, utg. Maria Vainio-Kurtakko & Henrika Tandefelt & Elisabeth Stubb, Svenska litteratursällskapet i Finland, 2014–, <http://edelfelt.fi/>

Benardou, Agiatis & Eric Champion & Costis Dallas & Lorna M. Hughes, “Introduction: a critique of digital practices and research infrastructures”, *Cultural Heritage Infrastructures in Digital Humanities*, Routledge 2018.