Intimate Fields: A Kit for E-Literature

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the development of *Intimate Fields*, an installation work that brings together "near field" technologies from markedly different eras to argue that secrecy, absence, and distance are constituting features of felt human intimacy. Looking back to the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, our project expands to digital technologies the concept of "the posy" and the practice of its creation and dissemination. Posies are short poems designed to be inscribed on gifted objects, most frequently rings. These bespoke accessories are meant to be worn on the body and to signify or transact amorous relations, act as *memento mori,* or even enable private and subversive modes of religious devotion. Posies and their objects were widely held to act as reminders of intimacy or as portals to memory. At the same time, the inscriptions themselves, particularly on courtship rings, are often generic and were collected and published in printed books for use and adaptation. By inter-animating today's methods of near field communication and early modern wearables, this project explores how text and code technologies and the languages they carry can create, interrupt, or re-shape interpersonal connection.

KEYWORDS

e-literature; poetry; near field technology; craft; intimacy; Gaston Bachelard; textile; letters.

RESUMO

Este artigo descreve o desenvolvimento de *Intimate Fields* [Campos íntimos], uma instalação que reúne tecnologias de "campo de proximidade" de épocas marcadamente diferentes para argumentar que o sigilo, a ausência e a distância constituem características da experiência da intimidade humana. Observando os séculos XVI e XVII, o nosso projeto expande para as tecnologias digitais o conceito de "posy" e a prática da sua criação e disseminação. Os "posies" são poemas curtos pensados para serem inscritos em objetos oferecidos, frequentemente em anéis. Estes acessórios feitos "à medida" destinam-se a ser usados no corpo e a significar ou transacionar relações amorosas, funcionar como *memento mori,* ou até mesmo permitir modos privados e subversivos de devoção religiosa. Os "posies" e os seus objetos eram amplamente usados como lembranças de intimidade ou como portais para a memória. Ao mesmo tempo, as próprias inscrições, particularmente nos anéis de cortejo, são geralmente genéricas e foram coligidas e publicadas em livros impressos para uso e adaptação. Ao inter-animar os métodos atuais de comunicação em "campo de proximidade" e os modernos "wearables," este projeto explora o modo como as tecnologias de texto e de código e as linguagens que contêm podem criar, interromper ou re-formar as relações interpessoais.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

literatura eletrónica; poesia; tecnologias de campo de proximidade; artesanato; intimidade; Gaston Bachelard; têxteis; cartas.

Every secret has its little casket. — Gaston Bachelard

Intimate Fields allows users to explore these potentials through a compact installation work that can be placed on a small table for display. The installation consists of a wooden laser cut box with multiple compartments. The box is embedded with an NFC (near field communication) reader connected to an Arduino Flora microcontroller and miniature thermal printer. Items in the box include printed scrolls and notes containing NFC stickers, textile items containing knotted codes, and a series of six ceramic/steel rings with embedded NFC chips. On touching the scrolls, notes and rings to the NFC reader, scripts are triggered to generate brief affectively charged poems remixed from a range of historical and contemporary texts. An accompanying bot posts remixed versions of posies to Twitter at regular intervals.

I.A KIT FOR E-LITERATURE

Intimate Fields was inspired by the work of Jentery Sayers and the MLab at the University of Victoria. There, Sayers curates a series of maker-inspired digital humanities projects called "Kits for Culture," in which our project will eventually reside as Volume 3 in the series. The mandate for Sayers' original "Early Wearables Kit" was to create what he called a "fluxkit for scholarly communication," drawing on the Fluxus model in which boxes are assembled of inexpensive materials to create a shareable art object. Sayers imagined using this model to create what he calls "small boxes of inexpensive materials assembled for media history" — kits that can be shared and recreated as scholarly objects that both reveal aspects of material history as well as "prototype speculations about the past" based on absences in what we know — in other words, to build objects that "recover, repair, and re-contextualize the stuff of history" (Sayers, 2015). The Kits are designed to be reproducible and executable — shareable like code — while simultaneously being executed on a local material platform (in code's case, a desktop computer; in the Kit's case, a 3D printer, laser cutter, etc). Indeed, *Intimate Fields* makes use of some of the digital lasercutter schematics from the original Early Wearables kit — it is a *fork*, in Github's vernacular, in which project files are copied, modified, and either given a new space (in this case, the repository for *Intimate Fields*) or pushed back to the original.

As a work in the Kits for Culture series, *Intimate Fields* seeks to share in some of these ideas: reproducibility, prototyping, speculation, play. As a work of media history, its aim is to reveal how media objects conveyed secrets in the early modern period, and extend "media objects" as a term to encompass the smell of rosemary and rosewater, the tactility and luster of linen and handspun silks, the intimate feel of a ring hugging the finger or laying suspended from a thread next to the skin. At the same time, it is clearly a creature of our own moment in history: the inclusion of near field communication chips and an electronic reader shifts the reader's awareness into the now, even while drawing attention to the way in which media objects have always held secrets, if only we knew how to read them.

Figure 1.

Intimate Fields also bears witness to Sayers' observation that reproduction is inevitably an act of situated practice, in which the embodied act of prototyping necessarily changes the act of interpretation. The specific instance of *Intimate Fields* built for exhibit at the Conference festival here betrays our own particular passions, sourcing materials that speak to us in specific ways (for Maggie, the magic of finding specific letter-folding techniques and reproducing them in specific papers; for Helen, the snagging of raw silk fiber on skin, the twirl of the spindle's whorl). Here, we offer two boxes: one that is "executed," complete, and imbued with our own bodily labor and affects, and a second one that is a schematic, a range of possibilities, a kind of historical narrative recipe for reconstructing secrets. In this way, *Intimate Fields* is a "kit for e-Literature": a kit for reconstructing potential texts that include both material and electronic, hard and soft elements.

II. HARBORING SECRETS

In *The Poetics of Space*, Gaston Bachelard observes that

> Wardrobes with their shelves, desks with their drawers, and chests with their false bottoms are veritable organs of the secret psychological life. Indeed, without these 'objects' and a few others in equally high favor, our intimate life would lack a model of intimacy. They are hybrid objects, subject objects. Like us, through us and for us, they have a quality of intimacy. (1958: 78)

Turning specifically to "small boxes, such as chests and caskets," he notes that "[t]hese complex pieces that a craftsman creates are very evident witnesses of the *need for secrecy*, of an intuitive sense of hiding places" (Bachelard, 1958: 81). *Intimate Fields* uses the coincidences and asynchronies of early modern and contemporary communication technologies to open considerations of secrecy, intimacy, and the felt dynamics of space. Playing on the relationship between the early practice of inscribing short poems (posies) on gifted (and often wearable) objects and today's near-field technologies, the project aims to initiate affective experiences in the ways that text technologies shape intimate environments. Its drawers and compartments concealing a small thermal printer, electronic components, intricately folded letters bound with knotted silks, a set of ceramic and steel "smart rings" embedded with NFC chips, embroidered handkerchiefs, and a slim volume of anonymous seventeenth-century love poems entitled *Loves Garland*, the box confronts viewer/makers with how intimacy inheres (or doesn't) in communicative objects. The kit incites different performances of Bachelard's claim for the connection between feelings of intimacy and their physical manifestions. Our installation is designed to be multi-sensory and to experiment with how a variety of small objects, some wearable, communicate across a spectrum

of intimacy and distance, past and present, permanent and ephemeral, hidden and visible, linear and recursive.

III. ON POSIES

A short poem often used in the early modern era to communicate love, hidden in a letter or inscribed on a ring, the posy is both intimate and generic. The posy travels on closely held objects. On the embroidered handkerchief, tasked with absorbing the body's affect (tears) and action (sweat, dirt). On the inner band of a ring, tight against the finger. A note in the fold of a glove. But posies, like their objects, are also common lovers' trifles, generic enough to become sentimental tropes, usable by anyone. Posies offer often unambiguous sentiments:

> *To me till death*
> *As near as breath.*
>
> *In thee a flame,*
> *In me the same.*

Posies are individuated and transferrable. The posy's meaning fixes upon a "thingly" substrate, like a ring, while being transmitted through others, including print collections and digital archives. As Juliet Fleming puts it, the "posy is the written form that calls attention to the fact that the writing is 'set' on something" (Fleming, 2001: 43). Attaching to things but staying on the move, posies both invoke and escape the bodies, objects, writing practices, time, and textualities that claim to shape their function. Posies signify most during specific moments of inscription and exchange, while also making themselves available for transmission and reuse elsewhere. In the printed posy collection, the gift object, alluded to in language, advertises its own absence and necessity: on paper, the posy is only half itself. Inscribed on a gift object, the posy reminds the wearer of the lover's absence. The printed posy is a double supplement. A supplement improves, makes up for, completes. A supplement also calls attention to insufficiency: a patch over a tear fills in the missing fabric but still highlights the weak spot in a garment. With this same irony, the posy asks for a double supplement: the gift object's absence on the page is supplemented by its description in language. It also recalls the giver's absence which the object will supplement, making up for and amplifying this absence at once: "it is not simply added to the positivity of a presence, it produces no relief, its place is assigned in the structure by the mark of an emptiness" (Derrida, 1976: 145). One posy for a ring captures the vexed pleasure the supplement can inspire: "Though absence be annoy/ To me tis double joy" (*Loves Garland* No. 22). The ring's physical presence as promise gives pleasure, as does the longing joy-annoy of absence it signifies. Thus, printed posies plot their escape from the book into which they are written,

traveling across bodies in different embodied states. Printed posies reveal the material limits of the book form which contains words, and words as things, but not things themselves. As codes for the propagation of objects, posies speak to today's encounter with coded text, initiating a hidden refrain that reverberates to today's digital texts and their "esthetics of secrecy" (Bachelard, 1958: xxxvii).

IV. *LOVES GARLAND*

Literary representations of posies, and particularly posy rings, often paradoxically intermingle the intimate and unknowable. Chaucer's narrator in *Troilus and Criseyde* watches the lovers exchange rings but can't read their inscription (III.1369); the rings act to enclose the lovers, the small nature of the inscription establishing a near field into which only the lovers are allowed. In other cases, the posy is inscrutable even to the lover, acting as a trope for female duplicity. John Lyly writes in *Euphues* (1578) "the posies on your rings are always next the finger, not to be seen of him that holdeth you by the hand" (163). The ring is a surrogate for the absent lover's secret touch, maintaining intimacy even as her hand is held by another. Such literary representations also speak to the ring's tradition as a surrogate for the woman's penetrable body and breachable chastity. The intimate space of the ring analogizes the intimate space of its wearer's body.

The compiler of *Loves Garland*, the reproduced collection of posies we include in *Intimate Fields*, brings subtle attention to the bodies involved in such exchanges by reminding readers of one posy, sent by a certain Nanne to the solicitous Will, whom she is rejecting (*Loves Garland* Nos. 63-4). This posy, the text claims, would have originally been written in Nanne's "fair Romish" script. The editorial voice is intent on preserving the posy's human agent; it is shaped by a particular hand. The emphasis on Nanne's italic handwriting (a hand typical for women and for more personal exchanges) as "fair" might suggest it as pretty, or as mediocre, perhaps reinforcing her lower status as a milk maid. It also joins other strategies of the printed text for keeping present but out-of-reach not just lost objects and the bodily encounters they broker, but even the unique hands that sometimes created their inscriptions.

In the particular case of *Loves Garland,* bodies even inhere in the printed text's typeface: if we can't see Nanne's "Romish" hand, we can see its use of blackletter type which calls back to the hands that developed this script for medieval manuscripts. By the seventeenth century, gothic blackletter was decidedly out of vogue for print materials, generally replaced by Roman letterforms much more familiar to today's readers. Despite the difficulty blackletter presents to the modern eye, in its time it likely seemed old fashioned but also linked to formal and handwritten precursors. Such hands were complex to master, undertaken by trained scribes, and generally used for sacred texts (Shailor, 1994: 30-35). Blackletter first found its way into print with Gutenbeurg's Bible and

other incunables which use print "as a surrogate for manuscript" (Crick and Walsham, 2004: 12). The concept of surrogacy is thus not unique to the shift from print to digital, but is a feature of media change more broadly.

Today's pushback from archivists, scholars, and theorists against the term "digital surrogate," favoring instead the term "digital artefact," speaks to the insufficiency implied by the term (Tarte, 2011). And attempting to treat a new medium as merely a surrogate for previous methods presented just as many conceptual and practical problems with the introduction of print. Blackletter does not work particularly well in most printed texts as it is a dense type subject to bleed through and smudging. In the case of *Loves Garland* as it appears in our kit, we've amplified these challenges. The blackletter shows hallmark illegibility at points. And this particular version is itself a surrogate of sorts. It is printed from a scan of a microfilm housed by the Early English Books Online database. Worn edges, tears, flecks in the paper, modulations in color, are all made a binary black and white in this print, which has also been shrunk to fit the box. Despite the seeming fixity of this printed object, we hope its historical and physical dislocation, and the way the text's posies ask to be remediated, will speak to the liveliness of the text both in its historical moment and in its status as an historically dispersed research object. This simple printout aims to capture the text's digital material resonances, bringing us close not to the "original," but to the text's many origins as it moves across, and is reinterpreted by, different media. *Loves Garland* isn't re-printed to be considered analogous to the scanned text from which it derives, but to be discursive with its other synchronic material lives: digitized, transcribed into nineteenth-century poetry collections, housed in brick-and-mortar archives.

The text of *Loves Garland* is also too short to be conventionally bound, its physical state activating the unboundedness of the texts it contains. When remixed as an electronic supplement (as it is for the festival, on Twitter), the text's thresholds become fluid as its contents intermingle with other love language to be printed, posted, or reinscribed. As with many early short texts, we've opted to present *Loves Garland* simply folded and wrapped. In this case, the wrapper is slightly translucent. The text's first edition (1624) has a different title page which exhorts the reader to "Read, Skanne, Judge." We've used the wrapper as a way to confront viewers with this sentiment which they can remove, read, or heed in any way they choose. In choosing not to stitch the gathering, we also invite viewer/makers to play with the ordering of pages, perhaps re-shuffling pages against the linear numbering of their contents. In shrinking it, we've made *Loves Garland* easier to have in hand, and even to hide within the box, the text becoming as intimately hidden as the posy of a ring. The exact dimensions of the text are not available in its bibliographic record. We've used this lacuna as an imaginative opportunity both to fit the text to the constraints of the kit and to consider how a small format might emphasize the text's discursive intimacy, as it can also be easily pocketed or surreptitiously read.

Inscribed objects are hybrid, as much object as written text. Yet *Loves Garland* privileges the reproduced text rather than illustrations of things. This is still to assume that the compiler of *Loves Garland* even derives his content from actual objects, which we cannot know. In foregrounding written text *Loves Garland* problematizes the primacy of text over object in ways that bear on our own research encounters with the past, encounters that remain visually fragmented and, in many cases, realizable only in part. Books themselves could be gifted objects and were held, felt, and inscribed by their owners.[1] Can we trust a book like *Loves Garland* to preserve posies from lost objects if the book itself is likewise a hostage to time and transmission? All books harbor this question in their leaves, but *Loves Garland* wears it on its title page, in the text's only fully realized posy: "Posies for rings, handkerchers and gloves, / And such pretty Tokens as Lovers send their loves." A short rhyming verse that makes the book speak to its readers about its purpose and contents.

V. TEXTILES

The fiber and cloth elements of our kit likewise engage early modern communicative practices with the networked and interwoven implications of the textile's etymology (*texere* = to weave). Silk bands were a notable, though not extremely common, affective marker on sixteenth and seventeenth century letters. The finest silks, thus those most apt to fray, were prized for this role and their color foreshadowed the letter's contents (or might misdirect a nosy bearer by masking the intimate contents of a letter) (Smith, 2013). Heather Wolfe, who is the primary scholar of this practice in early modern England, notes the range of dispositions that might be accounted for in the color of a letter's silk flossing: "faith, grief, patience, despair, trouble, sadness, purity, hope, prudence, deception, love, amity, jealousy, courage, or, in combination, courtesy, loyalty, and patience in adversity" (Smith, 2013). Many different systems for interpreting color were current during this period. Pink was the most common color for letter floss while red (symbolizing strength and power) was used rarely. Yellow might convey respect and lofty sentiment, while blue was for faith, and green could be for joy and love. Wolfe is careful to note that, given the numerous systems for interpreting color current at the time, making absolute equivalencies between color and affect is difficult. Likewise, letter writers of this period would have been constrained by the materials they had access to. Seventeenth-century guides even instruct readers on how to weave different colors of floss together, creating ever more complex patterns (Smith, 2013). Viewer/makers can explore how the colored silks relate to the descriptions of posy exchange in *Loves Garland* (one poem is said to be "writ in a Riban of Carnation three penny broad") or knot and re-knot the silks, participating in the communicative possibilities of the kit. We

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1 For more on gifted books see Ziegler (2000).

also include two letters folded in an intimate style. Letters were generally bound via a 'tuck and seal' method. Certain more personal missives were folded in an accordion style and bound with silk floss or "locked" with a paper tab and slit method, as is the case for those in our kit (Wolfe, 2012: 169). Letters were sealed with the sender's seal both as a method of authentication and security. Our letters are "sealed" with wax, but we have included a set of NFC-embedded stickers to show how an alternative "sealing" method might work. Silks woven through a stab hole in the letter could offer an additional level of security (Wolfe, 2012: 170).

These threads also tie past to present and create cross-cultural conversations as we invite viewer/makers to knot the silks as a coded language. In the Inka practice of Khipu knotted textiles are used as objects "to think with." Kate King explores how the past and present "co-invent each other," a possibility undertaken by such communicative practices (2010). Khipu is an ancient administration practice while letter flossing stakes out a space for intimacy within the early modern economy of letter exchange. Our project brings these practices (and other knotting games, as in the possibility of creating Morse code in tactile form) together to allow for play across traditions and temporalities.

As one of the imagined substrates for these posies, the handkerchief also finds a place in our kit. As Bella Mirabella has argued, the handkerchief in early modern Europe was a complex accessory, particularly for women, since it was tasked with two contradictory functions. The handkerchief ranges from "a receptacle for bodily excretions, to silken cloth emblematic of virtue, good taste, and excellent manners" (Mirabella, 2011:60). In the context of *Intimate Fields*, another way to frame this dichotomy might be to say that the handkerchief was at once tasked with legitimately intimate roles in clearing bodily waste and with public performances of intimacy. The random nature of words produced by our embedded printer or posted to social media plays along a similar edge, at once offering the possibility of word combinations that evoke emotion but with the recognition that these words come from a predetermined corpus and are produced in the context of a multi-media performance of sorts. Objects in the kit ask how different media, different substrates, even the moment-to-moment affective changes in users as they encounter these objects, negotiate the thresholds of the performative/public and the personal/private.

Our handkerchief is embroidered and is accompanied by small vials of rosemary extract and rosewater, offering users the chance to experiment with some of the tactile and olfactory elements *Loves Garland* suggests embodied certain of its poems. Rosemary was a complicated though resonant element of the early modern sensual landscape. Its association with remembrance made it common in the performance of betrothals, marriages, and funerals. In the plague outbreaks of the early seventeenth century (the last of which, 1625, was just after the first edition of *Loves Garland*) rosemary was a ubiquitous plague preventative (Dugan, 2011: 99). The posy in *Loves Garland* that claims to be sent with a "fair branch of Rosemary" plays upon the name of the beloved's name, Rose, and the

sender's goal, marriage. Smell is well known as the most memorial sense. Extending this wordplay to play with the senses, our vial of extract brings the medicinal and affective past of this scent into contact with the viewer/maker's own scent-based memories. We likewise include a small vial of rosewater, realizing what the maid in this posy exchange sends back with her metered reply: "The sweet reply in a conceit of the same cut, sent by Rose with a Vyall of Rosewater of her making." The kit gives us the chance to materialize certain of the poetry's metaphors. Rosewater has a complex history in England, its earliest origins being Arabic and Jewish while in the English textual record rosewater is re-cast as a fully English production. It is also a protestant analogue to Catholic incense and has strong associations with royalty (Dugan, 2011; 48-49). By the mid-sixteenth century, procedures for home distilling were common (52). Unlike ambergris or attar of roses, or any of the other scents no longer part of our olfactory experience, both rosemary and rosewater are still fairly common and can thus offer a different sense pathway between past and present in exploring our kit.

Embroidery in the early modern period was the purview of women, and often served as a collective practice which could be undertaken in schoolhouse or in a domestic space (Bertolet, 2015: 162). Book bindings of devotional texts were frequently embroidered, speaking to the relationship between the tactile and the immaterial, spiritual, and affective experiences such touching might enable.[2] Today's widely available patterns for machine embroidery might also invite contemplation about replicability and individual variation in the needle arts, which resonates with the bespoke and generic aspects of the posies themselves. While women did not publish manuals for needlework in the period of *Loves Garland* they did routinely adapt designs (Munroe, 2005: 36).

VI. ELECTRONICS

The Near Field Communication chip and its forerunner the RFID system bring again to the forefront the idea of intimacy. There is a secret message here, in this seemingly unreadable and yet strangely beautiful object with its spiraling copper coils and magnifying-glass chip. But we can only "read" it if we place it in intimate proximity to a reader, tuned to the right frequency, coded to find the right blocks of data on the chip. The reader induces a current in the coil, much as opening a secret message induces an affective current in the heart — anticipation, longing, release. Induction, magnetization. 13.56 Mhz of electric love. Typical visual representations of a NFC transaction — and it usually is a transaction, between a mobile device and a payment terminal — represent the moment of communication as a kind of "ray-gun," beaming information from active device to passive reader. But that's not how NFC works at all. The reader itself induces current, creating a communicative field that, if it could be seen, would be

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2 See Ziegler (2000) and Bertolet (2015).

more accurately characterized as a kind of "fountain" of energy, moving through the chip, inducing new current, and spiraling back to the reader like the roil of the earth's molten iron core. Magnetism has its own aesthetic.

Figure 2.

Several alternatives are available for composing the electronic portion of 1734734843 *Intimate Fields.* The setup used in the exhibit consists of an Adafruit Flora microcontroller board combined with an NFC reader and a small thermal printer. This configuration was chosen to be portable and (relatively) simple to set up in an environment with unknown network access; it does not rely on any wireless networks to operate. The reader sends the unique NFC ID numbers to

the microcontroller, which matches them with specific static strings of text and sends them to the printer. The limitations of such a 'plug & play' configuration are such that computer "processing" is confined to "matching and communicating" rather than remixing. But it's easier to set up in a non-networked environment and doesn't require any external apparatus such as screens or keyboard inputs. As a supplement, we set up for the festival a Twitter feed to conduct separate but simultaneously viewable "posies in action": short poems remixed from *Loves Garland* and a range of other lovers' texts.

Alternative configurations exist: one can add a Bluetooth module to the Flora board and send the ID numbers to a serial monitor on a laptop, where they can be transformed more fluidly into multiple text arrays, remixed, posted thence to Twitter, and so on. Or one can bypass the Flora board altogether and connect the NFC reader to a Raspberry Pi, remixing text via Python and simultaneously printing and posting. This requires more setup and maintenance; better for a permanent display rather than a travelling object or piece that can be reproduced in the makerspace or classroom. Schematics for all these possibilities are included in the online repository for reproducing the Kit — a type of "potential literature" in the making.

VII. OPENINGS AND CLOSINGS: INTIMATE FIELDS AS MATERIAL E-LIT

Approached as a work of electronic literature, *Intimate Fields* is deeply embedded in both the physicality of its multiple media and the ephemerality of its flickering codes. As such, it is satisfyingly subject to many of the joys we take in engaging with a work of electronic literature. Just as when we click on a launch screen, unboxing *Intimate Fields* transforms it from a single object (a box) into something else: a sudden cornucopia of sensory, tactile and visual treats. The act calls to mind Bachelard's caskets: "Chests, especially small caskets, over which we have more complete mastery, are *objects that may be opened*. When a casket is closed, it is returned to the general community of objects; it takes its place in exterior space. But it opens!" (1958: 85). And upon that initial opening, we have whole adventures of unpacking, unfolding, smelling, plugging in, scanning, un-knotting, to engage in, like a whole garden of forking paths, links to click. Diving deeper, just as when we venture as e-literature practitioners into "view source" territory in an effort to find the codes that create an effect or affect, so too can we delve into the source code of *Intimate Fields*' electronics, or scan the pamphlet that contains these generic-but-strangely-specific messages, like short text strings in the arrays that make up *Taroko Gorge* or other remix works.

And again, in the moment of closure: unplug the Flora, watch the LED wink out. Now we are left with intriguing but indecipherable chunks of plastic and metal: no more intimate fields. A second closure: the printed pamphlet is rewrapped in silks, stored. Fold up the letters, close the drawer, replace the lid. All

we are left with now is an opaque object, is the strange cipher of a single NFC chip on the lid. This is a familiar book-like moment: that moment when we close the cover, the text disappears and we're left with the thing, the artefact. Susan Stewart, in her meditation on miniatures, notes this strange property of the book-as-thing, in which the book occupies a fascinating position somewhere between materiality and abstraction — object and text:

> The book sits before me, closed and unread; it is an object, a set of surfaces. But opened, it seems revealed; its physical aspects give way to abstraction and a nexus of new temporalities. ... The metaphors of the book are metaphors of containment, of exteriority and interiority, of surface and depth, of covering and exposure, of taking apart and putting together. To be 'between covers' — the titillation of intellectual or sexual reproduction. (Stewart, 1993: 37)

In computing, Scott Dexter notes the ambivalence we have toward that act of uncovering and covering over, noting that it is both built into code (by virtue of and prone to slippage between different "layers" and practices) and itself a kind of misdirection that depends on our desire to retain some mystery, something hidden we cannot access:

> that which software purports to hide — that which it therefore might be compelled to make visible — is rarely what is actually hidden, ... This slip, these layers of desire for mystery, for open secrets, for the yielding of authority, are the primary generators of the esthetic of the hidden which suffuses modern computing. (Dexter, 2012: 128)

Intimate Fields in some ways contributes to this "esthetic of the hidden," with its emphasis on codes and secret messages, its sharing of "what lies beneath" in a repository as a way of reproducing a reconfigured kit. But it also celebrates secrecy *as a material, social and discursive practice*, with the knowledge that even if we uncover the code, we are still embedded in our specific circumstances. Our secrets are different to those of early modern lovers. The materials are different; our bodies are different; our modes of communicating love (or even our understanding of what love is) are different. As Lucy Suchman puts it,

> mutual constitutions of humans and artifacts do not occur in some single time and place, nor do they create fixed human/artifact relations. Rather, artifacts are produced through highly specialized 'labours of division'... that involve continuous work across particular occasions and multiple sites of use. (1999: 9).

Indeed, the pleasure of working with a box/book like *Intimate Fields* is twofold: as a finished object, it caters to our love of the artefact, the play of unpacking and revealing, the insight into early modern literature. It is, fundamentally, an act of deep and engaged reading. But downloading, reconfiguring and building one's own *Intimate Fields* box presses a different set of pleasurable buttons as

well, familiar to us as writers working with electronic literature: the sense that there is a "taking apart and putting together" not just of ideas and words but materials, assets, objects, actions. *Intimate Fields* provides a playground within which to explore ideas of history, mediation, materiality, technology, encoding and decoding, and remixing — surely, the fertile and experimental playground we inhabit here at ELO.

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