Playing De Profundis

Playable Media, Winter 2012
The novel got a start in epistolary fiction. Richardson’s Clarissa, for example. Stories made up of letters (and other documents) have a long history from there. Dracula, of course, but also HP Lovecraft, Griffin and Sabine, and House of Leaves. However, these stories aren’t actually written in an epistolary fashion.
De Profundis

- We will use a version of Michal Oracz’s De Profundis to tell an epistolary story, collaboratively, only communicating through the story.

- In these slides I will present a version of how we played at SLS St Petersburg, which we will then modify as a group.
De Profundis

- Setting: Present-day Santa Cruz
- Characters: Modified versions of ourselves or invented characters we have the knowledge to play
- Timeline: Story completed and compiled by end of term
De Profundis plot

- Our first constraint: the game will develop according to the “complex discovery plot” outlined in Noël Carroll’s *The Philosophy of Horror*
- Week breakdown: onset (2 & 3), discovery (4 & 5), confirmation (5 & 6), confrontation (7 & 8), final framing and presentation (9) — Thursday March 15
De Profundis method

- There is reason to believe that both snail mail and electronic communication are being monitored.
- Each initial pair should determine how they are connected, who is leaving the first letter and where it will be left (one by each player), each subsequent letter specifies the next “drop” time and place.
De Profundis result

- Take pictures of each drop and context of drop (when leaving and retrieving)
- Keep all letters
- We will compile into one or more collections; physically, digitally, or composed into book(s); share and discuss March 15th
De Profundis questions

- Do we want to do this as pairs, or as an increasingly-connected “society”?
- Do we want an agreed-upon overarching convention or genre?
- Agreed-upon Invisible Ink “armature” for each individual or pair story?
- Do we want to use tables to introduce random required elements?
- Pure physical correspondence, or USB keys, etc?
De Profundis expectations

- Determine characters, first letter writer, and first drop chooser by Tuesday
- At least one letter per week, each, meeting deadlines set by correspondents
- Pay attention to plot arc, follow up threads offered by correspondents
- Play seriously and playfully
Decisions made in class
Decisions

- We will use the complex discovery plot, physical drops (w/ photos), and a contemporary Santa Cruz setting.
- People can include anything in a drop, texts, images, cassette tapes, USB keys.
- We will have one large society, starting with pairs and expanding week 3.
More decisions

- The “armature” for the overall project is Lovecraftian: “How terrible is wisdom when it brings no profit to the wise”
- Individuals choose character armatures
- The setting is a research university (unknowingly?) dedicated to discovering what should not be known
Yet more decisions

- This class does not exist in the game
- Tables for letters to be created by Alexei, Adrien, Eric, Larry, and Cameron
- Create a character to propose to your initially-paired person by Sunday, know why you know each other by Tuesday
Initial setup

- Initial pairs: James/Grace, Eric/John, Larry/Cameron, Alexei/Paul, Julia/Adrian, Duncan/April, Lindsey/Jacob

- We will figure out second-round extensions (another character known by each, and contact procedure) during week 2