

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE CONEY ISLAND AMATEUR PSYCHOANALYTIC SOCIETY

Zoe Beloff

"We are all freaks on the inside"

Albert Grass

A CHANCE ENCOUNTER

When Aaron Beebe, the curator of the Coney Island Museum, invited me to create an exhibition to celebrate the centennial of Sigmund Freud's visit to Dreamland, there was no way I could say no. I have a long standing fascination with psychoanalysis and Coney Island and this was a once in a lifetime opportunity. I just had no idea how to proceed. Freud's own notes on his visit, chronicled by Norman M. Klein in "Freud in Coney Island" are in collection of the Freud Museum in London. The idea of simply presenting reproductions of his diary alongside photographs of the attractions that he mentions such as "Hellgate" and "Creation" seemed too dry. I wanted to convey the deep relationships that exist between popular imagination and the amusement park, to demonstrate how our unconscious drives cathect with these fantastic structures. But how could I show this?

In my work as an artist, I explore ways to manifest graphically the unconscious processes of the mind and discover how they intersect with technologies of the moving image. In the early 1990s I started collecting home movies for my film "A Trip to the Land of Knowledge" (1994). I wanted to find a way to reveal what Freud called "The Psychopathology of Everyday Life", to show how these naïve family films, like dreams or slips of the tongue, reveal more than they ever intended about the darker unconscious dynamics of parents and children. In my interactive cinema CD-ROM "Beyond" (1997) I explored how writers and philosophers like Henri Bergson as well as psychologists, Sigmund Freud and Pierre

Janet conceptualized memory and the unconscious in relation to the birth of mechanical reproduction. I re-photographed old home movies and early films from the Library of Congress to create many short films, opening up an ambiguous space. Were the women whose images flickered on the screen really the hysterics documented in particular case histories described in the narration? This unresolved state between sound and image opened up a void, a space to wonder what the moving image can reveal... a space between seeing, imagining and projecting that is central to my work.

My starting point is always historical records, documents. But I want to find ways to document the intangible, images that “are not there”. I have created stereoscopic séances based on accounts of spirit mediums. I have attempted to show the world through the eyes of patients suffering from mental disturbance, to transmit experience of hallucinations and delirium. I have explored psychoanalysts’ own attempts to document their patients on film in the 1920s and 30s¹. I think of myself as being a medium, an interface between the living and the dead, the real and the virtual world of images and sounds. As an artist my role is, I think, simply to be spoken through... an antenna attuned to vibrations moving across time. So how could I tune myself to the denizens of Coney Island’s vivid history?

I kept coming back one particular film in my collection titled, “The Lonely Chicken Dream” by a woman named Beverly d’Angelo. I acquired in the early 1990’s at the flea market on Sixth Avenue in Manhattan. Beverly’s husband, Buster, had been keen amateur filmmaker. The story of the family’s post-war rise in prosperity unspools through his home movies as the family moves from a tenement in Brooklyn to suburban New Hyde Park in Long Island.

Among all the rolls of 16mm film, “The Lonely Chicken Dream” stood out. It was the only film by Buster’s wife and it purported to depict a dream and then interpret it. In the film, Beverly dreams that she returns for an afternoon of fun at Coney Island, where she grew up. She goes on one wild ride after another. On awakening, she confronts the grim reality that her husband is having an affair with

¹ “Mental Images: the dramatization of psychological disturbance” in Karen Beckman and Jean Ma editors *Still Moving: between Cinema and Photography* Durham: Duke University Press 2008 pp 226-252

her best friend, Betty, and that it is her marriage that is a ‘rollercoaster ride’. I confess the idea of a housewife reenacting her dream on film to articulate her dissatisfaction with her marriage in the 1950s before Betty Friedan and women’s liberation seemed just too strange. Could this Brooklyn housewife have known about Freud and his Interpretation of Dreams? The idea seemed ridiculously farfetched. The film languished in my collection simply because I couldn’t believe it.

Wondering how to proceed with the exhibition I found myself imagining possibilities for this film. What if it were just the tip of the iceberg, a single piece of a larger archive? I began to speculate. Perhaps she was part of an amateur cine club, in which everyone explored their dreams, something like the Amateur Cine League of dreams right here in Brooklyn. It seemed too fantastic, yet I couldn’t shake the idea.

I think of the flea market as a beach where people’s earthy possessions wash up after they pass on. And sometimes, if I concentrate hard enough, I’ve discovered there are times when I can find something I really wanted amidst this great random tide of discarded objects swirling around me. I’ve had some uncanny moments where I turned around and there was something very unusual and unique, the exact object I pictured in my mind’s eye. I’d find myself trembling, unsure that what I was looking at was entirely real.

I walk into the garage on Twenty Sixth Street, all that is left of the once sprawling lots. Much to my surprise, Paul, the vendor who sold me the d’Angelo film, is still here. He recognizes me and asks if I am still looking for home movies. I say yes, but right now I am working on a project about Coney Island. Does he have anything? Paul lives in Coney Island and tells me he will ask around. “Come back next week.”

One week later I unpack three large cardboard boxes of what appear to be home movies, snapshots, notes and knickknacks from the estate sale of one, Robert Troutman. My hands are shaking. I am on the floor surrounded by old newspaper, rusty cans that smell of vinegar, torn photo albums, crumbling letters. I am ecstatic. This is none other than the archive of the Coney Island Amateur Psychoanalytic Society. I think of Walter Benjamin’s words as he unpacked his library “Every

passion borders on the chaotic, but the collector's passion borders on the chaos of memories."² I soon realize that Beverly d'Angelo was indeed a member of this Society and "The Lonely Chicken Dream" belongs with the collection. How much more material, films, lecture notes, correspondence, still exists in attics and basements? One can only speculate? What you see here at the Museum is, I hope, just the beginning.

Fortunately I was able to track down Robert Troutman, who recently relocated from New York to a retirement community outside Miami. He was kind enough share his reminiscences of this very unique society, to my knowledge the only amateur psychoanalytic society that has existed in this country. Robert, who used the name 'Bobby Beaujolais', was one of the last members. When the Society folded in the early 1970s he had the forethought to pack up the archive, which remained in his basement until his move to Florida.

The Coney Island Amateur Psychoanalytic Society did not spring directly from Freud's visit to the amusement park in the summer of 1909. It was inaugurated in 1926 by Albert Grass, the visionary amusement park designer. From what I was able to piece together from public record and notes he kept on file at the Society's office, it appears that Grass first encountered Freud's writing in France on his tour of duty in the Signal Corps during the First World War.

I have to confess, for me, Grass is truly a kindred spirit, an artist, a technologist and a dreamer. I love to pour over old manuals, in fact I already had copies of Audel's New Electric Library and was delighted to find his well thumbed editions filled with notes that spiraled into flights of fancy, where I glimpsing his first attempts construct a three dimensional map of the mind. I had created an installation inspired in part by this series of books, "The Influencing Machine of Miss Natalija A." that included a stereoscopic diagram or phantogram of an imaginary machine as described by the schizophrenic patient of one of Freud's early followers, Victor Tausk, a machine that she believed influenced her mind and body. But I had never imagined something as ambitious the Grass's visionary plans for a great

² "Unpacking my Library" in Walter Benjamin, *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings, Volume 2, 1927-1934* Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999. p. 486

amusement park that would embody the workings of the unconscious as put forth by Freud in chapter seven of *The Interpretation of Dreams*.

THE EYE OF CONSCIOUSNESS

The story that circulated in Society was that Albert Grass got his start in the amusement industry, while still a boy, working in the notorious “Insanitarium with Blowhole Theater” for George Tilyou the owner of Steeplechase Park, Coney Island’s great “Pavilion of Fun”³. After the armistice in 1918, he was hired by Edward, George Tilyou’s son to design new attractions.

Grass returned to Coney Island with a vision that would become a lifelong passion, to rebuild the Dreamland the amusement park that he loved as a child, as a true ‘Dreamland’, constructed according to strict Freudian principles. Sadly his vision never materialized. Funding was not forthcoming. What remains are only his sketches, plans and a working model commissioned by William Mangels’ Coney Island Museum of American Recreation. One can conceptualize his design as a missing link between the Beaux Arts structures of the original Dreamland that burned down in 1911 and the high modernism of the 1939 World’s Fair.

For example, Grass’s plan for the pavilion representing ‘consciousness’, a great glowing, revolving head with two staring eyes, seems to look back to designs for the “Globe Tower” that was proposed for Coney Island in 1906 while prefiguring the famous Perisphere of the “World of Tomorrow” a decade later⁴. But more fascinating still, this head also looks forward to original, “The Surrealist House” designed by Julian Levy and Ian Woodner for the Amusement Zone adjacent to the World’s Fair.

³ In his essay *Freud in Coney Island* Norman Klein describes Freud’s reaction to this decent into the Id, where men and women were separated by demented clowns and women had their skirts blown up by jets of hot air to the amusement of the audience.

⁴ The proposed globe was planned to be the largest steel structure ever erected, 300 feet in diameter and 700 feet tall. It was to include a vaudeville theater, skating rink, 4 ring circus, hotel, weather observatory, rollercoaster and several dinning establishments. Bonds were sold in 1906 and 1907, there were not one but two groundbreaking ceremonies. However it never made it above the foundations. In 1908 the company’s treasurer was arrested for absconding with stock proceeds. See Chad Randl, *Revolving Architecture: A History of Buildings That Rotate, Swivel, and Pivot* Princeton Architectural Press, 2008. p. 88

Levy and Woodner's prospectus showed a house built in the shape of an eye with a fantastically convoluted interior. "It proposed to construct a surrealist walk through... in the manner of the old type 'funny house' but with each attraction turned into terms of surrealism, based accurately on surrealist theory and principles –thus the 'funny house' of tomorrow." Their proposal went on to explain in "oversimplified terms," that it was "an attempt to utilize scientifically the mechanisms of inspiration and imagination... and apply this research to a systematic reformation of reality."⁵ Of course the Surrealists were fascinated by Freud's theories. The eye was the symbol of surrealism but one wonders whether the idea of building a fairground funny house to celebrate the unconscious could have perhaps originated in Grass's head. Were cosmopolitan, Harvard educated New Yorkers, Levy and Woodner aware of Albert Grass's designs and the activities of the Coney Island Amateur Psychoanalytic Society? This is just one of many tantalizing questions raised by the discovery of their archive.

Similarly parallels can be drawn between Grass's design for his central figure the "Libido", the giant topless goddess "Creation" guarding the entrance of the original Dreamland and Dali's "Dream of Venus" which was the ultimately realized version of "Surrealist House" at the World's Fair. At the beginning of the century visitors entered the original Dreamland amusement park under the outstretched wings of "Creation". In 1939 they entered the "Dream of Venus" pavilion between the skinny, plaster, spread legs, gartered stockings and frilly slip of an unseen giantess. While Grass's "Libido" pavilion was not as racy as Dali's, his sketches show how visitors would enter a fifty foot building in the shape of a prepubescent girl, through a doorway at the level of her crotch.

The other clue to Grass's connection with the more scholarly world of psychoanalysis was a book that I found in the archives *Side Show Tricks Explained: Sword Swallowing, Fire Eating, Feats of Strength, Juggling Secrets, etc* by Hereward Carrington, inscribed 'to my dear friend and seeker after truth, Albert Grass'.

⁵ Ingrid Schaffner, *Salvador Dali's Dream of Venus : the surrealist funhouse from the 1939 World's Fair* New York : Princeton Architectural Press 2002. p.38 Levy and Woodner's original plans did not come to fruition. Instead they hired the great artist, showman Salvador Dali who built the Dream of Venus pavilion.

Carrington was a British investigator of psychic phenomena who had moved to the United States, where he worked with the American Society for Psychical Research. He corresponded with Freud on the subject of the paranormal. Although Carrington embraced Freud's interpretation of dreams, the great psychoanalyst was somewhat skeptical of occult phenomena. To help him in his task of unmasking fraudulent mediums, Carrington went to Coney Island to study the tricks of sideshow artists. It was one of those expeditions that he met Grass who introduced him to many of his friends in the amusement business. Grass was doubtless most impressed by a man who corresponded with Freud himself and invited Carrington to address the Society on the subject of 'Freudian Psychology and Psychical Research'.⁶

In general it appears that the members of the Coney Island Amateur Psychoanalytic Society were self-taught Freudians pouring over well-thumbed copies of *The Interpretation of Dreams* and *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*. Most of them were working class men and women who couldn't afford to become professional psychoanalysts yet wanted to take part in the great intellectual adventures of the city. Like Freud, many were Jews. Some had studied psychology in college. This included, on one end of the social spectrum, Charmion de Forde, the society's only heiress, who went to Clark University, and on the other, Molly Lippman, who took night classes at City College while earning a living as a secretary in the garment district. Like many early converts, they believed that psychoanalysis could change the world and were braving moral outrage from a society who equated it with free love. One can think of them as working-class utopians, a link between the Workers Film and Photo League of the 1930s and today's YouTube activists and dreamers.

THE DREAM FILMS

According to minutes and letters, the Society met once a month for

⁶ This was a subject that Carrington fixated on for many years, see Hereward Carrington, "Freudian psychology and psychical research. (A rejoinder)" *The Journal of Abnormal Psychology*. Vol. 9 (6), Feb 1915, pp. 411- 416.

discussions, screenings and lectures in a small office above the Shore Hotel store at 1301 Surf Avenue in Coney Island. Once a year they had a special celebration at Feltmans Restaurant, where the ‘dream films’ were screened and a winner chosen.

In 1926, soon after the Society was founded, Albert Grass proposed that members attempt to recreate their dreams on film and analyze them. He had worked as a cameraman in Signal Corp during World War I and returned to Brooklyn with technical expertise⁷. When Kodak produced the first 16mm camera and the new ‘safety film’ in 1923, the medium was born for the amateur. Grass was ready to initiate members of the Society into the mysteries of cinematography and Freudian theory. He firmly believed that the films would prove Freud’s dictum that dreams are always the disguised fulfillment of a suppressed wish.

Of course not all members of the Society made dream films, but a surprising number did. Many of them, including Albert Grass and Arthur Rosenzweig, were also members of the Amateur Cine League. By an astonishing coincidence this organization was founded in the very same year as the Society, 1926, in Brooklyn by a fifty seven year-old MIT graduate Hiram Percy Maxim. Like Grass, Maxim had sweeping objectives, and like Grass he saw home movies as opening up a new form of knowledge. The scope of his thinking can be grasped from first editorial, “Amateur cinematography has a future that the most imaginative of us would be totally incapable of estimating. When we analyze amateur cinematography we find it a very much broader affair than it appears upon the surface. Instead of its being a form of light individual amusement, it is really an entirely new method of communication. Our civilization offers us today only the spoken word or the written word as a means of communicating with each other. This word may be spoken to those within sound of our voice, telephoned over a hired wire, mailed in a letter or telegraphed in dots and dashes. But no matter how transmitted it is still the spoken or written word. We are dumb as far as movement, action, grace, beauty, and all that depends on these

⁷ It is difficult to know exactly what films Grass actually shot while in the Signal Corp. His notes mention *Plastic Reconstruction of a face*, *Red Cross Worker*, *Paris 1918*. It is a strange almost surreal film in which we see doctors, dressed in artist’s smocks, in a studio, constructing false noses and ears for soldiers who had their faces destroyed by shrapnel in the war. The film is in the collection of the National Library of Medicine in Bethesda Maryland.

things. The motion picture communicates all of these. We are able to transmit what our eyes see, and it is the next thing to actually being present ourselves. And so instead of amateur cinematography being merely a means of individual amusement, we have in it a means of communicating a new form of knowledge to our fellow beings, be where they may upon the earth's surface.”⁸

The League encouraged the formation of local clubs, offering advice on rules, contests, etc., and published such news of the clubs' activities as was submitted. It also invited ACL members to send in their own films for review. In December 1930 the fourth anniversary number of *Amateur Movie Makers Magazine* announced a new feature: the annual selection of the ten best amateur films of the year. As a member of the League, Grass must have known Maxim and exchanged ideas. Perhaps it was the Amateur Psychoanalytic Society's own dream film competition that inspired Percy to follow suite with his ten best list? But while the Amateur Cine League went on to be an international organization with thousands of members, The Coney Island Amateur Psychoanalytic Society does not appear to have attracted members beyond the five boroughs. Whether it began independently or was formed by Grass initially as a local branch of the ACL is hard to say, but quickly it became clear that his goals were far more radical. His speech at the first prize giving ceremony makes this clear, “Sigmund Freud has written that the royal road to the unconscious lies in our dreams. Each night we are plunged into a fantastical world as amazing as anything we see in Saturday night Photoplays. But how to capture the most effervescent of experiences so that they can be properly analyzed and recorded for future generations? The answer, my friends, lies in our new tools, the Cine-Kodak Camera and the Kodascope Projector enabling us to reenact our dreams on film, producing a perfect reproduction of our mind's nocturnal wanderings, the strange adventures of our souls. As it will surely be soon with sound and color to perfect the illusion, we will open up our darkest dreams to the bright light of reason”.⁹

⁸ For more information on the Amateur Cine League as well as lists of winning films from 1930 to 1994 see Alan D. Kattelle *The Amateur Cinema League and its films* Film History, Volume 15, pp. 238–251, 2003

⁹ From Albert Grass, unpublished notes for his inaugural address at Feltman's Restaurant, Coney Island. July 25, 1926.

Even in this brief quote, it is clear that Albert Grass is making a great conceptual leap beyond Maxim. While Maxim extols the ability of film to capture and share what we experience in our waking life, Grass grasps the oneiric potential of cinema. Where did this idea come from? After all, Freud himself inaugurated a great turning away from the visual to the verbal in the ‘talking cure’. He refused to look at his patients on the couch. He believed that language, free association, slips of the tongue held the clues to our unconscious, the secrets that we keep buried even from ourselves.

My hypothesis is that Grass drew his inspiration from a rather literal reading of Freud’s classic 1913 text, *The Interpretation of Dreams*. Here Freud discusses how wish fulfillment, that is the *raison d’être* of every dream, is often hard to discern because it is disguised, hidden from our inner moral censors by various procedures including the condensation and displacement of ideas and the dramatization of thoughts and desires in the form of ‘mental pictures’. Thus when we dream we do not experience a wish as an abstract, intangible concept, instead we find ourselves protagonists in a fully formed virtual world complete with characters we may or may not recognize from our waking life, caught up in strange and often suspenseful situations. One could argue, like Grass, that the closest waking analogy is narrative cinema.

Freud expresses what he called “regard for dramatic fitness” in dreams very clearly in these passages from *The Interpretation of Dreams*, “a thought, usually the one wished for, is in the dream made objective and represented as a scene or according to our belief as experience... On closer examination, it is plainly seen that there are two pronounced characters in the manifestations of the dream which are almost independent of each other. The one is the representation as a present situation with the omission of the ‘perhaps’, the other is the transformation of the thought into visual pictures and into speech.”¹⁰ He discusses how “secondary elaboration” works like a good screenplay, to make the dream appear seamless and coherent, even suspenseful, to the dreamer while in fact it is a conglomeration of

¹⁰ Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams* trans. A. A. Brill, Barnes and Noble 2005. p. 422

many ideas that must be approached separately in the course of analysis.

If a dream is like a film in which the dreamer is the protagonist, why shouldn't the most fitting medium for sharing and analyzing a dream be cinema, now in the hands of ordinary people? In dreams the fantastic can occur: we can be in one place and then magically in another. Thus with a simple editing bench and a hot splicer even the amateur could create a fantastic celluloid dream world and then take it apart shot by shot in the course of analyzing and revealing the particular wish lurking within it.

A MONSTROUS ID

Freud's writing inspired Grass to initiate the dream film series that would become, for forty years, a tradition in the Society. At the same time it should be noted that Grass's own favorite movie was "Coney Island" (1917), directed by Roscoe "Fatty" Arbuckle, starring the fat man himself along with a young Buster Keaton¹¹. As his notes indicate, Grass loved to entertain members with a screening followed by a lecture in which he showed how the movie articulated Freud's theory of the ego. Here Arbuckle is the embodiment of the most monstrous, charming, androgynous, and playful "Id," freed from the rules of the civilized "Ego" or the "Superego" cops, even unbound from the confines of gender, regressing to a pure polymorphous, infantile state of unbound desire. Arbuckle was also the model for the obese clown in the animation that Grass planned to project onto the roof of the "Unconscious" pavilion in his proposed Dreamland.

That Grass articulated this long before film theorists took up psychoanalysis and before silent comedy was considered worthy of critical attention is extraordinary. Indeed the one person in the 1920s who truly understood and

¹¹ Grass would have access to this film through the *Kodascope Libraries*. Started in 1924 by William Beach Cook, Kodak began operating the *Kodascope Libraries* in the spring of 1925, around the United States in regional offices and local camera stores. An early precursor to the video tape rental store, Kodak leased negatives of fine grain prints from a variety of Hollywood producers and made stunning amber and sepia tinted prints for rental purposes. Most were comedies and newsreels. Grass would have been able to order, for study purposes, both the Fleischer's Out Inkwell series and Comique/Paramount shorts of Roscoe Arbuckle.

expressed silent comedy's radical potential was Luis Buñuel in his essay, *Buster Keaton's College (1927)*¹². Once again, this raises the question whether Grass was aware of the surrealists or whether they knew about him? At first the very idea seems absurd. Grass and his friends were working-class New Yorkers who did not see themselves as artists, let alone members of the avant-garde. They were simply trying to understand their own psyches because they believed that psychoanalysis promised a path to human happiness to which everyone is entitled. And yet tantalizing questions remain. During his stint in the Signal Corp in France in World War I, Grass was billeted near Nantes, where Andre Breton worked as an intern at the local hospital. Did the two of them ever meet? Did someone introduce him to Julian Levy, the art dealer and surrealist champion in New York?¹³ And could that someone have been Charmion de Forde?

Charmion was the only member of the Coney Island Amateur Psychoanalytic Society who was wealthy and sophisticated. Her father was a Wall Street financier and she briefly studied at Clark University. Her only surviving film, *The Praying Mantis (1931)* provides a single tantalizing clue that she was indeed familiar with the surrealist inner circle: it is an inter-title that reads, "Mr. K. shrieks, 'You've been two timing me with Rose. You little tramp.'" Was 'Rose' just a simple typo or a sly reference to Rose Sélavy, Marcel Duchamp's female alter ego who emerged in 1921 in a series of photographs by Man Ray?

THE HISTORY OF DREAMS

This archive is a remarkable record of the hopes, fears, and fantasies of ordinary New Yorkers, a changing cross section of those that made up the fabric of Coney Island through the twentieth century, from immigrant Jews and Italians to wealthy bohemians to young gay men exploring their sexuality in the 1960s. Thinking about this project, I often come back to a provocative statement by Walter

¹² Paul Hammond, *The Shadow and its Shadow* San Francisco : City Lights Books, 2000. p. 61

¹³ Levy welcomed local surrealist talent. He exhibited the work of Joseph Cornell, the shy Christian Scientist who lived with his mother on Utopia Parkway in Flushing, Queens. Like Grass, Cornell made films using the amateur 16mm format.

Benjamin in his 1927 essay, *Dream Kitsch*, “The history of the dream remains to be written, and opening up a perspective on this subject would mean decisively overcoming the superstitious belief in natural necessity by means of historical illumination.”¹⁴

Benjamin tells us that while Freud was exploring the psychic make-up of the individual through the study of dreams, he was not thinking about larger patterns of society and how a changing society influences our unconscious. Benjamin imagined that a history of dreams might tell us who we are in a social context rather than relegating the imagination to a timeless ahistorical sphere. It seems to me that this might indeed be a perfect lens through which to view the Society’s ‘Dream Films’.

If the ‘Dream Films’ seem poorly shot and at times little more than clichéd home movies, one might agree with Benjamin that the era of heroic or visionary dreams is over, “The dream has grown grey. The grey coating of dust on things is its best part. Dreams are now a shortcut to banality. Technology consigned the outer image of things to a long farewell, like banknotes that are bound to lose their value”. But Benjamin went on to write that it is through dreamwork that the banal, the kitsch, the outworn phrase is recuperated because in the dream we understand the good that resides in these things.

Benjamin was perhaps the first cultural theorist to celebrate the ephemeral; he showed us that it is not through the big events but through the scraps and remains of everyday life that we can best understand history. I believe that through the intimate, private Coney Island ‘imaginary’ represented by this archive that we can get a unique glimpse of hopes, dreams, and anxieties of several generations of New Yorkers.

At the end of *On Lay Analysis* Freud wrote, “perhaps once more an American may hit on the idea of spending a little money to get the ‘social workers’ of his country trained analytically and to turn them into a band of helpers for combating a

¹⁴ “Dream Kitsch: Gloss on Surrealism” in Walter Benjamin, *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings, Volume 2, 1927-1934* Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999. p. 3

neurosis of civilization... aha! A new kind of salvation army! Why not?"¹⁵ Freud's idea did not materialize. Psychoanalysis remained an expensive pastime of the upper classes. But the members of the Coney Island Psychoanalytic Society came closer than many to materializing his vision. They took difficult, abstract European concepts and with a hands-on American spirit applied them to their own lives. In their own way they were visionaries who, undeterred by lack of finances or professional training, decided to explore their inner life, to share their dreams with each other and in doing so attempted to free the psyche from the constraints of class and of cultural and sexual mores of their time.

I am indebted to all who took the time to contribute their memories, most especially Robert Troutman, but also I'd like to mention Patricia White, who gave us permission to reproduce photographs of her great aunt Charmion de Forde; Gerald d'Angelo,, and Bob Rosenzweig who shared memories and snapshots of his favorite absent minded professor, Uncle Arthur.

¹⁵ Sigmund Freud *The question of lay analysis; conversations with an impartial person* trans. James Strachey New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1978. p. 8

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