

EP02_BetweenAcrossThrough_SeidmanFreud

cdts.admin@utoronto.ca

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[music]

00:03 Iane Romero: You are listening to Between, Across, and Through.

[music]

00:22 IR: You probably wonder what your dreams mean all the time. You wake up in the middle of the night, startled by the wildness, strangeness, unfamiliarity of that dream. You have probably even tried to describe them, what happened and what they felt like, but found that you just don't have the right words. It feels as if your brain and your mouth are speaking different languages. Well, maybe that's because, according to Freud, they are. Those frustrated thoughts you experience in your dreams are arguably the same as the repressed feelings you had by telling jokes. They're even the same as the nostalgia you get when you think of home. Today, Professor Kevin Lewis O'Neill, director of the Centre for Diaspora and Transnational Studies sits down with Professor Naomi Seidman from the University of Toronto in a conversation that examines: How do you translate Freud? Is it even possible to achieve true translation? And what do jokes or dreams say about your subconscious? We explore all these questions and more as we examine the language of Freud. This is Between, Across, and Through.

[music]

01:45 Kevin Lewis O'Neill: Hi, I'm Professor Kevin Lewis O'Neill, and I'm speaking with Professor Naomi Seidman. Thanks so much for talking to us. Naomi, in your research you talk about Freud having a collection of jokes. Can you tell me one of them?

01:56 Naomi Seidman: I'm trying to think of one that you would think is funny. So I should say that the joke collection started off as a collection of Jewish jokes and Freud just kept them for his own entertainment. And he had a scrapbook and he would hear a joke and he'd write it down, or he'd see one in the newspaper and he'd write it down. And then, at a certain point, he wasn't making any money from his writing. We can relate to that.

[laughter]

02:22 NS: And he decided to try to write something more popular, and he had this idea of writing a book about Jewish jokes. And then, he decided...

02:28 KO: It was a book about Jewish jokes or a joke book?

02:31 NS: It was originally gonna be an analysis of Jewish jokes. And then he decided to turn it into an analysis of humour, more generally. And because he did that, he actually changed some of the jokes to seem as if they weren't about Jews, and the jokes thereby became even less funny than they are now. But these were all jokes that circulated in the Vienna of his time and that continue to circulate today, they're sort of what I would call joke types. So one of the examples, which is timely, is that a Eastern European Jew is sitting in a second-class train car, really enjoying the fact that he has the train car to himself. And he's spread out all over, he's got his stuff, he has his feet up

on the other bench. And a very nicely-dressed man walks in wearing a suit and carrying a newspaper and an umbrella under his arm, and the Eastern European Jew collects himself and starts sitting up a little better and takes his feet off the bench. And this very nicely-dressed businessman across the way pulls out a little pocket calendar and starts leafing through it, and then he says to this other Jew, he says, "Excuse me, sir, can you tell me when Yom Kippur is?" And the Eastern European Jew says, "Why didn't you say so?" And puts his feet up on the bench and leans back.

[laughter]

04:05 NS: So, that's one of Freud's jokes, which obviously, he couldn't do anything about the Jewish character of. So that's one of them. But there are many of them that revolve around the situation of the meaning between assimilated Jews and Jews who are more open about their Jewishness, more comfortable about being Jewish, and just relaxing in their own spaces, and then... That encounter between a kinda European-ized Jew and a less European-ized Jew, those are all over the joke books. There are many, many jokes about that. That was a situation in Vienna at the time, which was seeing huge waves of migration, in which German Jews had been there for 100, 200 years or longer and had learned to be middle-class Germans, had to deal with these Jews that they were somehow like, but also not like. So, Freud himself was one of those people. So, that's an example of a joke.

05:05 KO: And then, who's the intended audience for jokes like this?

05:08 NS: So the intended audience is a big question in psychoanalysis. Freud was very uptight about who his intended audience was. So a lot of people in his vicinity called psychoanalysis a Jewish science, which was not a compliment, and which was meant to say that psychoanalysis was really about Jews. And yes, people had crazy sexual thoughts, but that was because they were Jewish. And...

05:31 KO: So, a Jewish science in the sense that it was the science of Jews as opposed to a science...

05:35 NS: Yes, exactly.

05:36 KO: Authored or created by the Jewish community?

05:38 NS: A science both by and about Jews that was inappropriately universalized to be about human beings, the Oedipus Complex. So, let's take a Greek instead of a Jewish family and say, "This is all of us. We all have these crazy desires." And when the Psychoanalytic Institute in Berlin was Aryan-ized in 1933, they basically said, "We now need a new psychoanalysis for Aryans, who have much nobler problems than Jews." So, the question of Freud's audience was always... It was always a problem for Freud. Freud eagerly sought a larger-than-Jewish audience, but it took him a very long time to find one. He was not promoted academically because he was Jewish. So, he basically had a Jewish audience, he basically had Jewish friends. This was true of assimilated Jews, even converted Jews. Even after they converted, they tended to just socialize among Jews. And some huge proportion of Freud's patients in early years were Jewish, and he tried to cover that up in

various ways, in the case studies. So in the case studies, you read it and any kinda reference to Yom Kippur, or whatever, was erased so that it would look as if he had a clientele which reflected the Viennese public as opposed to his own small circle of friends.

07:06 KO: So, there is this continued tension between a Jewish audience, but also the aspiration to look beyond the Jewish community as the audience.

07:16 NS: Yes, this is what I call Freud's mission to the Gentiles.

[laughter]

07:21 KO: It seems like it worked.

07:23 NS: It worked beautifully, and it wasn't just... Freud eagerly sought out non-Jews, was really excited when he found them, and the non-Jews recognized their role. And then Jung was just put in charge of the Psychoanalytic Society. He was a token Gentile who was supposed to represent psychoanalysis. Freud knew that any kinda success that psychoanalysis would have was impossible inside Vienna. You had to go out of Vienna, where Anti-Semitism was so intense. And he looked to Switzerland, where Jung was, and to London, where James Strachey and Ernest Jones were, to do what Freud wanted, which was to turn psychoanalysis into a true science, as opposed to a Jewish science.

08:09 KO: So, what does it mean to speak to this gentile audience?

08:13 NS: So there's a difference between how you speak to an in-group and how you speak to an out-group, is one difference, which I would say is generalizable. So a lot of the kinds of theorists who deal with what's sometimes called The Hidden Transcript, so how people speak among themselves, how African-Americans speak among themselves versus how they speak when there's a white person in the room, or how Palestinians speak about themselves. This is a well-known thing that, actually, the persecuted group or the minority group is less likely to be known to the dominant group, than the dominant group is to be known to the minority group because they need to for their survival, tends to develop a kind of expertise about the dominant group. Whereas the dominant group tends to not know certain things about the minority group and also to cloak its own knowledge in a self-serving forgiveness of its own dominance.

09:13 KO: Is this is kind of a stretch when Canadian comedians are so knowledgeable of US or Germany, and are just so bright and talented about US culture?

09:24 NS: Right. Well, some of that is just the American culture. They export their culture, they're not interested in import. There's a trade imbalance in the cultural level. It's exactly... It's the opposite of the trade imbalance in the economic level with China, which is that America exports its culture and is uninterested in importing culture and uninterested in knowing... Which means that if you wanna get into the American market, if you are a Canadian comedian, you gotta know that market and you got to understand where you fit and you gotta develop certain kinds of smarts. This is the kinda structural understanding of Jewish smarts. So what's the characteristic of a kind of...

Why Freud? Why did psychoanalysis come from a Viennese Jew? What is it that he had to know that other people didn't? But how did he have to cloak what he knew to get through to the other side, which wasn't really willing to hear any kinda critique of its own culture from an outsider?

10:18 KO: To what extent does the myth of a return movement and nostalgia affect Freud's conceptualization of the psyche?

10:25 NS: What an interesting question. Freud theorized that desire, which seems so... Which is everywhere in human history, especially in 20th-century Jewish history, Zionism, the return to the homeland. He actually conceptualized that as the death instinct. He believed that a human being had a life instinct and a death instinct, Eros and Thanatos. This is something that he came up with to try to understand the horrors of World War I. And he believed that basically the instinct, which he had seen as determinative for the first stage of his career, which was to live the erotic instinct, to have projects, to be out there in the world, that every attempt to live in that way was met with a certain kind of psychic pain that are interfaced with the world, was a painful one. That this socializing and getting up in the morning and teaching a class and doing anything, was both a primary urge and there was some part of us that he associated with the kind of organic self. He also talked about our feeling of being in the womb, that our only capacity for real... Let's not say pleasure, but the absence of pain, was to actually return to organic matter. And that the urge to do was always countered by the urge not to do, to stay in bed, to go back to the womb.

12:07 NS: And that this thing that we consider paradise, which is the place we all came from when we were truly one, when we were happy and free, that this particular desire was caught up in all kinds of aggressive and self-negating impulses. He saw suicide as part of this, and also war, the desire to kill that thing that gets back at me, that is painful, the addiction.

12:37 KO: All of these returns are... They're these fundamental human kind of aspirations. Can one accomplish that kind of return for Freud?

12:46 NS: It's interesting, the whole field of psychoanalysis is debating this question right now. So, there are two ways of looking at it. First of all, the psychoanalysis itself is a diasporic movement. Freud himself moved from the Eastern regions of the Austria Hungarian empire, like so many other Jews of his generation, to the metropolis. The Vienna Psychoanalytic Society was full of immigrants from Poland, for instance. It wasn't called Poland then. So, psychoanalysis is very caught up in the question of diaspora.

13:23 KO: Because the principal architects of the school of thought are diasporic.

13:26 NS: Yes. Where themselves, came from elsewhere and had the experience of being outsiders and foreigners in the country, in the city that they did their work in. And psychoanalysis itself was shaped by the fact that some huge proportion of psychoanalysts left wherever they came from, relocating to other countries. And the effect of exile on psychoanalysis has been very interesting. And actually, it's the Argentinian psychoanalysts, many of them Jewish, who really came up with the psychoanalytic theory of exile and diaspora. But the question of diaspora in return is built into psychoanalysis in a different way, which is the question of, Freud saw the psyche as moving from

one life stage to another. And each movement of the psyche from childhood to adolescence, etcetera, was a form of diaspora, a form of expulsion. And the way the psyche moved itself was a form of movement across cross borders.

14:37 KO: So, it's the psyche movement across different stages of life. And if I'm understanding this right, as diasporic, then there's a nostalgia for what one has left.

14:49 NS: Exactly. Which is why the joke of lying on the couch and talking about your mother till you are 80-years-old...

[chuckle]

14:57 NS: You are always going back in some sense. And then, the question is: Can you go back? And I'll explain how this, technically how this works. And Freud was already dealing with this in his first major work, which is how he came up with this idea of the navel of the dream. But also, the way the psyche works just on a daily, minute-by-minute level is through a kinda movement which is generated because of heavy psychic censorship. So, the psyche has to evade its own censors. So for instance, a sexual thought or aggressive thought, which is what Freud thought we were all trying to feel the satisfaction of without copping to. That's the basic psychic game that is played in a joke or a dream.

15:45 NS: So, the dream is a way of evading the direct expression of whatever that thought is, in order to remain asleep, he thought. So that you come up with some, he called them visual hieroglyphics, that translate the early trauma, or the desire, or the thought. And then, you tell that dream to a psychoanalyst in your session, and that itself is another form of reshaping it. You will have the experience of the way you tell something is never how it happened, it's a further stage of the dream work. And then, the psychoanalyst hears it, and because the psychoanalyst is a different person, it takes a different shape within the mind of the psychoanalyst. And then the psychoanalyst's work is to try to reverse engineer the workings of transference, which is an inter-subjective, interpersonal kind of movement, and to try to discover the original thought, or trauma, or dream. And Freud said, "You never actually get there."

16:45 KO: Me telling you about my dream is a translation of my experience, but it's not an experience. But my... What is it? It's...

16:55 NS: So, you are telling me your dream... Please don't.

16:58 KO: Okay.

[chuckle]

17:00 NS: Is a translation of a translation of a translation. And let me be technical here. So it's a translation of a trauma or a desire into the hieroglyphics, the visual hieroglyphics of dream imagery into the verbal, whatever it is, of telling me your dream. You are turning that into the English language when you tell it to me. And because it's me, and I'm a different person, you are also

transferring... Freud's work for transferring is also translating. So, I'm not just me, I'm also your mother and you are repeating all kinds of other relationships you have had that have shaped how you interface with the world. So, the original idea that Freud had is you can translate back... So notice translation here has two directions as opposed to one. So what the psychoanalyst does is both further translation into the language of psychoanalysis and into the structures of the psyche as understood by psychoanalyst, and it's an attempt to recover some original kernel, which is the original trauma or desire that your dream came from.

18:12 KO: And that's the real goal, is to identify that original kernel.

18:14 NS: Well, this is the debate right now. So the debate is whether you relinquish the attempt to discover some pure kernel, or whether you say, as we do in diaspora studies, the pure kernel is a fantasy of the human psyche. So, what Freud meant, and whether he actually believed that some primary homeland could be returned to, especially since he was so critical of the idea of a return, or whether you were only gonna go further in certain kinds of translational trajectories that were meaningful, because they illuminated aspects of the journey as opposed to because they actually managed to successfully reverse this journey.

19:00 KO: Yes. So, the idea for...

19:03 NS: Can you go home again?

19:04 KO: Yeah, that's central to the study of diaspora, and clearly to psychoanalysis as well for very good reason.

19:10 NS: Right. So psychoanalysis and diaspora studies is a very interesting conjunction, and especially from the perspective of translation theory. How do you translate Freud? Do you attempt to create an English that somehow gets back to an original German? Especially given that Freud himself used the word translation to mean not just the reproduction of the original in a different form, but the new life of the original in a form that's never the same because of the forces of censorship, which are both internal and external, social.

19:46 KO: Now, at the risk of moving to too many different scales, Freud's work was also translated.

19:51 NS: Exactly. So Freud's work, the translation of Freud's work is basically the story of the history of psychoanalysis. So the question of what Freud's work in translation is, is very closely connected to what is Freud's own understanding of translation. When Freud's work got translated into English by non-Jews, the censorship that they themselves had to overcome was the censorship of a society that was suspicious of something that came from what was considered a parochial, Jewish environment. And the way in which the Church of England repackaged Freud was to make him more "scientific" so that he would pass muster within the Anglo-American Social Sciences. So, the word... So, Freud's vocabulary, [20:40] , turned into id, super-ego and ego, which are Latinate terms, even though the German is just simple German. It just means the I, the it and the over I. Those are the three words that were translated into id, ego and super-ego. This happened

throughout Freud's work. It was an attempt to assimilate into a new environment, which is completely predictable, according to Freud's own theory of translation.

21:13 KO: And Freud, as a scholar, would certainly... I can imagine, would want to have his works translated into English to hit a broader audience and to continue this project that you've mentioned, to make mainstream this new science of psychoanalysis. The question of Hebrew in your work is really interesting as well. Freud seemed also very interested in having his work translated into Hebrew.

21:36 NS: Yes. We all know the story about the translation of Freud into English, and that translation has been reworked in recent decades according to a new method of translating Freud, resisting the scientific vocabulary, I put "scientific" in quotes, and resisting creating a normative glossary of standard psychoanalytic terms. But in Hebrew, the earliest attempt to translate Freud was done not by trained psychoanalysts but by Zionist settlers who were interested in having Freud returned to the Jewish people as it were, and he was...

22:21 KO: Returned to the Jewish... In terms of having... Not physically return, but to take...

22:29 NS: To take possession of it.

22:30 KO: Possession, right.

22:31 NS: Even more fully, so a kind of opposite of what was going on in the universalizing mode. And Freud was ambivalent, he encouraged both projects. In some minor language in a backwater of psychoanalysis, fine, let him be Judaized, as long as in the rest of the world, he was universal.

22:48 KO: Was he ambivalent, or it sounds, from my perspective, from a current academic standpoint, really entrepreneurial? Like, "Let's get as many audiences as we possibly can."

22:57 NS: Very possibly. I think also nostalgic would be a way... If he really analyzed what that was. He said he couldn't read the Hebrew translation, but he claimed to derive pleasure from putting his hand on it and looking at it.

[laughter]

23:09 NS: So, there's something going on there with him and the Hebrew translation, and he worked with the Hebrew translator, the first Hebrew translators.

23:16 KO: And the first Hebrew translators, as you say, were trying to take possession of...

23:22 NS: It was a national project, it was a nationalist project, it was a Zionist project. The idea was the in gathering of the Jewish people, and the in gathering of the great discoveries and contributions to Western culture through translation, to the new Jewish homeland.

23:39 KO: But Freud didn't read Hebrew, so he says. How did he know it was good? Or how did he

know... Or did he know that this was going on?

23:46 NS: How much Hebrew did Freud actually know? How much Yiddish did Freud actually know? These are really charged questions in the field of Jewish studies. And the Jewish readings of psychoanalysis are... How Jewish was Freud is a persistent question. And I'm actually interested, not only in that question and the answer to that question, and the truth is that we know the answer to that question. It's weird that we keep asking the question when we know the answer. The answer is: Freud knew more Hebrew and Yiddish than he acknowledged. And Freud himself was constantly asked that question and suspected of being more Jewish than he was willing to say. And I don't actually know how to think about that. I'm actually interested in, what does it mean that everybody wants him to be Jewish? And why? What is that desire about?

24:34 KO: And you also mentioned in your work that at the time of Freud, there was debate about whether Hebrew served or did not serve as the unconscious of psychoanalysis.

24:45 NS: Actually, Yiddish. Yiddish or Hebrew.

24:48 KO: Okay, okay.

24:49 NS: In different ways, those were understood to be possibly the... I think more people thought of Yiddish, and continue to think of Yiddish, as the unconscious of the Jewish people... Of... Sorry, the unconscious of psychoanalysis. This is a widely repeated insight. It's the epigraph of the... Or the first line of a book about Freud and Yiddish by a French psychoanalyst. In French, it says, "My unconscious speaks Yiddish. Of that, there is no doubt."

25:18 KO: Wow.

25:20 NS: The Yiddish Research Institute, Freud served on the board of it, it's called YIVO. When YIVO moved to New York, it was brought out of Lithuania in 1940. Max Weinreich said, "YIVO is the collective unconscious of American Jewry." So, this idea that Yiddish forms a kind of unconscious, which if you read Freud's joke book, it functions in that way. So it's a buried layer of Jewish consciousness that's cover... The id behind the yid, which is a joke that already came up in the 1920s, not mine. That the European-ized Jew who assimilates to bourgeois manners and language, at moments of stress, their Yiddish unconscious will erupt and they'll suddenly start speaking Yiddish. And there's a joke type that's about this. So, whether...

26:25 KO: What is the joke?

26:27 NS: I'll tell you a quick one. And not from the Freud book, but just an American Jewish one, 'cause it's easier, I think, to understand. So, Mrs. Cowan, and Mrs. Cowan, of course, used to be Cohen, but changed her name to join a gentile country club, and she's sitting at the dining room, and the waiter spills some soup in her lap, and she says "Oy gevalt, whatever that means." So, the idea is that Yiddish is a kind of... Yiddish erupts from her, and then she covers it over with English. So, the structure of the modern Jewish self in folklore, in jokes, even in sociology, it isn't just a bilingualism of a earlier language that's covered over by a later language, it's a deeper language, a

more primal language, a shameful language.

27:17 KO: And it's not a strategically, a code-switching between two equally fluencies or proficiencies of language, it's something more primal.

27:28 NS: It depends who you talk to. The model of this is code-switching, or what we could call a surface reading of Jewish bilingualism. It's something that I think actually illuminates a lot about the joke book and about Freud, that actually there's code-switching going on here. But the ideology I'm describing is that in modernity, and some people even trace it back to the Spanish Inquisition, where there's... The Spanish Inquisition, which Foucault says, is behind... Is a distant ancestor of the psychoanalytic session. But what he never says is that what's being rooted out by the Inquisition is a secret Jew. So the Inquisition was going after conversos that continued to do Jewish practices. And a lot of these Jewish practices, by the way, were unconscious Jewish practices. People were brought to the Inquisition because they killed a chicken the Jewish way. In other words, these habitus body practices. So, the persistence of the Jew within the Christian was what some people say creates the modern split self, the alienated consciousness.

28:38 NS: So, when you talk about different languages of the Jew, you can talk about it as code-switching. Or you can talk about one that's buried, the shameful language that's buried beneath the "civilized language." The Yiddish beneath the French or the German. And Yiddish, which wasn't considered a true language, it was considered a badly mispronounced form of German, it was a "jargon," was what it was called.

29:05 KO: So, what is the relationship between a mother tongue and the language of the unconscious and the psyche?

29:11 NS: The unconscious is a kind of mother tongue, even if that mother tongue is forgotten, or maybe particularly if that mother tongue is forgotten. And the conscious is the language of the second acquired language. I think it's pretty easy to map those onto each other. And Freud himself seemed to do it, including in his joke book. One of the jokes that he tells in the joke book makes it clear that he himself understands the depth structure of the psyche, the unconscious unconscious, which was his first model, as related to layered languages, a layering of languages.

29:55 KO: And so, if someone is bilingual or trilingual, that's irrespective of this mother tongue?

30:02 NS: Bilingualism in Freud takes on a particular shape, which is actually much more closely related to the findings of Max Weinreich, who was a linguist and Freud's Yiddish translator, his findings about bilingualism. He analyzed the shape of bilingualism. In other words, we talk about bilingualism as if people were Berlitz courses, where they had some of this and they had some of that. But bilingualism is a much more complicated psychic structure, where there's almost always a stratification of languages. The ones learned earlier, at a deeper psychic level than the ones learned later, not to mention fragmentation and forgetting. And what's the effect of a language that you no longer know? But that was your first language. So these are questions that actually were most fully explored by Max Weinreich. So Freud didn't come up with a full-blown psychic theory of bilingualism, but it's implicitly already there in Freud in a very early stage, including his first

writings about hysteria and his joke book, which has a joke about Jewish bilingualism that very closely matches this theory of the unconscious.

31:22 KO: What's the joke?

31:23 NS: So the joke is about the baroness Von Fehsenfeld who's in labor, and her husband and the doctor are out in the parlour playing cards, which I guess was a thing, even if you were a baroness, which is why you should get a Doula and a midwife. Freud doesn't say that, that's me.

31:41 KO: Okay. [chuckle]

31:42 NS: So, the baroness is in great pain in the inside chambers and the husband and the doctor outside hear her crying out in French, [31:54] [REDACTED]. And the husband says to the doctor, "She's in pain. Do something." And the doctor says, "No, let's keep going, play another round." And 10-15 minutes later, they hear her say, "Oh my God, [32:11] [REDACTED]. And the husband says, "Listen to her, she's suffering. Do something, Doctor." The doctor says, "No, let's keep going another round or two." And then, suddenly, out from the other room, they hear a shriek and she says, [32:30] [REDACTED]. And the doctor says, "It's time."

[chuckle]

32:35 NS: Throws down his cards. And so, the joke for those of you who don't know, she's basically saying the same thing in French, German, and Yiddish, but the meaning of, we could call it the meta significance of the language, is entirely different in each case. The French is both the original, in the sense that it's what she says first, but it's also the most superficial and belated. And the fake language, is the implication. And when she says she's suffering in French, she's not truly suffering. To get to the marrow of who the baroness is, you have to go to the Yiddish. She was only truly suffering in this core language, which is her Yiddish, is the implication.

33:19 KO: You speak so much about Freud collecting these jokes. And in other parts of your work, Freud seemed to collect archeological artifacts as well. Even this joke has an archeological feel to it, in a way.

33:32 NS: Yes.

33:33 KO: Why is this fascination with archaeology so important to understanding Freud?

33:38 NS: So Freud was himself fascinated by archaeology, and he derived his understanding of the psyche from the notion of a dig. And he actually, when he talks about his first full-blown description of what a psyche is, invites his readers to imagine Freud as an archaeologist who arrives at a rune and asks the people standing around what this rune is, and they have a very dim understanding of what it was. It's just a bunch of broken rocks, as far as they were concerned. But luckily, he has a shovel with him and what he digs up is a bilingual stone, like the Rosetta stone. And that's what's in there. And the Rosetta stone tells the story of how this rune came to be. That's what's buried there. So, Freud himself saw the psyche, first of all as bilingual, but also as a kinda

stratified rune that each of us was a kind of catastrophe.

[chuckle]

34:42 NS: And that if you wanted to know... [chuckle]

34:42 KO: That's true. That's interesting.

34:44 NS: I don't know about you, but me.

34:45 KO: Sure, sure, it's catastrophic.

[chuckle]

34:49 NS: And only that, but it's a catastrophe that, if you just talk to the people who are standing around, in other words, the people who only see the catastrophe now, you'll never get the true story, you gotta dig. And what you'll get is a language that you don't understand. In other words, dream, that's in hieroglyphics, basically, Freud thought that that's what a dream was, it's hieroglyphics. And like the Rosetta stone, you have to figure out what the code is. So, one of the ways in which people have been sort of deconstructing Freud from a postmodern perspective and complicating this notion of a stratified self, and also, according to Freud's own suspicion of the notion of origin, complicating the idea that you can ever come up with the original story, is by noticing that Freud wasn't an archeologist, he was only a collector.

35:39 KO: Wow.

35:39 NS: And the difference between an archaeologist and a collector of antiquities is that the collector, you are taking the thing out of its historical context, you don't have it's spade, all you have is a piece of a dig that someone else did. And one of the ways of understanding that joke is that the joke isn't about primal pain and birth and who we are at our core, it's about a bunch of Jews sitting around a living room in a middle-class Viennese household, telling jokes in which they are able to produce little snippets of these languages after having basically forgotten most of the languages. It's like the Yiddish that you have in a coffee mug or the Yiddish that you have on a T-shirt. That's what the joke is. The joke is a snippet of Yiddish, which is what persists, whether it's an emblem of some deep, lost past or some primal self. Is the joke about a labouring baroness or is the joke about some Jewish man making fun of who they are? And once you think about it in terms of the social situation of joke-telling, as opposed to the primal situation of giving birth, then a whole new mode of understanding what Freud is. And you don't evacuate the meaning or the depth's model of the psyche, but you help recognize how it functions as a kind of emblem of depth as opposed to depths itself.

37:06 NS: So, Yiddish functions as a kind of token or emblem or fetish of depth, which is why Freud, and Hebrew too, in some way, which is why Freud could get off on stroking the cover of his Hebrew translation, as opposed to actually reading it. And the truth is, that's how Yiddish functions these days. We're in a post-vernacular era in which even Yiddishists are likely to signal, not their

knowledge of Yiddish, but their connection to Yiddish in some way, through these kinds of tokens, which is three words in a joke or which is a word on your T-shirt.

37:45 KO: Wow. Thank you so much, Naomi, for this conversation. It was great.

37:48 NS: Thank you, I really enjoyed it.

[music]

37:52 IR: That was Professor Kevin Lewis O'Neill in conversation with Professor Naomi Seidman from the University of Toronto. This monthly podcast is distributed directly by the Centre for Diaspora and Transnational Studies. You can email us to the cdtspodcast@gmail.com, and you can listen to the next episode by subscribing directly on your favorite app to Between, Across, and Through. I am, Iane Romero. Thank you for listening and joining the conversation.

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