**Filozofski vestnik**
ISSN 0353-4510 | Volume 46 | Number 2 | 2025 | 163–81
 | DOI: 10.3986/FV.46.2.07

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# Schubert's *mise-en-abîme*: Reading Copjec's Literacy of Desire as One Already Spoken For

**Keywords**
Joan Copjec, desire, Jacques Lacan, music, Franz Schubert

**Abstract**
In honor of the thirtieth anniversary of Joan Copjec's important and influential text, *Read My Desire: Lacan Against the Historicists*, this essay explores how the psychoanalytic conceptualization of desire operates musically as much as linguistically. If the unconscious is structured like a language, then music is structured like a desire for a language to be already spoken for. Franz Schubert's evocative *lieder* literally speak about music's capacity to capture and tarry with desire as a force always to be reckoned with.

## Schubertov *mise-en-abîme*: branje Copjecine pismenosti želje kot že izgovorjene

**Ključne besede**
Joan Copjec, želja, Jacques Lacan, glasba, Franz Schubert

**Povzetek**
V počastitev tridesete obletnice izida pomembne in vplivne knjige Joan Copjec *Read My Desire: Lacan Against Historicists* članek raziskuje, kako želja deluje v glasbi in jeziku. Če je govorica strukturirana kot govorica, potem je glasba strukturirana kot želja po govorici, ki je že bila izgovorjena. Schubertov evokativen samospev dobesedno govori o sposobnosti glasbe, da zajame in rokuje z željo kot silo, s katero je treba vedno obračunati.



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> For in considering the rights of man from the point of view of philosophy, we see the appearance of what in any case everyone now knows of their truth. They are reducible to the freedom to desire in vain.
>
> — Jacques Lacan[1]

> The veil of representation actually conceals nothing; there is nothing behind representation. Yet the fact that representation seems to hide, to put an arbored screen of signifiers in front of something hidden beneath, is not treated by Lacan as a simple error that the subject can undo; nor is this deceptiveness of language treated as something that undoes the subject, deconstructs its identity by menacing its boundaries. Rather, language's opacity is taken as the very cause of the subject's being, that is, its desire, or want-to-be. The fact that it is materially impossible to say the whole truth—that truth always backs away from language, that words always fall short of their goal—founds the subject.
>
> — Joan Copjec[2]

## *Mise-en-scène*; or, Recognition All in Good Time . . .

*Read my desire!* This clamour for recognition is the plea of the subject to their Other, the most revealing and honest demand one can make to anyone, at least initially, or until one can find words to read *one's own* desire, only to find that desire was lingering there all along, waiting to be read and enacted to the letter. Why then is it so difficult—pre-analytically speaking—to read desire? It seems that although what presents as desire cannot be thought, it can nevertheless be spoken and thereby expressed. This is precisely Joan Copjec's charge: Express yourself repeatedly and your desire can be read by another who holds the desire to do so. This is a specific transmission which demands the rigor of making a different kind of knowledge—one in which the singularity of one's desire is



1 Jacques Lacan, "Kant with Sade," trans. James B. Swenson Jr., *October* 51 (Winter 1989): 69.

2 Joan Copjec, *Read My Desire: Lacan Against the Historicists* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994), 35.

privileged—known, spoken and expressed. Moreover, in suturing the subject to desire, a struggle emerges from the repetition of its continual transmission.

Copjec's important work, *Read My Desire: Lacan Against the Historicists* is a praxis towards focusing on an unusual desire of psychoanalysis: music as that which is expressed extra-linguistically. When considering the question "What makes music, *music*, exactly?," we could argue that it is the desire of music to literally *be* read. Copjec frames architecture, film, history and the gaze as circulating the demand of desire to be read, and here I extend Copjec's demand to music. What does it mean *vis-à-vis* music to read desire as a compositional force? For example, one can only read Franz Schubert's *Death and the Maiden* (both the *lied* and the string quartet) simply from an ethical perspective because, from beginning to end, these compositions demand desire. That which lies beyond the notes are to be read in full-force as the heart of the ethics of psychoanalysis.

Copjec's method not to get stuck on repetitions of history is also the charge of psychoanalysis as a revolutionary force with which *Death and the Maiden* also sits in opposition to the lamentations of those who are stuck in the past, unable to move in the present and yet complicit in this very circular repetition. As Lacan says, "It should be noted that [the experience of psychoanalysis] sets us at odds with any philosophy directly stemming from the *cogito*."[3] Interestingly and somewhat perplexingly, Lacan elsewhere dispels the notion that psychoanalysis should position itself against universalisms:

> Psychoanalysis is neither a *Weltanschauung* [worldview], nor a philosophy that claims to provide the key to the universe. It is governed by a particular aim, which is historically defined by the elaboration of the notion of the subject. It poses this notion in a new way, by leading the subject back to his signifying dependence.[4]



Here the subject is stuck in a cycle of personal demise and subsequent renewal in which moments of fulfillment are temporarily sustained under the mandate of desire.

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3 Jacques Lacan, "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the 'I' Function as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience," in *Écrits*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York: W. W. Norton, 2006), 75.

4 Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: W. W. Norton, 1998), 77.

As a historian, Michel Foucault compels us to think of the past as sticky. As subjects who study and experience both the world and ourselves, our present discourses, although differing from those of past ages, always retain something of these past discourses, something which has stuck. For psychoanalysis, too, the past is always present and enduring. In spite of the difficulty the analysand faces as complicit in repetition of the past, this can nevertheless be reconfigured on the couch. Here, the stickiness of the past is redirected not towards becoming unstuck but instead towards a focus on the object one desires to be stuck to.[5] This, in turn, enables a realization that "stuckness" is not about possible release from an object but rather a matter of sliding unaware into another sticky position offered by the signifier. Lacan calls this metonymy, which is where Copjec's method begins with its simple command: *Read my desire!*

Despite being no easy task, it is one that sets psychoanalysis in a historical frame through its presumption that the metonymic procedure of history can be knowable to the subject. As Copjec claims, psychoanalysis is the "mother-tongue of modernity," having through a process of infiltration become its very condition.[6] The restless questions posed by psychoanalysis concerning desire and drive continue to inform the *zeitgeist* of the contemporary world, enabling us through history to lament its failures while continuing to afford it respectful if ambivalent intellectual, rational attention. Yet, amid such surface appearances, we remain troubled, having established links with all manner of philosophical, political, scientific and aesthetic topographies. We now well know that modernity posed so many questions which rendered us anxious that its project to rationalize, bedevilled with uncanny moments and monsters, continues to haunt our subjective (non)relation with the social bond. Here, attention to desire, read solely as an unconscious force and not as a moment in time, is necessary in order to understand what it means to be thrilled and awakened by desire without allowing *jouissance* to overtake its nourishment.



Unlike *jouissance,* desire can be mapped as a modest subjective project laden with bouts of anxious hesitation. It is more than a word-object. For Lacanians,

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5 We could say that Copjec, while provoking us to develop a literacy of desire to know what one is repeating, nevertheless situates Foucault (the historicists) as distinct from the illusory position that there exists full liberation from "unstuckness."

6 Joan Copjec, "The Inheritance of Potentiality: An Interview with Joan Copjec," interview by Jennifer Murray, *e-Rea* 12, no. 1 (2024): http://journals.openedition.org/erea/4102.

desire is specific; it is precisely and singularly correlate to the suffering of the subject in that to know desire differently requires confrontation with or submission to its opacity in the name of reading it again and again. Here anxiety emerges as the closest the subject can come to the *object a*, the non-existent object serving as placeholder for that which is lost, never to be recovered. Copjec puts this well:

> Anxiety—again, like respect and terror—is not only not caused by any object, it is not even caused by loss/lack of object (which is why anxiety can be distinguished from disappointment, say, or grief). Rather than an object or its lack, anxiety signals a lack of a lack, a failure of the symbolic reality wherein all alienable objects, objects that can be given or taken away, lost and refound, are constituted and circulate.[7]

Anxiety, which Lacan defines as the only true affect that does not deceive,[8] is best understood as an overdetermination wherein the *object a* is revealed as a (known) fiction of smoke and mirrors. Anxiety is nevertheless a psychic intrusion. Here, Copjec draws attention to Lacan's commentary on Irma's injection: in facing anxiety it is better, whatever the cost, to try and defer the desire to know all, everything, even "the origin of the world."[9] Copjec's method develops a literacy of desire via objects just close enough to the subject to be affective—gothic vampires and unresolved Oedipal complexes. These all tantalize anxiety which, although in plain sight, still eludes us and can only be signified symbolically.[10] Copjec proposes that in order to reveal itself as desirable, desire harbors an irreducible aesthetic quality emanating from what must be prohibited. In this way, desire, as that which refuses linguistic realization, invites transgression of the law—whether determined through God, the name-of-the-father, or the law as significant other, "the name-of-the-partner," if you will. Insofar as this speculative position carries the refusal of desire to name, to put into realization a word-object, it is beyond the realm of historicism. Here Copjec offers a caveat to her novel theoretical provocation: Knowledge has not failed simply



7 Copjec, *Read My Desire*, 119.
8 Lacan, *Four Fundamental Concepts*, 41.
9 Copjec, *Read My Desire*, 120.
10 Copjec, 121.

because saying it all is impossible, neither has it failed because (some) knowledges' exclusion from a system of signifiers can be easily dismissed.

It would seem that the first rule of Copjec's method of reading desire confronts historicism by its resistance to interpretation. For Copjec, desire can be read but not interpreted because only by resisting interpretation can the subject contend with their very limits in an apparent meaningless void. For desire to be read to the letter, insists Copjec, stay stuck to the meaninglessness of the drive in order to extract the meaning of desire. For the neurotic, being stuck in perpetual lack of knowledge, without falling into cynicism or giving too much ground to doubt, is a living nightmare requiring one's willing vulnerability to a literacy of desire which could very well take all the time in the world to read. This is the crux of Copjec's method wherein the very existence of desire is dependent on the subject's lack of knowledge.

Accordingly, any feeling or sensation has the capacity to be aesthetically presented beyond the context of its linguistic or visual counterpart on Copjec's analysis. In illustrating this I turn not to literature, architecture, photography or film (Copjec's preferred forms) but to their sonic counterpart: music. Insofar as the desire of the composer/musician to express feeling and sensation transcends technique, the listener must commit to a praxis of reading this desire as their own, even when this demands confrontation with the greatest anxiety of all: with death itself.

## Schubert's "Evil" Music



> The idea of death, the fear of it, haunts the human animal like nothing else.
>
> — Ernest Becker[11]

Schubert's string quartet No. 14 in D minor, known as *Death and the Maiden*, was completed in March 1824 as he was confronting his greatest personal prohibition—a premature death. Although not recognized at the time and published only after his death, this quartet is today considered one of the most powerful ever written.

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11 Ernest Becker, *The Denial of Death* (New York: Free Press, 1973), ix.

The death march theme of the second movement is taken from his 1817 setting for voice and piano of Matthias Claudius' poem *Death and the Maiden*, in which the maiden's initial innocent enjoyment of youth is gate-crashed by an unexpected, terrifying visitor who induces her cataleptic inability to resist his embrace.[12]

| | |
|---|---|
| *Das Mädchen:* | The Maiden: |
| *Vorüber! Ach, vorüber!* | Pass me by! Oh, pass me by! |
| *Geh, wilder Knochenmann!* | Go, fierce man of bones! |
| *Ich bin noch jung! Geh, Lieber,* | I am still young! Go, dear, |
| *Und rühre mich nicht an.* | And do not touch me. |
| *Und rühre mich nicht an.* | And do not touch me. |
| *Der Tod: Death:* | |
| *Gieb deine Hand, du schön und zart Gebild!* | Give me your hand, you beautiful and tender form! |
| *Bin Freund, und komme nicht, zu strafen.* | I am a friend, and come not to punish. |
| *Sey gutes Muths! Ich bin nicht wild,* | Be of good cheer! I am not fierce, |
| *Sollst sanft in meinen Armen schlafen!* | Softly shall you sleep in my arms! |

The subtext to this song-poem might be read as how, in trying to regulate *jouissance* in the face of overwhelming anxiety, the subject is caught in the tension between neurotic repression and the pervert's disavowal. The desire of the figure of Death is gratification in taking the innocence of the Maiden away forever, a perversity not entirely constrained in the song's concluding funeral march. As a formalized gesture of the social bond, its steady pulse marks the Maiden's death, but its appearance in the major key refuses the traumatic by providing a soundscape in which foreboding remembrance is grasped alongside an alleviated sense of release rather than of horror, suffering, and remorse for a lost future. We no longer have any sense of the Maiden as embodied nor of Death as a figure to be reckoned with. She no longer inhabits the world with enunciations, love, or the reading of desire, while Death nevertheless remains coherently perverse in providing a fitting end to the Maiden's desire. Schubert's demand that



[12] This scenario also provides the narrative of his setting of Goethe's *Erlkönig*, a lyric poem in which a young child's plea to his father for protection from the mysterious spirit (father, son and unholy spirit), being ignored, leads to his death. A theme from this song, too, is included in the fourth movement of the quartet.

we read the desire of the Maiden and her alterity, Death, as his own could not be more eloquent.

What are we left with following the death of the Maiden? If we remain true to Copjec's method of reading desire, we might find a glimpse of the answer. Following the Maiden's death the world is no longer innocent and cannot return to how it was. From Schubert's perspective the notes on his manuscript remain unchanged and will hopefully endure, whereas he, together with performers and listeners, is caught up in a terrifying encounter with death and an ensuing strange sense of resignation in which there is no judgement towards the figure of Death. The Maiden cannot be resurrected through music because it is precisely its performance that has killed her. Musicians and audience alike are thereby enabled to read Schubert's desire as his composition commands us, as that of both the Maiden and her deathly Other which sticks to her. In this way we, the listeners, too, are complicit in killing an innocent victim. From such a position of guilt there can be no reconciliation other than to desire her innocence in vain.

Seven years later, in 1823, Schubert was in debt, deeply depressed, and suffering the adverse symptoms of syphilis and mercury poisoning. He nevertheless continued to compose, finding in the string quartet a perfect medium for conveying to the outside world his inner turmoil in reconciling the lyrical aspects of his life with not just the fear of death but his actual confrontation with it. As W. W. Cobbett observes, "the string quartet had now also become a vehicle for conveying to the world his inner struggle."[13] The result was Schubert's astonishing *Death and the Maiden* quartet in which the writing throughout manifests sudden changes from gently lyrical to fiercely dramatic in a semi-programmatic rendering of Claudius' poem. One cannot forget the Maiden's scream and the stranger's libidinal rage at the end of the exposition of the quartet's first movement, as they merge in an ecstatic crescendo; sex and death are united in horrifically beautiful, seductive and nostalgic music which in expressing the inexpressible offers a perfect trope with which to present Copjec's method of reading desire. The tension is maintained even in quieter interludes by a recurring undercurrent of driving triplets, culminating in the final movement's frenetic



13 W. W. Cobbett, *Cobbett's Cyclopaedic Survey of Chamber Music*, vol. 2 (London: Travis and Emery Music Bookshop Publishers, 2009 [1929]), 357.

tarantella or "dance of death."[14] The tarantella was a dance traditionally used as a treatment for madness and convulsions caused by bites from the tarantula spider, which perfectly encapsulates Schubert's desire to kill off his protagonist as a metonymic force with which to handle his own impending fate. The Maiden now fully inherits Schubert's desire, unable to fulfil her destiny through also dying too soon.

Even before actually facing his own death, Schubert was haunted by the probability of dying too young, which in psychoanalytical terms is the inevitable castration where desire ceases. Hence Schubert's clear demand that we read the desire of both compositions and moreover, like Copjec, read it to the letter. Furthermore, if we treat these compositions like a dream (the royal road to the unconscious) or a wish-fulfillment, then we can assume that they directly implicate the desire of the Other as illusive and meaningful. Thus, we might say that the Maiden's imminent death is not so much Schubert's ultimate horror as his acceptance of castration and lack in fulfilment of an unconscious wish for the Maiden to surrender to death. In order to read another's desire coherently, one must at least have cultivated a literacy of one's own desire through assuming the position of the subject-supposed-to-know: how to read one's desire; how unfulfilled wishes are located in the everyday praxis of life; how commands and requests are deferred so that desire can be expressed in objects and other subjects.[15] In these ways, one gives oneself ethical space in which to explore desire as a life drive enabling subjective ontological security. Here in the face of ultimate castration—death—one can cling on to the life-driven matter of fantasizing, all the while being safely sutured to the symbolic order as a necessary scaffolding on which to develop a literacy of desire. This coming to grips with castration cuts off excessive satisfaction (for the neurotic, at least) before it spills over into unmanageable anxiety (undoubtedly not that far off for Schubert at the time). In this way symptoms can provide satisfaction without always being, in the end, entirely satisfying. The dream—in Schubert's case provided by Claudius' poem—has the potential to be psychically freeing by offering a different relationship with the inevitable, one not based on immediate *jouissance* but rather on the articulation of potential freedom from the grip of *jouissance*



14 W. W. Cobbett, *Cyclopaedic Survey*, 359.

15 This is why it is crucial for psychoanalysts to undergo the process of analysis proper. Not many vocations demand that one endures what one will ultimately put another through.

implicit in lingering desire. A literacy of desire can be nothing else other than ethical, which is precisely Copjec's point. After all, once desire is fully spoken (that is, in true or full speech) it becomes identifiable and malleable. It is where freedom resides. Furthermore, if we remember that no explanation of castration is ever complete, we might say that in his compositions inspired by Claudius', Schubert *is* the figure of both Death and the Maiden.

Claudius does not tell us why the Maiden died, only that Death desired to tantalize her innocence, before possessing her entirely. From the perspective of being alive, facing one's inevitable death looms as the most shocking castration of all because it is our fate either to accept that one's freedom is necessarily contained by surrendering to castration, or to embrace denial of the effects of castration by fighting to protect the illusion that one has a choice in the matter.

For Schubert as for most of us, coming to grips with these harsh limitations is suffocating, hence his retreat into the text of Claudius' poem. Schubert's setting provides us with a musical reading of his desire as the ultimate non-choice of castration: *your fantasies or your life*. The poem has enchanted him precisely as a consequence of his relationship with the Other and his setting of it is an acceptance of castration but on Schubert's own terms: *death is inevitable and just out of reach, but I am going to reimagine it by scanning my investment in innocence, so as to reach a more comfortable conclusion*. This libidinally-charged creative project is both revealing and protective. Schubert is obviously both the figure of the Maiden fearing death before her time as well as the figure of Death, expressing his anger through murdering her innocence. The Maiden is curious about desire and perhaps flattered by the Other's desire for her. Here Schubert's composition can be read in tandem with Copjec's method of developing a reading of one's desire as a curious plea. Once we have this different knowledge of desire (via the transference psychoanalysis offers) we will never again be the same yet nor will we necessarily be radically different. When it comes to desire, no one is innocent, yet in life the only thing we are truly guilty of, as Lacan reminds us, is compromising (giving ground to) our singular desire. That is, in the final analysis (in the face of castration), have we done that which we sincerely wanted to? Schubert makes sure that this question is properly reckoned.

## Innocence as "False Claimant"

Lacan's proposition that "the unconscious is structured like a language" entails that every wish is based on the law of the letter which can appear when least expected, especially when we grapple on the couch with the question of desire. Schubert, of course, was not analysed in this way, but we can say that his *Death and the Maiden* compositions are not so much an ethical drama of good *versus* evil as they are a stark portrayal of the libido's encounter with the Real in which the law not only fails but is traversed in the name of forbidden pleasure or when pleasure becomes law. Schubert's compositions convey his dreams of possibilities where things could be different for him. They enunciate the composer's wish to take control of death before it takes control of him and thereby give the unthinkable a representation in terms of musical utterance. Here for Schubert the Real is an imposition in which the domestication of the drive (Death) must take up the ethic of castrating the docile body of the Maiden.

What might it feel like to perform the figure of Death, to play or instrumentalize a characterization of that which desires pure and present evil opposed to the life force embodied in the innocent maiden? In Schubert's *lied*, Death is a dichotomous figure—a trickster ("I am your friend") but also a truth-teller of sorts ("softly shall you sleep in my arms"). Death speaks for itself plainly, leaving only room for immediacy, not interpretation. Death, it seems, is entirely immediate and sincere—after all, there is "happiness in evil," as Lacan proclaims.[16] We are witnesses to the Maiden's naïve libidinal enjoyment in the big Other's trustworthiness ("Go, dear"). Only when this ultimate beautiful soul begs to be spared ("I'm still young") is her vulnerability fully exposed to the listener. In Schubert's music we hear the Maiden scream out as she is pursued by Death, repeating in vain her shrill unambiguous demand, "do not touch me!" directed both at Death and us as witnesses. Insofar as the Maiden's demand is ignored, it is taken as an invitation to take up Death's *jouissance*, a poignant moment in which the link between mourning (one's premature death) and lack is made explicit.



We might at first think that "and do not touch me" has little to do with the desire of the Other. Or does it? Lacanians are well aware of the slippage that occurs between enunciation and what is enunciated as the meaning of what we say then

16 Lacan, "Kant with Sade," 55.

slips beyond our control. To this extent meaning is determined by the Other and not always clear. Moreover, for the neurotic, meaning is murkily determined *in* the Other. Alongside demand, desire has little chance of being heard, let alone read. Perhaps, for the non-neurotic, not being heard is taken to be simply a mistake, whereas for the neurotic it feels disturbingly unclear and beyond one's control. Schubert's *Death and the Maiden* compositions make a plea for us to read his desire without his necessarily having to explain. Yet, being a frustrated neurotic, he is compelled to do so. Occupying the positions of both Death and the Maiden, Schubert's conflicting motives paradoxically ensure that his message, *Read me!—again and again!*, is a compositional offering where words and music align. The little other—the listener—is left in stunned silence by the composer's request for his desire to be read, for love to be both sinful and meaningful as a performance.

Copjec offers a caution regarding being imperceptibly drawn into the instability and constructedness of such performativity.[17] Referring to the horror of the vampire (that which devours innocence), she says: "the drying up of desire is the danger against which vampirism warns us, sending up a cry for the breast that would deliver us from this horror."[18] Schubert's *Death and the Maiden* compositions present a similar nightmare, in which Death devours the Maiden as an ultimate fetish object for the audience. They foreground the desire of Death as having exclusive possession of the Maiden, thwarting her dream of maintaining pleasure in the face of ignorant bliss and leaving behind only nostalgia for this lost object. Copjec's further observation on vampirism perfectly captures the Maiden's position regarding her fate: "Vampirism is located beyond this point where the child maintains itself in relation to a partial object, an object of desire."[19] Schubert's two compositions are not intended to deliver us from such evil, rather they are an inheritance left by him for musicians whose task is to help us face the horror of unreconciled death, a death-horror in which desire will eventually dry up.



17 Copjec, *Read My Desire*, 128

18 Copjec, 128.

19 Copjec, 128.

## Time is of the Essence . . .

We all (especially musicians and composers) draw upon what we know or have experienced and yet may not ever venture into beyond our musical subjectivity. This is the common ground shared by music and psychoanalysis, one which provides the libidinal foundation to music as essential in developing a literacy of the composer's desire. Composers and musicians are neither necessarily evil nor innocent but simply complicit in making the desire of the Other their personal (sometimes perverse) object of fantasy. Music can be anything: profound, dramatic, amusing, irritating, or subversive—an extra linguistic form to which the composer or musician is stuck. Furthermore, what keeps them stuck is not a sensation of imposed immobility, paralysis, but rather a preference for grappling with it. We all want our stuckness to be time-bound, that is, to have a conclusion, and this is the wonderful promise which music offers, an opportunity to emerge from being uncannily stuck in even the worst-case scenario. Copjec says we "stumble [. . .] into the dimension of the uncanny. The special feeling of uncanniness is a feeling of anxiety that befalls us whenever we too closely approach the extimate object in ourselves."[20] Copjec then makes her important claim from which desire must be read, that it is "overproximity to the 'extimate'" which determines that not only a literacy of desire is possible but also that indifference (in the sense of disidentification) to (the superego's) over-proximinity is absolutely necessary in enabling the subject's transformation, that is, enabling the subject in a sensation of redoubling, to harness desire as both within and outside of itself. The literacy of desire involves this strange evental time-loop in which the subject is caught and bound, while at the same time, through a lessening of the tension of over-proximity, able momentarily to integrate a different imago of desire, one which is listened for and listened to. In order for this revolution to take place, the subject must surrender to being stuck at a certain point in time while, as Copjec puts it, rejecting other options in order not to remain "stuck in place," and instead moving through it without condemning stuckness as a "world of destruction."[21]



Returning to Schubert's interpretation of Claudius's poem in light of this specific mobius maneuver, we might say that Schubert's "evil" music becomes unstuck

[20] Copjec, 129.

[21] Copjec, 131.

through a sort of fantasy, what Copjec refers to as an "illegal hesitation" in the presences of the uncanny.[22] The conjoiner *und* in the poem's title objectifies both *das Mädchen* and *der Tod* equally, thus ensuring that each becomes a claimant on the other and thereby wards off anxiety. That they exist in this double form is what allows access towards a literacy of Schubert's desire. The composer plays on this *und* by first expressing the distress of the girl pleading for life before moving on to death's desire not only for the maiden's demise but to be the reason for it. Interestingly, in Schubert's score the determiner *Der* is dropped so that now there is no specific qualification of *Tod,* nothing to identify it from the uncastrated universe of death—that is, death being the end of desire is in contradiction with Schubert's figure of death who not only desires but claims the forbidden "innocent" subject—which we can count on existing without requiring any qualifier. Here, death is a word-object which stands completely on its own, irrefutable in meaning, devoid of sartorial super-ego and where there is no Other of the Other. Death is and has the phallus and therefore unlike the Maiden does not need to regulate his body. Nevertheless, for two thirds of Schubert's *lied*, the Maiden is alive, so Death can only be interpreted in relation to her. Death gets off on the *jouissance* of innocence. Insofar as Schubert embodies both figures, the Maiden's imaginary status of lost innocence anxiously offers language whereas Death, in holding the ultimate status of the phallus, takes it away. Here, Schubert's score allows this ultimate non-relation between oneself and one's death to be expressed musically.

In Copjec's thought, time is always close to the subject's reading of their desire. For her, just as history is always in the here-and-now, so too is desire; indeed, that history begins in the present is its very desire. We can think the "now" of both history and desire as emerging from the enigma of when time seems to stand still. It is in these uncanny moments, Copjec offers, that one has the strange ability to bear witness to the structure of fantasy in repetition. It is via this deliberate and slow movement—where the past becomes part of the present in a short circuit of its own temporality—that we can track desire and thereby attempt a reading of it. For Schubert, capturing moments of both past and present achieves through music precisely the psychoanalytic charge to say everything by breaking the rules of social engagement by not thinking before speaking. Speech, like composition, can be deliberate and sometimes repetitive but not



[22] Copjec, 131.

always careful, deliberate, and formulaic. Both can catch us off guard and linger into more tangential, free-associative moments. In this way, music's fundamental rule, similar to psychoanalysis's fundamental rule, is to express something: You must say what you can.

In order to develop a literacy of desire, one must ask the tough questions posed by Copjec: With what is one complicit in being stuck and why is one clinging to this sticky thing? To put desire to work one has to experience loss—not just an everyday loss, but one which is transformative. Only then does one realize what one has, which for Schubert was music. However, before any such realization, one needs to have grappled with loss of identification. Returning to the notion that *Das Mädchen* and *der Tod* was also Schubert's dream, we might say that as a dream it was both a wish-fulfilment and a form of self-reproach. Through killing the figure of innocence in a dream, Schubert shielded himself from his death by being Death's temporary master. As Freud observed, there is a death in every dream yet crucial to most people is the sustained desire to live. Schubert did not want to know when his time might be up, hence in his dream Death, although the ultimate blow for the Maiden, initially presents merely as forbidden, fickle pleasure. For Schubert, his dream culminating in the dance of desire between Death the aggressor and the innocent Maiden represents a reenactment of the universal human condition which allows the subject to find themselves in the presence of the *object a*, only then to discover themselves vanishing. This is literally the death wish in every dream: to remind us of our desires and how we keep them at bay.

Copjec's method harbours the crucial Lacanian ethic of ensuring that the subject can live with a literacy of desire, and further, that this literacy is what guarantees their autonomy as an expression. Desire and autonomy are inextricably linked as a contradiction in that one is a subject unto the law of desire, a desire which violates autonomy. Schubert puts us—musicians and listeners—into the stuck position of reading his desire at times when he was either fearing or actually facing death, when, as Copjec suggests, the rights of the subject to confront the limits of language and one's freedom are reduced or reconfigured. In Schubert's music, such moments—little grooves which lie between words—create an intimacy in which the historical subject can invest and articulate a desire, notwithstanding that this is struggled to be spoken in vain. Insofar as Schubert's death wish for himself manifests in his music as a desire to identify with Death

the aggressor who refuses castration, we could say that through composing he regained the agency with which to plunge into death at any time or in no time at all. Here, death for Schubert becomes the life-drive enabling him to be the object depicted in his music.

## *Mise-en-abîme*; or, Recognition in No Time at All . . .

> Desire begins to take shape in the margin in which demand rips away from need [. . .]
>
> — Jacques Lacan [23]

If Schubert had lived in the twentieth century and landed on Freud's couch, we could imagine Freud asking, "Is there someone in your life who wants you to be aggressive? Is there someone else who wants you to remain innocent?" The unconscious has the capacity to recognize the desire of the Other; that is, desires and wishes which may or may not necessarily be one's own but are nevertheless expressed in terms of rivalries, contradiction, aggressions, and so on, and which bear a relationship to lack and loss. Subjectivity has its enigmatic foundation in its own possible destruction, and furthermore, dreams provide the perfect conduit for this to play out: psychic grief, lost desires, overindulgence in *jouissance*, and lack. All of these signal something taken up in the imaginary but which cannot survive alone in symbolic time. Copjec cautions that getting stuck to time can be destructive and that, in gaining a literacy of desire, we must embrace the totally fantasmatic position that one has all the time in the world. Here, desire takes the guise of a vital force which can be sustained only insofar as life continues inexorably towards death, a hyperbolic position which nevertheless garners the truth that killing time is what formulates the very signifier which the subject must overcome in the name of desire. One gets to a position not of "I am where the Other is" but "I am where the 'I' is," where speech and the act become one's very name in a movement beyond consciousness. This is the very position where we can locate music as a desire of psychoanalysis, where as time passes something happens which is critical in identifying the discontents and discomforts of our subjective worlds. As a singular experience which allows us to face directly



[23] Jacques Lacan, "The Subversion of the Subject and the Dialectic of Desire in the Freudian Unconscious," in *Écrits*, 689.

our alienation and the fantasies which are pleaded for it, music and philosophy share a similar vision.

In allowing the torment of desire to be an insubstantial leftover, a foreign tongue common to us all, the music-psychoanalysis nexus metonymizes the thing we have lost and hope to recover in the form of materializing wishes and dreams. Here we might say that in juxtaposing the question of desire as a form of knowledge, dreams are a fateful rendezvous with the moment of truth and manifest by ensuring that death is replaced with life, life replaced with murder, innocence replaced by savviness, old replaced with new, and love replaced with anxiety. The real for Schubert exists as a universal expression which, as music demands, is logical and which resists being ontologized yet without being completely linguistic. In counting on the object of history to fall back upon, Schubert is a historicist; and, as a subject prior to psychoanalysis, he is forced to confront his frailties and limitations in developing a literacy of his own restless desire (his rivalry with the Other) through the composition of music. What makes music *music* is desire, all in good time.

Restlessness haunts Schubert's compositions by confronting us with a loss of belief in the transcendent embodiment of beauty as truth. Yet, at the same time, Schubert longed for a world which embraced a desire for music as a conduit to read one's own desire. Lacan would characterize such a position with the following:

> [I]nsofar as desire is a desire for recognition, this is something other than a desire [. . .] this desire is a repressed desire [. . .]. It's a desire that the subject excludes insofar as he wants it to be recognized. As a desire for recognition, it's perhaps a desire, but, at the end of the day, it's a desire for nothing. It's a desire that is not there, a rejected, excluded desire.
>
> This twofold characteristic of unconscious desire, which, by identifying it with its mask, turns it into something different from anything that can be directed towards an object—we must never forget this.[24]



[24] Jacques Lacan, *Formations of the Unconscious*, trans. Russell Grigg (Cambridge: Polity, 2017), 307–8.

For Schubert, recognition of the singularity of this desire lies between life and death, yet there is something radically unnameable about his very existence as a composer as he grapples with inevitable and imminent death. For all of us, as death draws ever nearer, the fear that things might get worse signals a loss of faith in the ability to not only read one's desire but even to listen for it. Copjec's method demands that we hold onto fidelity to listen for and read desire, at least theoretically, but I would say also clinically, to listen for the other's inimitable and irreplaceable voice which we all possess. We can think of Schubert as one of Copjec's historicists who ended his life in the most spectacular way by giving us these stunning compositions in which to listen for his desire and to claim the strange freedom that accompanies not knowing exactly when he will die. His music immortalizes the singular avowal of his testimony, this self-authorization of his experiences which embody truths of a deeply personal character. In psychoanalysis, too, there are often difficult moments: hesitations, false starts, mumblings, silences, various forms of impasse, and at times the giving up of the hope that anything meaningful can be said at all. It takes work from both analyst and analysand to facilitate a singular avowal such as "I feel," "I want," "I fear," "I love," "I hate," or simply "I." Such articulations—or *Listen to my desire!*—stake a claim to witnessing self-creation of an emergent self, of being a Copjec-ean secretary of one's desire, for which everyone possesses the credentials. Schubert's compositions encompass the many facets of desire in which space and time collapse at the edges of the voice of his desire to preserve his strange fantasy whilst at the same time leaving things to fate, and in these ways to express the inexpressible. After all, as Lacan reminds us, "The Other [. . .] [is] something strange to me, although it is at the heart of me."[25] Schubert, too, realized how we all uncannily live on the Other's watch and in the Other's time.



**Acknowledgements**

Concerning the music-psychoanalysis nexus, I am most grateful for my discussions with Nathan Gorelick, Rosemary Overell, Russell Sbriglia and Nick Derrick. As always, deep respect and admiration is reserved for Joan Copjec.

[25] Jacques Lacan, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Dennis Porter (New York: W. W. Norton, 1997), 71.

## Data availability statement

Data sharing not applicable to this article as no datasets were generated or analysed during the current study.

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