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## Sonification of Twitter Leadership at the G20

### A surprising musical opportunity for Donald Trump to sound a new note

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Written on the occasion of the [G20 Summit \(Hamburg, July 2017\)](#)

#### Introduction

Commentators are noting the deliberate choice of [Beethoven's Ninth Symphony](#) as celebratory entertainment on the occasion of the G20 Summit (Bryony Jones, [Why Merkel chose 'Ode to Joy' for G20 concert](#), *CNN*, 7 July 2017). The *Ode to Joy* has long been accepted as the [Anthem of Europe](#) by the Council of Europe and by the European Union. As noted in that commentary, the Ninth Symphony has been variously used in support of quite diverse political agendas.

Press coverage of the planned event was in many cases made under a title starting *G20 Leaders to Enjoy Performance of Beethoven's...* This phrasing could be considered a curious provocation with the implication that G20 leaders were expected or required to enjoy a performance beyond any reasonable criticism -- considered by many as one of the greatest compositions in the western [musical canon](#). This recalls the use of the *Ode to Joy* as a celebration of values in a religious context, suggesting the need for G20 leaders to "[sing from the same hymn sheet](#)" -- a questionable metaphor in a multipolar society.

As a metaphor, imposition of the experience can be understood otherwise in that it was Beethoven's final complete symphony, composed when he was almost totally deaf. Those protesting the Summit in the streets of Hamburg would readily ascribe to the "deafness" of the G20 leaders ([Arrests and injuries as Hamburg gripped by mass anti-G20 protests](#), *The Guardian*, 7 July 2017). The inability of world leaders to "hear" the water cannons deployed against the demonstrators, echoes anecdotal accounts of Beethoven's inability to hear cannonfire during his composition of music in which cannons were incorporated.

The questionable cognitive framework of the *Ode to Joy*, as the Anthem of Europe and of western culture, invites critical challenge in this period of crisis, as argued separately ([Reversing the Anthem of Europe to Signal Distress: transcending crises of governance via reverse music and reverse speech?](#) 2016). What in particular can it be claimed to enable in terms of the new thinking which is arguably now required -- especially given the degree of violence of the protests on the occasion of the G20 event?

It is however known that Donald Trump, representing a minority perspective at the G20 gathering, has previously declared himself to have little taste for such classical music. Trump is also known to have a remarkably short attention span, as was highlighted with respect to an earlier NATO Summit (Greg Price: [NATO Plans for Donald Trump's Short Attention Span](#), *NewsWeek*, 15 May 2017; Boer Deng: [Donald Trump has four-minute attention span, Nato briefed](#), *The Times*, 18 May 2017). It might be appropriately claimed that many are similarly impatient with the patterns of discourse characteristic of gatherings such as the G20 and by their leaders in national contexts -- again unfortunately exemplified by the *Ode to Joy*.

It may well be imagined that, in order to relieve the tedium of the concert, Donald Trump might have engaged in an activity he much prefers, namely tweeting. This now offers the opportunity of a musical riposte to the choice of Angela Merkel -- through the musical metaphor implied by the tweeting process as the much-appreciated "[language of the birds](#)" with its mythical antecedents ([Re-Emergence of the Language of the Birds through Twitter?](#) 2010).

The notes which follow indicate the credibility of this possibility to which Donald Trump could easily choose to give support. As a "new sound", this modality which would tend to be far more widely appreciated than the conventional choice of an ancient piece of music reinforcing patterns of thinking of the past -- arguably less appropriate to the challenges of governance purportedly confronted by the G20. Ironically, as a primary characteristic of a natural ecosystem, the tweeting of birds offers a more appropriate metaphor of the complex patterns of relationships which governance of the environment is obliged to recognize -- an issue on which Trump is a focus for criticism. Sonification of the "twitterscape", enabled by Donald Trump, would constitute a memorable reframing of governance discourse -- an appropriate counterpoint to the *Ode to Joy*.

#### Sonification of tweets as a political innovation

- [Sonification](#) is a well-developed technique of "auditory display", most notably promoted by certain sciences as a means of

detecting patterns in complex streams of data. Many references are available regarding such use

- [Tweeting](#) has been widely and successfully used in political campaigns, most notably in his presidential campaign by Donald Trump, and thereafter as President of the United States -- as a means of by-passing the constraints of conventional channels of communication with a wider public
- [Pattern recognition](#), as a feature of sonification, makes use of software for the conversion of text and speech to patterns of sound, possibly taking musical form, as separately described (*Convertor from Text to Poetry, Song or Music: computer-assisted aesthetic enhancement of treaties, declarations and agreements*, 2007).
- [Improvisation](#) in discourse is characteristic of tweeting, notably by Donald Trump. His usage contrasts with the prepared scripts by which political discourse is conventionally governed. This suggests fruitful possibilities which merit exploration, as argued separately (*Multivocal Poetic Discourse Emphasizing Improvisation: clarification of possibilities for the future*, 2012; *Improvisation in Multivocal Poetic Discourse: Basque lauburu and bertolaritza as catalysts of global significance*, 2016).

Experimental sonification of tweets has already been variously explored:

- Kingsley Ash: *Affected States: Analysis and Sonification of Twitter Music Trends*, (International Conference on Auditory Display, 2012)
- Scott Lindroth: *Sonification of Twitter* (YouTube, 27 July 2012)
- Sam Harman: *Twittersynth: sonifying public tweets* (*Sonification Art*, 1 November 2013); *Twinthesis : Twitter Powered Synthesis*, 13 March 2011
- Domenico Vicinanza: *Special SC11 Performance: Live Sonification of SC11 Twitter Stream* (Geant Association)
- Thomas Hermann, Anselm Venezian Nehls, Florian Eitel, Tarik Barri and Marcus Gammel: *Tweetscapes: real-time sonification of Twitter data streams for radio broadcasting* (International Conference on Auditory Display. 2012)

The last paper introduces a system that transforms message streams from Twitter in real-time into a [soundscape](#) that allows the listener to perceive characteristics of Twitter messages such as their density, origin, impact, or how topics change over time. Tweetscapes allow the listener to be in touch with the social platform/medium Twitter and to understand its dynamics. Sound [examples are provided](#). The system is already used to provide content for radio broadcasts.

Other experiments have focused on the sonification of Trump's declarations:

- Alexis Kirke, *TrumpTones: sonification of a President's Emotions* (2017); Britt Julious, *This Composer Analyzed 84,000 Words Spoken by Trump to Create an Acid House Track* (*Thump*, 18 February 2017)
- Stephen Taylor, *Sonification of Trump's Lies*, (YouTube, 30 June 2017)
- Shadab Nazmi: *This is the sound America made for Trump: mapping the conversation on social media* (*DailyO*, 10 November 2016)

Any tweeting by Trump during the G20 event, and the concert experience to which he was exposed, might be used to exemplify the possibility of sonification to reframe the approach to political discourse. Related implications have been separately argued (*A Singable Earth Charter, EU Constitution or Global Ethic?* 2006). More speculatively, even more could be made of the current role of Donald Trump as the "black sheep" of the international community -- or far worse. In operatic terms, rather than being subjected to the *Ode to Joy*, Trump might have resonated to a far higher degree with [Richard Wagner's](#) treatment of [Loki](#) in Germanic mythology, as separately explored (*Identity in question via Trump: Narcissus vs Loki?*, 2017). His rejection of the climate deal recalls Loki's role in setting fire to the [Valhalla](#) of the gods through the *Götterdämmerung*. In such a sense there is aesthetic coherence to recognition of the G20 as a secular "20-God pantheon" replicating the archetypal functions of the gods of yore -- with the G8 grouping gods of higher order.

In exemplifying the surreal ambiguity characteristic of the *Zeitgeist*, a more appropriate comparison might however be made with a blackbird -- given Trump's unusual tweeting capacity. This invites reflection in the light of the much-studied haiku-like poem by [Wallace Stevens](#) (*Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird*, 1917), previously explored as a way of reframing a gathering of the [G8 Group](#), as the core of the G20 (*Anticipating When Blackbirds Sing Chinese: conversion from tweets to songbites to ensure integrity of communication*, 2014). The poem has been an inspiration to many for rethinking the "ways of looking", notably serving as an inspiration for [Umberto Eco](#) (*Eternal Fascism: Fourteen Ways of Looking at a Blackshirt*, *New York Review of Books*, 22 June 1995). The latter followed the author's quest for an appropriate language for "The Making of Europe", informed by insights from the mythical "language of the birds" (*The Search for the Perfect Language*, 1993).

Future sonification of 2019 analysis of Presidential tweets -- from text to music?
Michael D. Shear, et al: <i>How Trump Reshaped the Presidency in Over 11,000 Tweets</i> ( <i>The New York Times</i> , 2 November 2019) <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <a href="#">Trump's Twitter Presidency: 9 Key Takeaways</a> (<i>The New York Times</i>, 2 November 2019)</li><li>• <a href="#">In Trumps' Twitter-feed</a> (<i>The New York Times</i>, 2 November 2019)</li></ul>
Alexis Nedd: <i>7 bizarre revelations from the New York Times analysis of Trump's tweets</i> ( <i>Mashable</i> , 3 November 2019)
Ashley Collman: <i>The New York Times analyzed Trump's 11,390 tweets since becoming president, and found he praised himself 2,026 times</i> ( <i>Insider</i> , 4 November 2019)
Software possibilities for processing vaporware:

- *Conversion of Global Hot Air Emissions to Music: aesthetic transformation and instrumentalization of vaporware* (2009)
- *Convertor from Text to Poetry, Song or Music: computer-assisted aesthetic enhancement of treaties, declarations and agreements* (2007)
- *Transcending crises of governance via reverse music and reverse speech?* (2016)



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