



laetus in praesens

Alternative view of segmented documents via Kairos

3 April 2012 | Draft

Tweeter, Tweeter, Little Star

How I wonder what you are

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Produced in a period when use of [Twitter](#) has become ever more significant in political processes and democratic protest

Comment

This is a simple adaptation of the widely popular English nursery rhyme [Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star](#), whose original lyrics are from an early nineteenth-century English poem, *The Star* (1806) by [Jane Taylor](#). The relevance to Twitter and tweeters -- and the process of tweeting -- has been recognized by a number of bloggers who seemingly have chosen only to adapt the first line as it appears here. This is therefore an adaptation of the complete poem. The original text is from the [Wikipedia entry](#), which also offers an audio version -- and indicates the subsequent use of the title, notably in films. A [commentary](#) follows below.

Tweeter, tweeter, little star,
How I wonder what you are.
Up above the world so high,
Like a diamond in the sky.

When the blazing sun is gone,
When he nothing shines upon,
Then you show your little light,
Tweeter, tweeter, all the night.

Then the traveller in the dark,
Thanks you for your tiny spark,
He could not see which way to go,
If you did not tweeter so.

In the dark blue sky you keep,
And often through my curtains peep,
For you never shut your eye,
Till the sun is in the sky.

As your bright and tiny spark,
Lights the traveller in the dark.
Though I know not what you are,
Tweeter, tweeter, little star.

Tweeter, tweeter, little star.
How I wonder what you are.
Up above the world so high,
Like a diamond in the sky.

Tweeter, tweeter, little star.
How I wonder what you are.
How I wonder what you are.

Sociopolitical implications: The role of Twitter in politics has been variously recognized, as noted for example, by *The Economist* ([Sweet to tweet: Twitter makes politicians seem more accessible](#), 6 May 2010):

Since feudal days, subjects have hoped that petitioning the sovereign can have great effects. E-mail made writing to politicians easy. Now a new technology is making those missives public. Twitter messages ("tweets" in the jargon) are like public telegrams. No more than 140 characters in length, they can be sent from any computer or mobile phone. Anyone with an account (there are 100m and rising) can send a public message to anyone else by placing the @ sign before a username or a # sign before a topic. That makes it much easier for voters to reach politicians and for politicians to react to them (or at least to pretend to). It helps election organisers too. At its height Barack Obama's campaign (@barackobama) employed 100 staff working on social media such as Twitter. But now it is catching on elsewhere.

Created in 2006, the service rapidly gained worldwide popularity, with over 300 million users as of 2011, generating over 300 million tweets and handling over 1.6 billion search queries per day.

It is now typical for newspapers and other media to make use of Twitter and to invite their audiences to respond in kind. More surprising is that major intergovernmental institutions now feel obliged to have Twitter accounts -- as with the [United Nations](#), [UNESCO](#) and the [World Bank](#). Politically and legally this would have been inconceivable in decades past, even if the technology had existed. Of great interest is the internal debates within such bodies, and the level of authorization required, in order for them to become "members" of Twitter. It is of course the case that the legal implications of "membership" of social media are avoided by defining them as "services" for which only an "account" is required. More fascinating is that typically a legally binding agreement has to be "accepted" in order for any body, including an intergovernmental organization, to acquire an account. In that sense international bodies are now "accountable" to Twitter (or Facebook).

Irrespective of the nature of the engagement of these international bodies, it is now arguably the case that "tweeting" is perceived as far more significant to "[we the peoples](#)" than the resolutions of those bodies, or the conventional activities of many conventional bodies preoccupied with social change. However its significance is to be interpreted, the ranking of the [top 100 most followed on Twitter](#) (refreshed daily) merits reflection as indicative of the brightest "stars" in the [twittersphere](#) -- with [Lady Gaga](#) as the brightest star (over 22 million followers), and Barack Obama as the 8th brightest (over 13 million). What implications might such rankings have for those upheld as most central to global governance? (cf Alex Fitzpatrick, [How Nations Can Be United With Social Media](#), *Mashable, Inc.*, 14 January 2012).

A checklist of the number of Twitter "follower", or Facebook "friends", achieved by the bodies of the "international community" -- UN, UNESCO, etc -- would be of great interest. For example: [UN](#) (149,000 followers; following 10,000); [UNESCO](#) (40,000; 3,000); [UNICEF](#) (900,000 followers; 23,000 following); [WHO](#) (400,000 followers; following 750); [OECD](#) (27,000 followers; following 460); [NATO](#) (26,000 followers; following 380); [FAO](#) (1,000 followers; following 5); [ILO](#) (1,300 followers; following 0). In the case of international NGOs, examples include: [IUCN](#) (15,000 followers; following 1,300).

Security implications: Given the manner in which the policies of Twitter are effectively controlled as a US-based corporation, and following the failure of the official US [Total Information Awareness](#) initiative, especially ironic is the strategy of the [US Department of Defense with respect to social media](#):

Social media is an integral part of Department of Defense operations. This site is designed to help the DoD community use social media and other Internet-based Capabilities (IBC) responsibly and effectively; both in official and unofficial capacities. Visit Social Media @ DoD for the latest on defense-related social media activity. ([DoD Social Media Hub](#))

Given this perspective, it might be asked whether for UN bodies, achieving "membership" of Twitter required the approval of the UN Security Council. And, if not then why not, given its recognized role with respect to the "[Arab spring](#)" movements -- and the specific implications of Article 71 of the UN Charter regarding "nongovernmental organizations" ([Legal status of international NGOs: overview and options](#), 1996). Twitter and Facebook would appear to have bypassed all such antiquated constraints.

Implications for a global knowledge society: The adaptation of the nursery rhyme was inspired by reflection on the challenge of communication between people and groups across the cyberspace "universe" of a global knowledge society ([Towards the Systematic Reframing of Incomprehension through Metaphor](#), 2012). It followed from earlier reflection on the challenge of eliciting coherence of relevance to global governance through Twitter ([Re-Emergence of the Language of the Birds through Twitter? Harmonising the configuration of pattern-breaking interjections and expletives](#), 2010; [Enabling Collective Intelligence in Response to Emergencies](#), 2010).

As the intergovernmental body with a specific mandate regarding the global knowledge society and the associated development of the information infrastructure, including the Internet and the World Wide Web, there is profound irony to the lengthy delays with which UNESCO has responded to such facilities. The irony is all the greater in that, in seeking to "play catchup" in the domain in which it is mandated to provide leadership, UNESCO is proving instrumental in efforts to control it.

Social media interactivity is offering the possibility of mining the large data sets thereby engendered (cf [Synthetic Environment for Analysis and Simulations](#), [Living Earth Simulator](#)). Of particular interest in relation to the emergence of so-called [swarm intelligence](#) is the sense in which simulations underway may be able to explore the tweeting dynamic in terms of [flocking behaviour](#) in relation to topics of global interest ([Dynamically Gated Conceptual Communities: emergent patterns of isolation within knowledge society](#), 2004). Given the manner in which tweeter flocks (variously following "flock leaders") may move from topic to topic, is this to be usefully compared with the impressive migration of birds across the globe, according to the seasons and to the availability of nourishment permitting them to reproduce?

Ambiguity of interpretation: The nursery rhyme also merits reflection for a certain poignancy in its recognition of the condition in

which individuals are placed in a global knowledge society, in which the "little star" is to be variously understood as indicative of:

- misleading identities, created by individuals, enabling grooming (cf [adult grooming](#), [child grooming](#)), or other processes in support of questionable agendas and inappropriate behaviour
- [celebrities](#) created by public relations as exemplars to condition the behaviour of those who can be attracted to follow them
- surveillance of every kind -- perhaps monitoring by one of the multitude of [orbital satellites](#)
- an invasively inquisitive drone (an "[unmanly aerial vehicle](#)")
- computer generated [intelligent agents](#) simulating interactive identities within social media, -- effectively large-scale "grooming of the public" -- whether for marketing, propaganda or defence (cf *Using Social Media to Predict Future Events with Agent-based Markets*, 2010)

The ambiguity of these possible interpretations evokes a sense of individual incomprehension and bewilderment (*Living with Incomprehension and Uncertainty: re-cognizing the varieties of non-comprehension and misunderstanding*, 2012). The nursery rhyme offers delightful pointers to all such interpretations. This may even imply the advent of extraterrestrial aliens, or an entry point to intergalactic spaceways as variously hypothesized ([Geoffrey Marcy](#), *In Search of the Great Galactic Internet*, *New Scientist*, 31 March 2012; [Charles Choi](#), *'Galactic internet' proposed: aliens might have sent messages by tweaking variable stars*, *Nature*, 9 September 2008).

In a period of increasing information overload, is a "tweet" -- as the acoustic equivalent of a "twinkle" -- to be understood as an innovative effort to reframe communication in terms of "short cuts". Do these anticipate the speculative possibilities of "[hyperspace](#)" travel through "[wormholes](#)" -- in this case of knowledge space (*Hyperaction through Hypercomprehension and Hyperdrive: necessary complement to hypertext proliferation in hypersociety*, 2006)? There is the delightful possibility to be foreseen of delegates to international governance gatherings effectively achieving their coherence through a pattern of tweeting that makes of that event a form of "[subspace](#)" vehicle traversing the twittersphere.

Or, as tweeters, perhaps people individually are to be understood as "stargates" (*People as Stargates: an alternative perspective on human relations in space-time*, 1996). More poignant still is the sense in which the "little star" may be indicative of:

- the twinkling "light at the end of the tunnel" -- the hope of a better future implied by some forms of tweet
- the faint "light of conscience" -- otherwise recognized as the "still small voice" so frequently neglected
- the momentary glance (constrained by attention span) accorded to any tweet in the emerging "blip culture" (as named by Alvin Toffler)
- momentary recognition of implied relevance -- before psychic numbing sets in and its time to move on
- long lost hopes of the distant past -- as with the time taken for light from the stars to be seen on Earth
- the fate of the tweets of today as they become enfolded into the past -- as "ancient tweets" of time past -- "stardust"

Reproduced from *Animation of Classical BaGua Arrangements: a dynamic representation of Neti Neti* (2008)

(note if the [SWF format](#) animation does not display automatically, it may do so more readily in Internet Explorer)

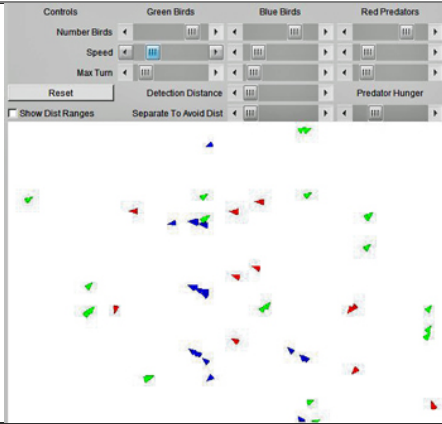
Embodiment of wisdom: A striking reason for the success of tweeting is the brevity of the text -- requiring a discipline in rendering succinct where this has proven to be impossible with conventional texts. In this sense a tweet uses a form adopted by past vehicles for guiding wisdom: the epigram, the aphorism, and the motto. In the case of the United Nations, this recalls the compilation by V. S. M. de Guinzbourg (*Wit and Wisdom of the United Nations: proverbs and apothegms on diplomacy*, Paroemiological Society, 1961). These can readily be recognized as "guiding stars".

Extensive use is already made of Twitter as a vehicle for *haiku* poetry -- a *twaiku* is a *haiku* posted on Twitter. It clearly offers a vehicle for holding the challenging questions typical of the Zen *koan* (*The Gateless Gate*) -- [Zen koan on Twitter](#) (see *Configuring a Set of Zen Koan as a Wisdom Container: formatting the Gateless Gate for Twitter*, 2012). Presumably most such jewels of wisdom will be uploaded into Twitter in the near future as a cultural resource -- as UNESCO might have proposed.

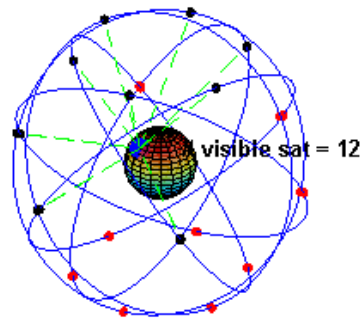
Imaging potentially indicative of the dynamics and coherence of the Tweetersphere

The flocking simulation offers possibilities of interactive exploration of tweeting dynamics, with the periodic global movement of flocks between themes suggested by orbiting satellites

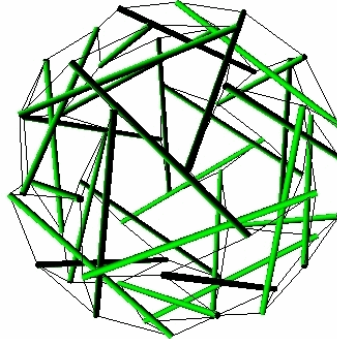
Bird flocking behaviour simulation
For more information on emergent behaviour go to [Flocking Simulator](#)
(by Michael LaLena)



Global migration of bird flocks
as suggested by the orbits of GPS satellites in medium Earth orbit
orbit
(reproduced from [Wikipedia entry](#))



Synergetic representation the global organization of tweeterspace as a tensegrity
as featured in commentary on [Geometry of Thinking for Sustainable Global Governance](#)
Billions of tweets then form textual "tunnels" (like optical fibres), with their "ends" as portals for beams of light (seen as "stars")
and coherence ensured by the networks of followers



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