13 Style and stylizing from the perspective of a non-autonomous sociolinguistics

John R. Rickford

Coupland's paper – one of the most innovative and thought-provoking contributions in this volume – essentially consists of three parts: (1) a critique of quantitative sociolinguistic approaches to the analysis of style; (2) a proposal for a new approach in which dialect style as a marker of identity takes center stage, informed by goal-orientation and other concerns from communication theory; (3) an extract from a radio broadcast by a Welsh DJ, illustrating the new approach. I'll comment on each of these components in turn.

1 The critique of quantitative approaches to style

Coupland's critique of quantitative approaches to style ranges further and cuts deeper than the earlier, largely methodological, critiques that he cites. His is more conceptual, concerned with the underlying assumptions of quantitative stylistics (so to speak), which he lists as ten numbered points and elaborates on in subsequent sections. I won't repeat or comment on all of his points, but the overall thrust of the critique – directed at "the theoretical limitations inherent in an *autonomous* sociolinguistics" (emphasis added) – is one that I endorse, and have voiced before. For instance, to adequately account for the quantitative distributions by social class that we observe in local surveys of language use, we need to turn to sociological and anthropological models of social stratification and life mode, but these are quite unfamiliar to the average sociolinguist (Rickford 1986, Williams 1992, Milroy and Milroy 1992). And I agree with Coupland that the study of style can be enriched by drawing on the theory of communication studies and other fields. As sociolinguists and linguistic anthropologists, we cannot fully understand the cultural, ideological, social, political, psychological, and communicative underpinnings and ramifications of language data by making up *ad hoc* explanations of our own. We need to familiarize ourselves with, draw on and contribute to the theoretical, conceptual, and methodological issues and approaches in related fields. The need to reach beyond language to social theory becomes more imperative

as we seek to move from descriptive or observational adequacy to explanatory adequacy.

Some of the specific assumptions that Coupland singles out are worth noting. The first, that "variation in dialect style variables is an adequate representation of sociolinguistic style variation in general," is certainly limiting, but its limitation has long been recognized. For instance, in his first major essay on the analysis of style, Labov (1972a [1966]:97) noted that:

> It is not contended that Style A [essentially = "casual"] and Style B [esentially = "careful"] are natural units of stylistic variation: rather they are formal divisions of the continuum set up for the purposes of this study, which has the purpose of measuring phonological variation along the stylistic axis. The discovery of natural breaks in the range of stylistic phenomena would have to follow a very different procedure.

Labov's conception was that identifying breaks in the continuum of the sociolinguistic interview was a valuable element of variation theory or socially "realistic" sociolinguistics (Labov 1972b:184; Hymes 1972a), which shared goals with "mainstream" linguistics (e.g. understanding the form and evolution of linguistic rules). One might question this view, by suggesting that even a socially realistic sociolinguistics would be better off if it conceptualized style in a broader sense. For instance, the social motivations for and embedding of language change might be better understood if we considered "style" in the broader sense of the presentation of self in everyday settings. (Cf. Eckert in this volume and 2000.) But the limitations of thinking of style only in terms of phonological and grammatical dialect features are even more evident in a "socially constituted" sociolinguistics of the kind proposed by Hymes (ibid.) and endorsed by Coupland – one in which social function rather than linguistic form is paramount. Some aspects of "style" that are potentially significant in a socially constituted sociolinguistics – e.g. lexical variation, address terms, and the different speech events in which individuals and groups engage – may be of rather less interest for those engaged in socially realistic sociolinguistics. Assumptions about what counts as relevant and how to study it depend significantly on what the enterprise or goal of sociolinguistics is. Labovian, Hymesian, and Couplandian conceptions of this are different. In discussing how to study style, we should not assume that we are now all united on what the goal or enterprise is, any more than we were a quarter of a century ago.

The third assumption identified by Coupland – that style is "a situational correlate, rather than an active, motivated, symbolic process," is one that I agree is deserving of critique, although I would add that substantive demonstrations of style-shifting as "an active motivated process" are less frequent than rhetorical endorsements of its importance. We particularly need empirical research on what aspects of speakers' styles are predictable from

the sociocultural contexts of their "performance," and/or in line with existing theory, and what are not. For instance, in Rickford and McNair-Knox's (1994) study of addressee- and topic-influenced style-shift, we found several instances in which Foxy's style-shifting between interviews III and IV was directly in line with Bell's audience design principles, given addressee and other differences between these two contexts. But Foxy's low use of key vernacular variables in interview II, where the addressees were both African American and familiar, as they were in interview IV, was contrary to prediction. And while we cited some potential contributory factors for this result, we concluded that:

> our purpose is NOT to explain away the unusualness of interview II or to view it as aberrant. . . . While addressee variables do set up some valid expectations about the kind of language that Foxy (or anyone else) might use, we have to allow for the use of style as a resource and strategy, as an interactive and dynamic process . . .

At the same time, an approach that assumed that EVERYTHING in the realm of style was individually variable and dynamic and that NOTHING was regular or predictable would be as inadequate as an approach that predicted the reverse. Judith Irvine's valid point (in chapter 1 of this volume) that style is about distinctiveness depends in part on understanding what is non-distinctive or predictable (or unmarked, in the related framework of Sankoff 1980).

I am ambivalent about the fifth assumption Coupland critiques – that style is one-dimensional. I have no problem with lambasting unidimensionality in the situational and linguistic sense – that relevant situations and variables can always be ordered according to one criterion, like formality, or standardness. But I have reservations about outright rejection of unidimensionality in the psychological sense – "that linear shifts relate to one scaleable intra-personal variable, such as 'attention to speech'." While attention to speech does not strike me as ultimately likely to be the "right" unidimensional model, the unidimensional audience design approach of Allan Bell, whom Coupland cites with approval throughout his paper, still strikes me as very promising. Multidimensional models (like those of Hymes 1972b and Preston 1986) will always be able to account for a wider variety of styles than unidimensional models, but they share the potential danger of never being able to be proven wrong. As Rickford and McNair-Knox (1994:241) note, Bell's (1984) model makes a series of specific, empirically falsifiable claims, and provides an integrative and predictive approach which sociolinguistics in general could benefit from.

Models with fewer variables are also more tractable than models with many, perhaps unlimited, variables, and they provide more ready explanations for how speakers come to acquire and control style-shifting. (Compare similar discussion of unidimensional versus multidimensional approaches to creole continua, in Rickford 1987:22–30.) It may be useful to push a unidimensional approach as far as it can go, modifying and extending it with additional factors and variables only where necessary. Or at least one might recognize that while no single underlying dimension may be capable of accounting for **all** aspects of stylistic variation, some may be more important (accounting for **most** of the variance) than others, requiring us to regard them as primary, and others as secondary, tertiary, and so on. Moreover, while we have been pursuing unidimensional approaches to style in a "universal" sense – as if attention, or audience or register – were the key covariable world-wide – what is stylistically significant may differ from one community to another, and ethnographic approaches will be necessary to reveal that. Hymes (1972b:66) seems to have anticipated both of these ideas with his concept of "hierarchies of precedence among components": "When individual societies have been well analyzed, hierarchies of precedence among components will very likely appear and be found to differ from case to case . . . For one group, rules of speaking will be heavily bound to setting; for another primarily to participants; for a third, perhaps, to topic." The fact that Hymes did this in the very article in which he outlined his multidimensional "components" model shows us that we should not consider multidimensional and unidimensional models as irreconcilable. Finally, I should add that despite his embrace of multidimensionality, Coupland comes close to embracing "identity" as a new "unidimensional" variable governing style. We should recall his critique that no one stylistic co-variable will suffice.

The danger of not heeding one's own admonitions is even greater when one looks carefully at Coupland's critiques of assumptions 7 and 9 – that only "relative frequencies of occurrence" are relevant in the study of style, and that styles are relevant only at the level of social groups, not individuals. Clearly language styles are identifiable and distinguishable by more than frequencies, but there is some danger, as one reads Coupland, that we might be tempted to eschew frequency considerations altogether, and **that**, I think, would be a retrograde step. Ditto for eschewing group styles – what it is like to sound "Black," or like a "Jet," or like a "burnout" – in favor of studying individuals alone. Group styles and individual styles are both realities, and each can help us to understand the other. I take Coupland's overall point to be that we should **not** restrict ourselves to the confines of any one approach, and I therefore oppose any suggestion that we rule out a potentially or demonstrably useful approach, even when the suggestion is implicit rather than explicit, and comes from Coupland himself.

2 Coupland's new approach to style

The new approach to the analysis of style that Coupland proposes involves several key elements, including: (1) considering style in relation to human communicative purposes and practices; (2) distinguishing "dialect style" from variation in "ways of speaking" more generally; (3) exploring how style projects speakers' identities and defines social relations.

In relation to the first element, Coupland excoriates sociolinguistics for its general neglect of communicative purpose, contrasting this with communication science, where purpose is theoretically and analytically central and where a distinction between instrumental, relational, and identity goals is commonly made. Unfortunately, perhaps because the distinction is so commonplace to him as a communication scientist, he does not define these terms; I was left to track them down (via Tracy 1991:4) to their source in Clark and Delia (1979:200):

> (1) overtly *instrumental* [or *task*] objectives, in which a response is required from one's listener(s) related to a specfic obstacle or problem defining the task of the communicative situation, (2) *inter-personal* [or *relational*] objectives, involving the establishment or maintenance of a relationship with the other(s), and (3) *identity* [or *self-presentational*] objectives, in which there is management of the communicative situation to the end of presenting a desired self image for the speaker and creating or maintaining a particular sense of self for the other(s). (Emphasis and bracketed material added)

This conception of communicative goals is indeed rare in (quantitative) sociolinguistics, but I found it almost immediately useful. Soon after reading Clark and Delia, I used it to reflect analytically on an interaction I had at an Automatic Teller Machine (ATM) outside a bank. I had just gone to the walk-up ATM to withdraw some money, but it had no cash. As I was leaving on my bike, I noticed a woman standing outside her car completing a transaction at a second, drive-up ATM nearby. This was a holiday; the bank was closed, and we were the only people around. I wanted to find out whether this second ATM had cash (instrumental or task goal), so I called out to the woman to ask whether it did. But to "justify" this opening conversational move with a complete stranger, and to allay any fears she might have that I was a potential robber and she a potential victim (relational and identity goals), I said and did several things. I prefaced my request for information with the "explanation" that the "walk-up" machine had no cash, perhaps because so many people had been using it over the long holiday break (an explanation with which she expressed agreement). While waiting to use the drive-up machine, I maintained a good distance away from her, taking out my own wallet and ATM card quite conspicuously to establish my legitimacy as a bank customer. I did not move closer to the ATM until

she had completed her transaction, stepped back into her car, closed the door, and begun to drive off. And, most importantly for the analysis of style, I used a very standard, polite register throughout the brief verbal exchange, attempting to portray myself as an educated, co-operative, upstanding community member.

While the analysis of goals along these and similar lines could be quite revealing for sociolinguistics, it is not without its complications. One source of complexity, discussed in the introduction to one of the references cited by Coupland (Tracy 1991) is that goals can be numerous, difficult to define, and impossible to link to discourse in any transparent, one-to-one relationship. A second complication, explored in another of Coupland's references (Craig 1986) is that goals can be distinguished in several other ways: as *functional* (in relation to outcomes describable by an external observer) versus *intentional* (existing in the mind of the speaker); as *positive* (directly causing behavior) versus *dialectical* (more loosely related to behavior, as with "happiness" or "success"); or as *formal* (having to do with official, conventionally expected, goals) versus *strategic* (having to do with what individual participants try to get out of the interaction for their personal goals). This last distinction seems virtually identical to one drawn by Hymes (1972b:61) between purposes conceived as "conventionally recognized and expected outcomes" (like the Venezuelan Waiwai's use of the *oho* chant to help accomplish a wedding contract), and purposes that represent the individual "goals" of participants (the Waiwai father-in-law and son-in-law, Hymes notes, have opposing goals in negotiating the wedding contract). Apart from this single instance, much of the theoretical complexity introduced by communication scientists over more than two decades of discussing "goals" will be new to us. We will have a lot of catching up to do, but it seems worthwhile.

In relation to the second element in Coupland's new approach – the distinction between "dialect style" and other "ways of speaking" – I have more questions and reservations. Dialect style involves phonological, grammatical, and lexical variables of the type traditionally associated with regional and social "dialects": (*-ing*), multiple negation, *soda* versus *pop*, and so on. This is distinguished on the one hand from expressive or attitudinal styles, like prosodic variables that are **not** linked to social groups, and, on the other, from "ways of speaking" in the broader sense delineated by Hymes. But I could not understand the sense in which ways of speaking distinguish ideational meanings while dialect styles do not, nor in which ways of speaking include instrumental goals, while dialect styles do not. After a close reading of Hymes (1974) I see both ways of speaking and dialect styles as capable of fulfilling all of the three basic goal types (instrumental, relational, and identity goals), and as equally capable of expressing ideological

and "socio-symbolic" (Fischer 1958) shades of meaning. Overall, I agree with Coupland that "it would be misleading to overemphasize this distinction" – insofar as address terms, politeness, taciturnity, and other "ways of speaking" that are not traditionally associated with dialect style are indisputably aspects of "style." But having said this, I am not clear why we want to make or maintain the distinction in the first place. If the argument is that only dialect style features are associated with regional and social dialects, that is only because of our theoretical tunnel vision, for we have sufficient empirical evidence that regions and social groups **are** distinguished by forms of address, politeness patterns, and so on. And the fact of the matter is that when we assess the "styles" of people we hear, we generally attend, not just to the one or two dialect style variables on which sociolinguists tend to focus, but to a whole combination of co-occurrent features (Ervin-Tripp 1972), including forms of address, volume, volubility, and other elements typically excluded from dialect style.

Mention of how we "assess" styles reminds me of one aspect of Coupland's proposal that I really liked – his call for attention to neglected issues of style-reading and recipiency. Whites who talk Black might be perceived quite differently by Whites than they are by Blacks, for instance, and more generally, would-be convergers might be perceived quite differently by different social groups and individuals, but we do not completely understand the constraining factors, even after a quarter century of Accommodation Theory. Speaking more generally, we might ask: to what extent does competence in the interpretation of styles and speech-varieties extend beyond the boundaries of "the speech community" (that most controversial of objects)? Here, for instance, is an example of student chapel assistant Darron Johnson reading a biblical text (Luke 23:42–3) with a stylized laugh and repetition in the middle, in the course of an African American Sunday morning service in King's Memorial Church at Morehouse College, Atlanta, Georgia on February 11, 1996:

(1) "And he said unto Jesus, 'Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom.' And Jesus said unto him, 'Verily I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with me in paradise.'" *Huh huh, let me, let me read that again*: "'Verily I say unto thee – verily I say unto thee – Today shalt thou be with me in paradise.'"

I presume that many speakers of English, and of other languages worldwide, will understand that repetition of this type provides an emphasis or underscoring of a key point. But they will probably not know how pervasive textual repetition is in bible-reading and sermonizing in the Black church, nor how often preachers break out of their sermons and readings temporarily to alert their congregations to the significance of what they're

doing: "'Watch this,' they'll say, or 'Follow me close, now.'" (Rickford and Rickford 2000:52). Nor will they know that a stylized laugh like Darron's is frequently used to suggest the speaker's delight with the content or the situation he or she is describing, its effect partly deriving from its similarity to the emphatic *huh* or *hunh-hunh* that Black preachers use at the end of breath groups as an energizing punctuation, as in this example (ibid:47):

You wouldn't be here today, *hunh-hunh-hunh*,
Hadn't God comforted you, *hunh-hunh-hunh* . . .

These elements, more or less unique to the Black worship tradition, allow Black congregants who hear Darron Johnson's short laugh, interpolation, and repetition to read and relish a little more of its ambience than outsiders to the community and to this tradition might.

Similarly, in the illustrations to be discussed in the next section, some aspects of what Cardiff radio personality FH does stylistically are uninterpretable to me without Coupland's guidance, just as what some of what Guyanese radio personality WM does are uninterpretable to him without my guidance. But some of their style-shifts are noticeable/receivable by both of us, without community-specific knowledge, since some aspects of style are projectable/sendable across speech community boundaries. What is local and what is general (one dare not say global or universal with this aspect of language use) in the production and interpretation of style remains to be specified, as it has for other aspects of language variation like *t,d* deletion (Kiparsky 1972).

The final element of Coupland's new approach is its focus on style as a marker of *identity*, or the presentation of self. This is an increasingly popular approach to style (its popularity partly due to Coupland's formulation), and one on which I myself have drawn in discussing the vernacular usage of African Americans, particularly teenagers (Rickford 1992, Rickford and Rickford 2000:chapter 12). I am surprised by the absence of any reference to the very relevant work of Le Page and Tabouret-Keller (1985) on language and ethnic identity, however, especially since Coupland seems to draw on similar notions of "projection." One respect in which the Le Page/Tabouret-Keller model might be useful is in reminding us that there are **limits** to the extent to which individuals can consciously adapt their style to project a certain persona or to identify with a particular group (see their constraints or riders – including adequate access to the group – on pp. 182 ff). Identity management and shift through style-selection and -shifting is not endless or unlimited. A more general concern I have is that we may be in danger of seeing **identity** as the only or primary factor affecting style, and of forgetting the role that other factors like purpose, audience, topic, and so on, play in effecting style-shift even when identity is held

constant. To repeat the point made earlier: Let's not enshrine a new kind of unidimensionality while advocating multidimensionality, and let's not be limited by any one approach.

3 Coupland's illustration: excerpt from a Cardiff disc-jockey

With his closing discussion of the excerpt from a recording of a Cardiff radio disc-jockey (DJ), FH, Coupland nicely illustrates some of the principles and points raised earlier in the paper. There is, for instance, the strategic repeated use that FH makes in his radio broadcast of "phono-opportunities" for the use of salient Cardiff variables, like /a:/; we can probably all think of similar examples from the speech communities we have come into contact with. I cite a similar example from Wordsworth McAndrew, below, and Penny Eckert cites one from her work with pre-adolescents in San Jose in chapter 7 of this volume. All of these examples suggest that speakers are more aware of dialect features, and more capable of employing and exploiting them creatively, than we normally give them credit for. In FH's case, even the "shift" to standard forms when the projection of "competence" and "expertise" are in order is not total – regional Cardiff features are retained, while socially stigmatized features are "corrected."

Overall, the complexity of what FH is doing is emphasized: he is varying not only regionally and socially marked Cardiff features, but drawing also on American, south-west-of-England and Cockney features; the projection of various "personas" and identities is paramount, but (and this is reassuring), the relevance of content and key is also clear. And the "contexts" in which his speech forms are "set" do not pre-exist, but are to some extent created and constituted by the speech forms themselves. FH is not merely "using" a style, but "styling" or "stylizing." In words that are themselves well stylized, Coupland closes his "illustration" by observing that "Cardiff English is not merely 'Frank's voice' but one of many culturally loaded voices that FH, and presumably his audience too, can manipulate for relational and other interactional purposes."

I do have a couple of questions about the generalizability of this example to everyday conversation, but let me first cite a very similar example that I recorded in Guyana, South America. The radio personality in this case, Wordsworth McAndrew [WM] is a well-known local folklorist and defender/champion of "Creole" (versus English) language and culture. His program is called "What else?" – and like FM's "Hark, Hark, the Lark" title, it provides a ready (and frequently exploited) phono-opportunity for WM to use the highly marked low unrounded Creole /aa/ rather than the rounded English /ɔ:/. Although the title does not occur in the brief extract given below, "walk," pronounced as /waak/ in the closing lines of the extract, provides a similar opportunity.

Like FH, WM performs a number of different communicative functions within his show, and his style varies – sometimes subtly, sometimes dramatically – between them. The segments in which he "structures" the show, reminding the radio audience of the overall theme for the evening ("You're listenin', of course, to a program of 'Congo Songs'") or making a transition to the playing of the next song ("Right now, here's one of those 'Yamapeleh' or 'Gumbo' songs") are more formal, and show a higher incidence of English rather than Creole variants. The English copula is present ("You'*re* listenin' "), and two of the only three voiced inter-dental fricatives in the extract ("*the* drums," "*those* 'Yamapeleh' . . . songs") occur in these segments. As with FH, the move towards the standard is not complete, but it is noticeable, and it can be interpreted as a display of "expertise" in the performance of the "announcement" responsibilities all radio talk shows must fulfill.

In the segments in which WM revels in the kind of material unique to his Creole-oriented show, however – when he projects the persona of talking informally with an old friend about ring dances or the risqué song about a woman who arranges a tryst with her boyfriend's friend – in these the Creole elements are deliberately foregrounded. The preverbal copula is dropped ("dey Ø enjoyin' "), although, as in AAVE, the prenominal copula is more resilient ("Dey are men"), and all the phonological Creole variants are implemented (*d*ey, enjoy*in,'* A*n*, cent*uh*'). The shift is especially marked in the final paragraph, where the basilectal or deep-Creole morphosyntax and lexicon of the Congo song's words ("*Waak a* side-line . . . *koonomoonoo gat 'e* fevah, . . . leh me wound *am*") spill over into the text introducing them like a warm infusion. Note the pronominal and phonological shift from *his girlfriend* to *e' frien*, and from morphologically marked (*felt*, *decided*) to unmarked past tense verbs (*waak*, *go*, *fin' out*, *call*).

(1) **Wordsworth McAndrew** (Radio Program, GBS, Guyana, July 31, 1977; 047 – 60)

[As previous song ends.] Yeah, de story of de "dance-man." You're listenin', of course, to a program of "Congo Songs," done by the Annandale Sout' End group – ah – featuring guest leader CZ, on the drums, EG, and – ah – helpin' to sing, a whole bunch of women: LF, FJ, EC, IG, BE, HT, ITA, LC and LK.

Well, fuh de nex' couple of minutes, we want to – look at a slightly different kind of song, not de specific folksong with de specific explanations [i.e. not from the genre represented by the previous song], but – ah – songs da[t] are more or less – ah – how dey call dem in de Congo world, they call dem "Yamapeleh," or "Gumbo." Dat is, songs dey play when dey Ø enjoyin' demselves, in de ring, wid de drum in de middle,

an' de women goin' out to de centuh to dance, wid de men, or widout de men if dey are men. An' if dey are no men, well of course, de women go out alone. An' dey'll – very special kind of Congo dance, which you'll have to see – ah – to understand.

Right now, here's one of those"Yamapaleh" or "Gumbo" songs I told you 'bout. It's an interesting one. It's in Creolese [local name for Guyanese Creole] of course, a slight – ah – African flavor to it. It's about a man who had a girl-frien', an' dis night – ah – *his* girlfriend felt – ahm – a little risqué – in which she *felt* like doin' someting wicked. An', dis man had a man-friend, an' de man-friend *decided* to *walk* de side-line [i.e. dam next to wide side-line canal in cane fields] so "*e* frien' wouldn' see '*e* goin." [So 'e] *waak* de side-line, an "e *go* to visit de girl. Den de man *fin' out*, an' so 'e *call* on *his* people [at] home to "bring a cutlass, leh me woun' *am*." [ie., "bring a machete let me wound him."] So de song says – ah – "*Waak* a side-line, my Cungo / koonomoonoo gat 'e fevah, my Cungo / Bring a cutlass, leh me wound *am*!" [i.e., "Walk on the side line, my Congo / the cuckold is hot and angry ("has his fever"), my Congo / Bring a machete, let me wound him!"]

Song begins: "Oh, *waak* a side-line, my Cungo . . ."

My point in introducing WM's excerpt is to reinforce the point of Coupland's illustration with FH. If we merely took their recordings, threw them in with socially similar individuals, and produced an aggregated analysis of the frequencies with which they used selected variables in different contexts, we would have missed something of the subtlety and complexity of what each is doing, moment by moment, in and through their varying "styles."

It occurs to me, however, that some verbal (and non-verbal) performances – especially those that involve radio broadcasts, large audiences, and public occasions **are** more stylized than others. And that people in such situations **are** trying more consciously than most of us may do in everyday life, to project personas of various types. I am reminded of the grandiloquent, tightly synchronized, but multifaceted bow that a steel band with about thirty members performed at a huge outdoor competition in Guyana several years ago. The stylization was distinctive, elaborate, and successful, eliciting oohs and aahs of appreciation from the audience and putting them in a positive mind-set towards the band even before they played their first note. There are undoubtedly parallels to this kind of stylization in one-on-one conversation, but the opportunities and possibilities for it seem to increase as audience size grows.

This raises the larger question of whether we can generalize as easily from broadcast styles to everyday spoken styles as the discussions in Coupland's paper for this volume, and in Bell (1984) would suggest. Like the excerpt from WM, their examples are insightful and revealing, but there may be limits on the applicability of data from these sources to everyday

conversation. An interesting exercise would be to compare the radio styles of FH or WM with their styles in recorded interviews and everyday conversation in a wide range of contexts. Would they show the same range of features and personas? Or would their "on air" performances stand out as something quite distinct?

Another question is whether FH would agree with Coupland's analysis of what he's doing in the extract he cites, or whether WM would agree with my analysis of what he's doing in the extract I cite. As one turns (rightly so) to ethnographic approaches, and to questions of agency and purpose that go beyond statistical distributions, it seems important to arrive at interpretations that accord with or at least relate to those of local insiders and performers. In my dissertation work in Guyana (Rickford 1979), I didn't ask people to interpret their stylistic behavior in specific contexts as recorded and analyzed by me, but I did ask them about the appropriate contexts, in general, for the use of English and Creole. Audience considerations turned out to be very salient for them, as against topic, setting, or any of the many other dimensions an observer might have proposed, and it was important for me to take that into account in the analysis. But this then raises another question – of the extent to which speakers have any better access to intuitions about their *styles* than they do about other aspects of their linguistic behavior. Craig (1986:261) points out that speakers sometimes deny having any goals in informal conversation, although this is contestable, and that their accounts of their goals can be vague, inarticulate, even "demonstrably wrong." This is not sufficient reason to ignore such self-reports, but it does indicate that the process is neither straightforward nor easy.

That is probably a good note on which to conclude. What Coupland offers us is a sharp critique of some of the ways in which sociolinguistics has approached the study of style, and a vivifying vision of an alternative approach that draws on speech communication theory and discourse analysis and places the speaker, projecting his or her identities, at the center. The approach is not without its questions and difficulties, but the vision, the argumentation, and the illustrations are compelling enough to encourage us to follow. It would indeed be interesting if it were style (rather than social class or other constructs with more obvious social science connections) that finally led us most resolutely beyond autonomous sociolinguistics.