

The accomplishment of style in mediated  
political performances:  
The case of right-wing populism

Mats Ekström, Marianna Patrona and Joanna Thornborrow  
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# Introduction 1

## The project

”Right wing populism in the news media: A cross-cultural study of journalist practices and news discourse”

(Funded by the Swedish Research Council, 2017-2019)

.... related to a recent study

Ekström, M and Firmstone, J (eds) *The Mediated Politics of Europe: A Comparative Study of Discourse*. Palgrave (Forthcoming Sept 2017).

# What is political populism? (previous research)

“Populism ... is best seen as an appeal to ‘the people’ against both the established structure of power and the dominant ideas and values of the society.” (Canovan ,1999)

Discursive articulations of antagonistic relationships between the people and the power bloc (Laclau, 2005)

A “thin-centred ideology” (Mudde, 2007)

“Populism ... is a particular *moralistic imagination of politics*, a way of perceiving the political world which opposes a morally pure and fully unified, but ultimately fictional, people to small minorities who are put outside the authentic people.” (Muller, 2014)

# What is a populist political style? (previous research)

In political communication research: (e.g. Aalberg et al, 2016)

Style operationalized in terms of emotionality, dramatization, spectacular performances, colloquial language

Stylistic features assumed to increase newsworthiness: A symbiosis between political populism and media populism (Krämer, 2014; Moffitt, 2016)

Dick Pels in *The Restyling of Politics* (with John Corner):

“Style refers to a heterogeneous ensemble of ways of speaking, acting, looking, displaying, and handling things, which merge into a symbolic whole that immediately fuses matter and manner, message and package, argument and ritual.”

Moffitt (2016) “Bad manners” as a typical populist style

# Our approach

## Performative dimensions of populism

(Moffitt, 2016; Ekström and Morton, 2017)

The appeal to the people and the blaming of the political elite:  
in symbolic representations and front stage performances in  
different media settings and interactional frameworks

Embodied styles and enactment of identities

Populist language: Talking frankly and crudely; violate the  
norms of formal political language ...

Performances are cultural practices: Must connect to the back-  
ground culture (Alexander 2011)

# Our approach

## Four related features of right-wing populism

### Populist discourse

Anti-establishment discourse; The antagonistic relation between 'the people' and 'the elite'

### Populist style

'Doing being' non-establishment and ordinary (e.g. unpolished talk); Identities in their "semiotic aspects" (Fairclough, 2016); style and cultural membership

### Socio-cultural resonance

How populist discourse and style refer to, resonate and captivate stereotype identities, sentiments and nostalgia in specific national cultural contexts

### Nationalist ideologies

Constructions of us and them, in-groups and out-groups, nativism, anti-immigration policies ...

# Our overall argument

To understand populist political styles, how such styles are accomplished in mediated performances and with what implications, we must relate to the conceptualization of style in sociolinguistic and discourse analysis!

In disregarding the theories of language and discourse, political communication research fails to understand:

1. The performative, signifying and identity ('doing being') aspects of style
2. The political implications of style (the importance of style in the right-wing populist articulation of nationalist ideologies)

## Introduction part 2

Theorising style as an aspect of mediated political performance



# Style is:

- currently a topic for discussion in the political news agenda:
  - Macron's 'style' v Le Pen's 'style'
  - Corbyn's 'style' v. May's 'style'
  - ( extracts from recent political news and interviews FR and UK)
- 'lay' perspective: differences in political behaviours; what politicians 'do' differently from one another;
- theoretical perspective: features of 'form' rather than 'content'; indexing social values; constructions of social identity

## BBC Radio 4 The World Tonight 15-06-2017

James Coomarasamy and Paul Waugh, executive editor of politics for HuffPost UK

- PW : the real difficulty was that she clearly obviously didn't meet any residents or she didn't certainly didn't meet any (.) publicly we talked to people (.) Huff post reporters on the ground and there was a lot of anger about the fact that shd'd arrived in her chauffeur driven car was flanked by police went in to meetings saw only officials only the fire brigade and the police uh was there for a while and then left (.) and there was genuine palpable resentment that she hadn't come to- to listen to ask people's own personal experience on the ground and that stood obviously in sharp contrast to Jeremy Corbyn (.) who arrived and actually was in listening mode and was seen (.) hugging people and offering them genuine empathy and (.) did this once again expose differences in (1.0) in style
- JC :
- PW : very much so

DP: pourquoi ce choix  
*why this choice ?*

EM : parce que je pense que ça a été un temps fort  
*because I think it was an important moment*

de cette campagne à la fois sur le plan politique et  
personnel  
*of the campaign from both a political and personal  
viewpoint*

ça a été un temps fort sur le plan politique  
*it was important from a political point of view*

parce que (.) nos deux styles se sont opposés  
*because it showed the difference in our styles*

et nos deux formes de relations uh avec uh  
*and the two different ways that we relate to uh*

les français en particulier des ouvriers  
*French people and in particular to workers*

Madame le Pen est venue pour uh passer  
*Madame Le Pen came to spend*

un quart d'heure faire des photos et (.)  
*quarter of an hour taking photos and*

ne pas (.) enfin proposé absolument aucune solution  
*offering absolutely no answers*

# variation

- Style as meaningful features of linguistic ***difference*** indexing social class/identity and value:
- *'a crucial part of the success [of Blair's style] is his capacity to, as it were, 'anchor' the public politician in the 'normal person' (Fairclough 2000: 7)*
- *'the sort of 'normal person' that comes across is very much 'middle-class' and 'middle-England' in values, outlook and style' (Fairclough 2000: 8)*

# motivated choice

- Style as a rhetorical **resource**:
- *‘Bevan’s debating successes hinged on establishing ludicrous or foolish or inconsistent personas for his Tory opponents, and in building identities and stances for himself in relation to them and working people that listeners could ‘take away with them’ and possibly adopt as their own.’ (Coupland 2007: 163)*

# performance

- Style as choice of contextually 'embodied' behaviours:
  - 'given' (Goffman), e.g. communicative value of
  - Farage drinking and smoking;
  - Marine Le Pen's choice of new haircut/high heels
- but also choice of *discursive* behaviours in specific contexts:
  - relational
  - interpersonal
  - interactional

Data and analyses 1

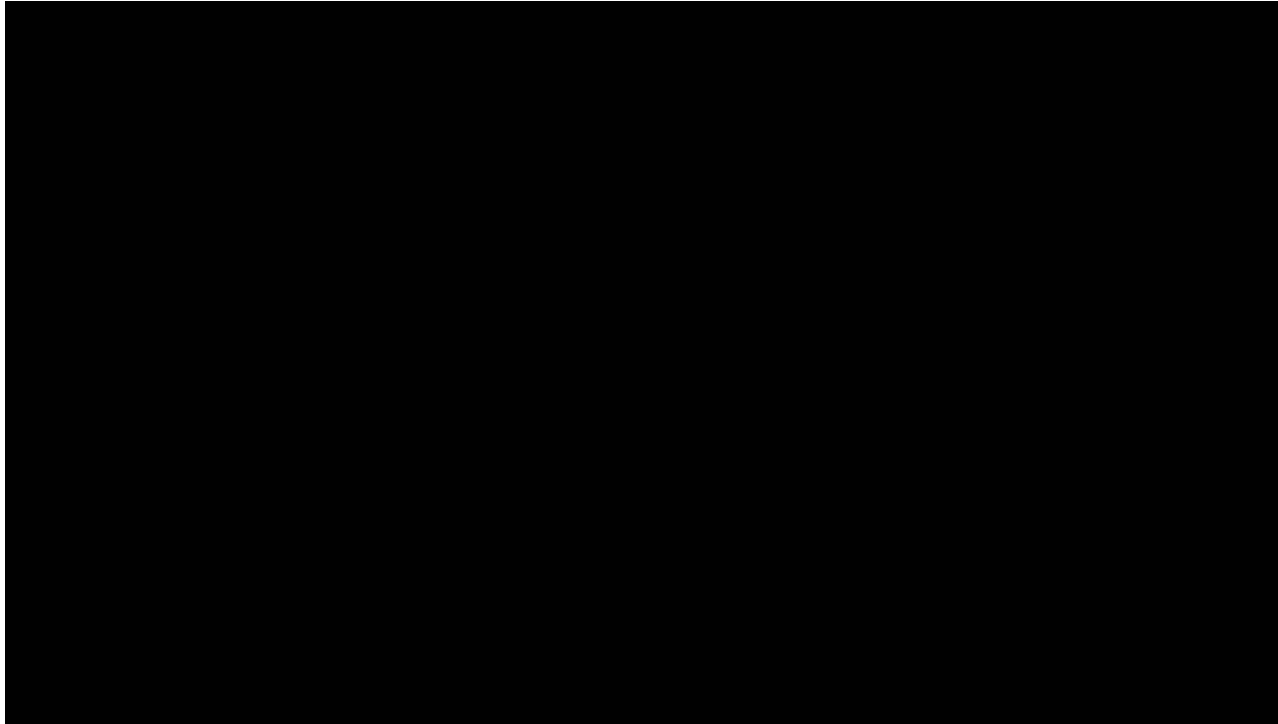
The case of Nigel Farage



# Example 1 (Introductory )

A YouTube collection

"Nigel Farage Top 10 giving zero f\*\*\*s"



# Some observations

Populist style articulated in different settings, genres and interactional frameworks:  
In a car (back stage); on street meeting people and being interviewed; in formal democratic institutions (parliament); semi-public places (news coverage); news interviews; in talk shows; in speeches; at political (UKIP) conferences; in the pub

In interactions to journalists, mainstream politicians, citizens/'the people'

Enacted in disputes (in the parliament) and collaboratively produced (talk shows)

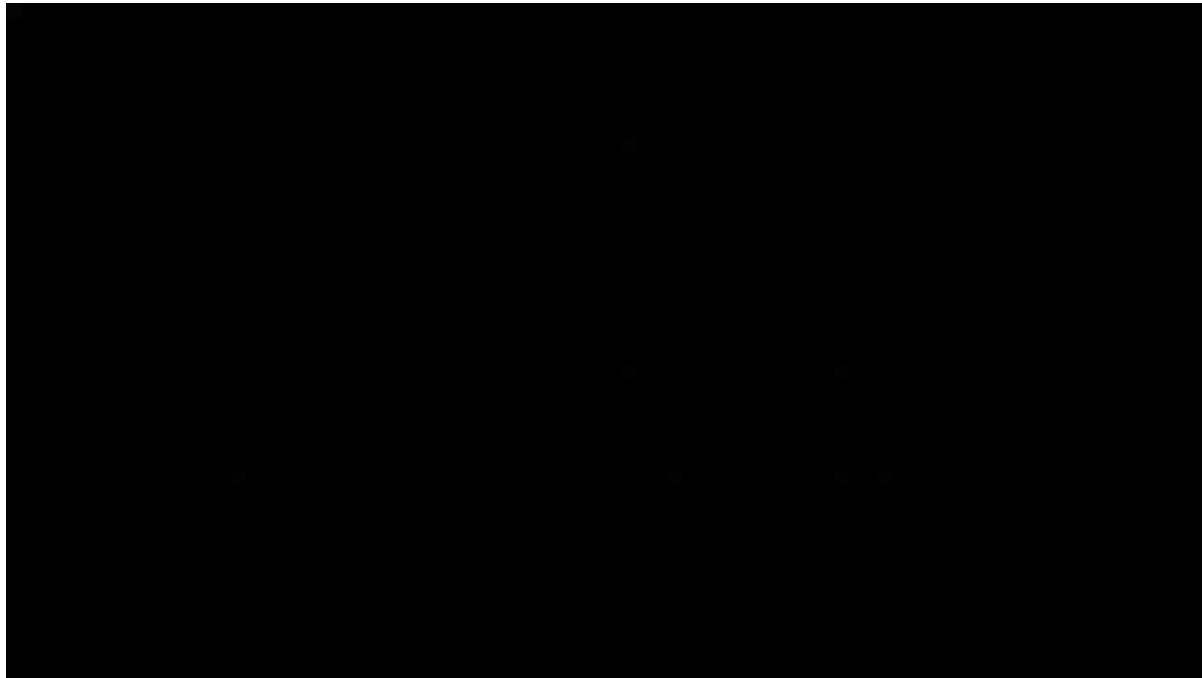
Populist styles as situated performances and general repertoires

General aspects:

- Blaming and being different from the elite/establishment in talk (frankly speaking, jokes, colloquial language) and body language
- The challenging and destabilization of norms of conduct (appropriate/inappropriate) in different contexts
- Markers of socio-cultural membership (the nation and the people)

## Example 2

Nigel Farage's Key note speech at the News Xchange conference for the international news industry, in Copenhagen 30 nov 2016



## Example 2 Farage Copenhagen speech Nov 2016

(00:39)

Twenty sixteen has been the year of political revolution  
it's been the year of the outsiders  
but remember what makes Brexit happen and what  
got Trump elected were a lot of little people (.)  
who don't normally vote at all  
but who simple had enough and want to vote for change  
they feel they've been talked down to  
they feel they've been sneered at  
and I think what this conference (needs to face) up to  
it is not just the political class (.) that  
increasingly is treated with contempt by the  
broader public across the west  
actually the national broadcasters are becoming  
and- and the rest of the media too  
are being I'm afraid viewed in the same way  
you are now on a par with the political class  
how about that?  
it's not a great place to be is it?

## Example 2

Is this a populist style or just an articulation of a populist discourse?

Examples of social media comments:

On Breitbart.com

[Nick Robinson @bbcnickrobinson](#)

About to invite [@Nigel Farage](#) to tell 500 journalists from around the world why they're out of touch. Could be lively [#nx16](#)

On You Tube

[Johnny Blazeför 6 månader sedan](#)

Britain should be proud of this man, he speaks up for real people.

# Example 3

Nigel Farage in the Parliament in  
Strasbourg



## Example 3

How the breaking of norms of conduct is interactionally performed in particular settings and political context

Frankly speaking

The populist style as co-constructed by the reactions from the establishment

# Example 4: Interview with Farage

(May 19 2014 BBC)





## Example 4

18 NR: =would it be acceptable to say if Jamaicans  
19 moved next door people should be concerned?

20 NF: (.) no

21 NR: Nigerians?

22 NF: no

23 NR: Irish?=  
24 NF: =no there is- (.) no there is=  
25 NR: =signs in the window that say no blacks or Irish here?  
26 NF: can we- can we just have an honest appraisal to what has  
27 happened to post-communist Romania all right?  
28 Across the whole of the European union amongst all  
29 twenty eight member states seven percent of all crime  
30 is committed by two hundred and forty Romanian gangs

## Example 4

Example of a destabilization of the roles and practices in accountability interviewing?

Farage's suggestion: Let's stop playing this journalistic game and instead talk (frankly) about the reality

Frame shift: 'Can we just have ...'

## Example 5: Farage meeting people in the street (BBC 10, May 19 2014)



## Example 5

The broadcasted performances of non-establishment identities and cultural membership

# Concluding remarks 1

- (1) Populist styles are repertoires enacted in different settings and interactional frameworks
- (2) Populist styles are performed in the 'doing being' of non-establishment (identities thus related to a populist discourse)
- (3) Style functions as markers of cultural membership and values in the performances of political nationalism (ideologies)
- (4) Populist style is not just a media savvy strategy (as pol com people tend to assume) but a strategy to perform populist and nationalist ideologies (in the case of Right wing pop)

## Concluding remarks 2

### Populist style as broadcast talk

(1) Spectacular and newsworthy (attraction as a mode of communication)

(2) Being 'mainstream' and being 'non-mainstream' are performative qualities shaped in institutionalized genres of mediated communication, genres which profoundly structure politicians spoken relationships to the public

(3) Fresh and authentic talk in broadcast contexts typically restricted by formal talk and political correctness (negotiating the boundaries of front stage and back stage)

(4) The performance of populist styles are interrelated to the challenging and destabilization of rules and norms of conduct in public communication