

## **Constituents of a hit parade: Questioning democracy and listener participation in P4 i P1's Det elektriske barometer**

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*Due to their historically inaccessible nature, public service broadcasters' media archives have lent themselves primarily to internal reflection while historical contextualisation of the cultural heritage in these archives has been broadcasters' prerogative. In this study, digitised material from the Danish youth radio programme P4 i P1's Det elektriske barometer forms the basis for an experiment into how access to digital archives can inform humanities scholarship. We argue that one important implication of the new digital archives is that they enable approaches independent of broadcasters' own narratives since they offer the possibility for autonomous study of large quantities of material. The character of listener participation in Det elektriske barometer, which had the slogan 'the listener-determined hit parade', is approached from a micro-, meso-, and macro-level employing Carpentier's concept of participation (2011b), to explore how different approaches to digital archives can provide new answers to media's self-presentation.*

Since the introduction of state-sponsored mass media in the early 1920s, democratic access has been of major concern and debate. Early infrastructural implementation of the broadcast system focused on securing a stable signal for as many people as possible, in part to legitimise using taxpayer money to produce mass media content. From the perspective of the citizen, however, access quickly became a question of not just being able to listen

to but also being able to participate in the production of radio programs. Bertolt Brecht's 1932 vision of radio as a device for two-way communication is the most famous example of this early demand for democratisation of the media system (Brecht, 1986). However, it was not until the late 1960s and early 1970s that Brecht's ideas found resonance within the broadcast institutions. In a Danish media context, which is this study's setting, this development was closely linked to the publication of Hans Magnus Enzensberger's essay 'Constituents of a Theory of the Media' (orig. 'Baukasten zu einer Theorie der Medien', 1970), which was heavily indebted to Brecht's writings on radio. Taking its point of departure in the Marxist theories of the Frankfurt School, Enzensberger's essay influenced both intellectual circles and a number of departments in the Danish Broadcasting Corporation (DR).<sup>1</sup> Parallel to and possibly affected by this influence, DR's departments experimented throughout the 1970s with programme concepts in which active listener participation was essential. The establishment of 'The Tape Reel Workshop' ('Båndværkstedet') in 1972, where regular citizens were taught how to use recording equipment in order to produce their own programmes, is one example of this influence. Another example is the establishment of the Department for Children and Youths (*Børne- & Ungdoms-afdelingen* – better known as 'B&U') in 1968. The establishment of an independent department that focused on the lives, dreams, and problems of children and youths in itself expressed a new understanding of what a state broadcasting service could be. The B&U department quickly proved to be the most creative and innovative section within DR, for instance by introducing participatory elements in its programmes.

The main task of this study is to analyse the character of participation in Danish youth radio in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s. Specifically, we turn to the program *P4 i P1* (hereafter *P4*), which between 1973 and 1997 was broadcast on the P1 radio channel for three hours on Sunday nights. Our focus will be on one recurring segment within this 3-hour show: a hit parade called *The Electric Barometer* (*Det elektriske barometer*, hereafter *DEB*) with the ambitious slogan 'the listener-determined hit parade', in which listeners were encouraged to vote for next week's songs by mailing postcards and letters to the editor. This programme segment was introduced in *P4* in 1986 and remained part of it until 1997.

Only very recently has it become possible for researchers to access the cultural heritage of Danish media archives, including the B&U material central to our case study. Through digitisation, substantial external funding, and media-political initiatives, access to these historical records has been secured. As accessible digitised archives are slowly replacing the previously dispersed and nearly inaccessible analogue broadcaster archives, academics from a broad range of fields are debating the consequences and potentials of this situation. As Jensen (2012, pp. 306-307) notes, the scarcity of analyses of the content of the radio programmes in Danish media histories testify to "a black hole" as "researchers historically have had very limited access to the archives harbouring them." The years of the no-access period may have come to an end due to recent media-political initiatives, but this new situation confronts researchers with new challenges.

The analysis of listener participation in B&U material can, from our perspective, be regarded as more than just a historical case study. Instead, conducting this study on the threshold of the age of digital access implies a supplementary perspective concerning the notion of access to the archive and the emergence of new software to analyse media sources. The article thus represents an experiment into how access to digital archives and use of research software can inform humanities scholarship. We argue that one important implication of the digital archive is that it enables approaches independent of broadcasters' historical narratives, inasmuch as it offers the autonomous study of large quantities of media archive content. In an effort to explore the possibilities that emerge from an accessible digitised archive, the concept of 'participation' (Carpentier, 2011) becomes a testing ground upon which this study applies three approaches enabled by digitised material. We then see how these approaches provide possible answers to the character of listener access to media.

The study of *DEB's* listener participation will thus be carried out by means of three inter-related analyses. First, a micro-level analysis is directed towards the host's representation of the individual listener's letter to the hit parade. Second, we consider the role of the letter at the meso-level of the whole programme, that is, the linguistic, rhythmic, and tonal staging used by hosts when reading listener letters on air. Third, at the macro-level, we analyse *DEB's* development over time, from 1986-1996, to examine possible development in hosts' use of letters and listener inclusion. This final quantitative analysis tests the scope of the qualitative analyses and adds a historical contextualisation to the overall analysis.

## Method

Until recently, this study's empirical material was available only on reel-to-reel tapes and DAT tapes in DR's radio archive as well as on copy tapes at the Danish State Library. However, through the LARM Audio Research Archive research project, which today provides access to a digital radio archive of more than 1,000,000 hours of audio, a large sample of *P4's* estimated 4,500 hours of broadcasts was digitalised.

The sample was designed as a representative crosscut of *P4*, consisting of two programmes from the same days each year from the entire span of *P4*. This amounts to a total of 167.5 hours, broadcast over 44 Sundays (excluding 1997, since *P4* ended prior to the sample days). When, in three cases, DR's archive was incomplete on the sample day, the programme from the next available week was chosen instead. The digital sample was transferred to the qualitative analysis software NVivo 10. Here, the material was listened to, briefly described in writing, and coded descriptively in, for instance, programme segments, talk versus music, readings of listener letters versus the host talking. The separation of different programme segments enabled us to isolate 20 hours and 23 minutes of *DEB* material in the *P4* programmes, distributed over 21 programmes.

In the programmes, quotes from 255 listener letters, selected by *DEB's* editorial staff, were read aloud. It should be emphasised that although we had access to the programme's

scripts, we did not have access to the original letters, just to the sections of the letters that were read aloud during *DEB*. We therefore have no knowledge of other components of these letters (illustrations, handwritten or typed, possible connection between the requested musical numbers and the wording of the letters, etc.). As a result, this is not a study of what listeners chose to write to *DEB* but instead a study of which letters were chosen by programme staff and how these were used during the programme.

After becoming familiar with the material, we developed a set of 23 “data driven” (Boyatzis, 1998) codes to systematise *DEB*’s content. These codes denoted letters that contained, for instance, ‘connections between music and letter’ and ‘listener idealising childhood’. In the process of coding the letters, we were inspired by the programme’s focus on democratic inclusion, as evidenced in the slogan ‘the listener-determined hit parade’. We thus chose to focus on material in which the presentation of a letter displayed the power balance between host and listener or in which listeners address *DEB* as democratic. This material then became the starting point for the study’s micro- and meso-level analyses of listener participation. We thus approached the archive inductively, as has become common within the digital humanities, but fully recognise the “lure of objectivity” (Rieder & Röhle, 2012, p. 70) in this, and acknowledge that we operate based on preconceptions that affect the questions we ask and what we look for in the material.

To enable a conversion of the empirical material to data suitable for quantitative analyses of developments in *DEB*, all of the coded material – which is automatically marked by time codes in NVivo – was exported to the SPSS statistics software with indication of each letter’s starting time, finishing time, duration, radio host, and date.

### **If *DEB* involves listeners, is it participation?**

Before we turn to *DEB*, it is worth dwelling on the notion of ‘participation’, which, as a theoretical term, seems to incorporate the present study’s perception of listener involvement. However, as observed by Carpentier (2011a), ‘participation’ within media studies today is more popular than it is well-defined. Carpentier thus argues in favour of a clearer and differentiated use of the word, to clarify what is meant when we speak about, for instance, ‘participatory radio’. In the *AIP* model (Carpentier, 2011a, p. 30), Carpentier defines the concept in relation to *access*, for instance, in the sense of “access to media contents and technologies,” and *interaction*, which among other things, deals with the possibility of selection and co-production of content. Although these concepts constitute the conditions of possibility for participation, the key concept for Carpentier is power. This power relationship can be measured when testing for the existence of co-decision for the user/listener. Thus, collaboration on even terms is a key aspect of this understanding of participation “because of its concern with the inclusion of the people within political decision-making processes” (Carpentier, 2011a, p. 14).

When participation is used synonymously with access and interaction as a general term for 'the listener's access to the media', one risks – according to Carpentier – delimiting participation to signify a minimal involvement of media audiences, which makes critical evaluation of participation in media difficult. In contrast, a politically oriented participation concept such as Carpentier's includes a continuum of possible ways of relating to listener participation, from minimalist representative democratic models to maximalist forms of democracy perceptions.

One way of understanding the mindset behind such different approaches to participation is to consider the two fronts in the 'Dewey-Lippmann debate', which has been explicitly linked to media participation (Nyre, 2011). While Dewey, in *The Public and Its Problems*, argues for the active role and inclusion of all citizen's voices in the public so that all may work for the good of society, Lippmann rejects this idea of the "omni-competent' citizen" (Nyre, 2011, p. 9) and emphasises the role of the expert (such as media professionals) in creating the best and most accurate information (or media content). In media theory, Enzensberger's vision of democratic two-way radio can be viewed as a 'Deweyan' position in which the media holds emancipatory promise for the public, while for the media historian Paddy Scannell, it could represent its opposite. In a primarily phenomenological approach to media, Scannell (1996) has analysed the 'care structures' (i.e. the care for listeners inherent in the detailed planning of a programme so that the result will appear natural and sincere) inherent in the work done by media professionals. In this way, Scannell represents a more 'Lippmannian' position, which stresses the significance of expert knowledge rather than the maximisation of audience participation. These two positions may provide a more nuanced analysis of the nature of (and possible motivation behind) the character of listener involvement in *DEB*.

In the start, *P4*'s editors presumably decided on a format for *DEB* without input from the listeners. The principle was simple: Listeners could send letters to suggest/vote for five songs for the hit parade, but they could not vote for just anything. They had to choose from among the ten songs from the previous week as well as the four 'testers', that is, the new songs of the week. Listeners could suggest songs for those testers, but they were ultimately chosen by *DEB*'s editorial staff. A song's maximum duration on the list was 12 (and later 10) weeks.

This description already raises a number of questions about the nature of the roles of listener and host in *DEB*. Carpentier (2011a, p. 24) argues that participation is always situated and involves specific players, and he argues in favour of dealing with participation at all levels: "Participation is not limited to one specific societal field (e.g. 'the economy'), but is present in all societal fields and at all levels. The contexts that these different fields and levels bring into the equation are crucial to our understanding of any participatory process."

In order to accommodate a broad field of participatory contexts, the present study consists of an analysis of listener participation in *DEB* at three levels. One factor that cuts across these levels, however, is the presence of media technologies, which influence the

nature and possibility of participation. The letter, which is used in *DEB*, has a history in *P4* that predates the introduction of *DEB* in 1986. Already in the first *P4* programme, listeners were encouraged to send letters – instead of calling in – to a variety of segments. In the early *DEB* programmes, letters or postcards functioned exclusively as voting ballots. Listeners would later include personal stories, but this was not anticipated in 1986 when the program was introduced. The letter format was likely chosen because it was an easy way to communicate listeners' intended contributions to the programme: a list of five votes for the songs of the week. In relation to that function, a letter may be visually skimmed, more text may be added in connection with the counting of votes, and it can be easily sorted in visual stacks. In contrast, one can rarely listen to recorded messages at anything other than normal speed.

In order to determine the nature of listener participation in *DEB* through use of the letter, we shall in the following look at the situated nature of listener involvement. Our first approach deals with listeners' involvement in *DEB* as mediated through the host's reading of their letters.

### **The Threefold Mediation of Listeners' Voices in *DEB***

One of the most innovative features of *P4* was its use of an automatic telephone tape recorder in *P4 Pop* and its use of the telephone in *Tværs*, a call-in segment. Both segments became representative of the 1970s political emancipatory ideals of listener participation in radio, in which teenagers were encouraged to become independent from parents, schools, and other authorities. Here they could listen to the voices of peers confronted with similar problems as themselves, while the crackling "telephone acoustic" (Crisell, 1994) guaranteed the programme's authenticity.

This description of authentic telephone voice aesthetics as the quintessential example of the emancipatory vision of the 1970s is important for understanding the listener interaction for which *DEB* became an exponent in the mid-1980s. Both *DEB* and *P4 Pop* focused on involving the teenage audience by way of their interest in music, but *DEB*'s aesthetic was oriented towards achieving a perfectionist smooth sound rather than the crackling authentic telephone acoustics. Letters thus presented a possibility for professional control of *DEB*'s entire sound universe, which led to a remarkable break from the legacy of the 1970s' emancipatory listener participation.

*DEB*'s divergence from the emancipatory aesthetics and ideology of the 1970s raises the question: How are we to understand the role of the listener? In an article about the British radio programme *Our Tune*, Montgomery (1991, p. 164) describes how host Simon Bates' representation of letters from listeners includes interposed sentences in which "the discourse turns back on itself to comment on or evaluate something as it is being said." This is done in order to mark the distance between the narrator of the letter and the radio host.

Montgomery refers here to Goffman's concept of 'footing', which describes this change in the narrator's position:

A change in footing implies a change in the alignment we take up to ourselves and the others present as expressed in the way we manage the production of an utterance. A change in footing is another way of talking about a change in our frame for events (Goffman, 1981, p. 128).

Such shifts in alignment occur constantly in everyday conversation. The host of *DEB* will at times speak as a representative of the public broadcasting corporation DR and at times as the host of *DEB*. However, for radio hosts in programmes such as *Our Tune* and *DEB*, the situation is distinctive because some of what the host says refers to or quotes the texts of listeners. In *DEB*, the host often reads directly from the listener's letter with minimal paraphrasing in the third person. The majority of the letter is thus read in the first person, where the host's "I" represents the listener, as in the following, when Astrid from Hillerød approaches the host Dorte:<sup>2</sup>

((high tempo electric keyboard plays in background))  
 hi barometerpeter I almost said (0.4)  
 hey ho here I come  
 and >I that is< astrid from hillerød who continues (.)  
 dew drops in the hair (.) grass in the mouth hundred per cent invulnerable .h  
 squeeze the air out of life (.) fill the senses (.) with sensuality (1.3)  
 how are you dorte (.) is it cool (.) is it good  
 is it life-affirmingly hot to be the barometer hostess  
 are we good at dreaming on the air (.)  
 or what do you have spring flowers in the studio (0.5)  
 I wonder what you think about when you turn yourself off (.)  
 and turn on (.) the music  
 1996-05-05

The rapid narrative and upbeat background music chosen by the host Dorte seek to capture the hectic and energetic note of this letter. The reading takes place at the very beginning of the programme and could be perceived as a radio host's classic introductory pep talk. Inherent in *DEB*'s letter-reading format is a close coupling of host and listener, and unless the host clearly signals her footing, there is a risk of confusing the narrator-host with the narrator-listener. Dorte is likely aware of this problem in her performance of the letter. In the above example, the shift in footing makes it clear who the letter author is, as Dorte, in an interposed sentence (Line 3), indicates that she speaks on behalf of Astrid and will continue to do so for a while.

The following letter from Per, read by the host Inge, illustrates another aspect of the host-narrator's representation of the listener's voice on *DEB*. It illustrates how direct recital on *DEB* facilitates other and more complex changes in footing than the marking of the host, which Montgomery identifies in *Our Tune*. Here, there is no potential confusion of

the listener-narrator and the host-narrator; instead, Inge uses different voices to change footing in relation to the various individuals in the listener's story:

((Madonna's 'Like a Prayer' plays in background))  
 homework pouring in and no time to listen to the birds sing  
 or look at beautiful spring girls  
 who enjoy the warmth of the summer while eating a soft serve ice cream  
 ((MC Einar starts playing in background))  
 the girl I am slowly falling in love with has a boyfriend .h  
 and thinks it is super cool to gossip with her girlfriends  
 ((higher, lighter voice))  
look at that guy he is crazy about me ↑ what an idiot ↓  
 ((deeper, lower voice))  
 oh god how can you be so stupid  
 1989-05-07

Here, the host's change of footing adds a layer to the nature of the story as it is loyal to the letter writer. The gossiping girl's voice has a high, sneering tone which reflects the narrator's sympathy for Per. Per's voice is marked by a change to a deeper tone which signals his gender and exhaustion due to the situation.

In addition to the tone of voice and direct linguistic indication of the narrator of the story, the music plays a key role in relation to the *DEB* host's change of footing. According to Goffman, adjustments regarding whom the speaker represents may be difficult to perceive if one does not see the person face-to-face (Scannell, 1991, p. 150). Changes of voice from deep to high and changes of tone – from sneering for the gossiping girl to exhausted for Per – are important elements in the example above. However, the example's music also acts as an important character, helping underline the changes in tone and emphasise the spoken words. We hear it in the shift from the pop song by Madonna to MC Einar's rap music, which has likely received a vote from Per, as an introduction to Per's private story.

Another element in the analysis of footing changes relates to the aforementioned first-person narrative's close coupling of host and listener. This does not necessarily mean, however, that the host assumes a loyal listener footing. Instead, through his/her representation of the listener-narrator, the host may take a disloyal position:

dear barometer -host writes anne in aarhus (0.5)  
 are you aware of all the brutal slaughtering of native americans  
 that have happened over time .hh  
 I am writing a history assignment about this (.)  
 and I almost get tears in my eyes (0.4)  
reading about some of the stuff (.) that has happened  
 (0.4) and still happens (0.5)  
 it is scary that people in this way have been wiped out  
 from their own country



## Article: Constituents of a hit parade

in this way (0.6)

.h I hope the world will soon open its eyes to everything I am reading about (0.6)

otherwise the last native american will die

1991-05-05

The above is an example of how the host, Mikael Bertelsen, reads a letter from a listener who is worried about the fate of Native Americans and asks why we do not react to some of the injustices in the world. However, in the host's accentuation of the listener's 'I' in the second to last line of the quote, the footing changes, and in a break from the representation of the listener heard in the beginning of the letter, the serious tone transforms into an ironic remark about self-importance: If the whole world did as *I* do, all problems would be solved. Thus, when the host Mikael emphasises the word 'I', it may paradoxically be seen as him distancing himself from the implied 'we' that is present when, in his own voice, he reads aloud another person's thoughts.

In this analysis of narratives of listener letters, footing emerges as a strong instrument for the host. *DEB*'s threefold mediation (through the letter, the radio host, and the radio) is thus a format with a marked imbalance in the distribution of power, as the listener has no influence over the way in which her text is represented. A negative or sceptical host may destabilise and contradict the letter writer's story, while a sympathetic host will support it. The analysis points to a power distortion in the fundamental structure of *DEB* that is apparent in the way listener letters are represented in the segment. Listener letters do not represent *participatory* involvement of the listeners in Carpentier's definition of the term. However, the reading of listener letters provides the possibility for mediated listener *access* to and *interaction* with *DEB*.

### Critical dialogues in *DEB*

In order to discuss the consequences of the appropriation of the listener's voice, we will now expand our focus from the representation of the listener in the individual letter to the status of listener participation at the meso-level of the programme as a whole.

Most of the letters read in *DEB* give the impression that the listeners are dedicated and supportive of its format, hosts, and music. However, listeners sometimes take a critical stance towards *DEB*. This critical dialogue often focuses on the representation of the listener by the host or on the selection of songs that can enter the list. This opens a different perspective regarding the programme's participatory nature. Here, the very structure of *DEB* is open to critical inquiry in a discussion in which listener and host take an explicit stand.

In the following example from 1991, host Kenan Seeberg reads a letter from the outraged listener Lars, who writes:

## Article: Constituents of a hit parade

I don't believe you are familiar with the concept of <democracy> at P4 (0.8)  
 .h if the list really belongs to the listeners (.)  
 why then- or then it should be completely free  
 so that one could vote for anything (0.6)  
 .h and why do you succumb (.) to record companies' release policies  
 by .h only testing new singles .h  
 and why are you making listeners believe (.)  
 that you can only save the world  
 from imminent destruction .h  
 if they write on recycled paper (0.4)  
boycott the barometer .h  
 the listeners only write (.)  
 to beg for a gift certificate from the studio hosts anyway  
 who only sit in the studio anyway to get their part of the license fees (.)  
 and not out of compassionate interest  
 1991-11-03

Lars' criticism concerns *DEB's* self-identification as democratic (based on the slogan 'the listener-determined hit parade'), and he questions the editors' narrow guidelines for the music allowed in the hit parade. In response to this criticism, Kenan begins with a counter-attack by sarcastically asking why someone who is so critical finishes his letter by using his "right to vote." Kenan thus underlines what *DEB's* democracy is made of: All listeners have 'voting rights'.

Kenan then addresses why *DEB's* list is not co-determined by listeners to a greater extent:

and then I can say just briefly  
 that the testers are a mix of listener proposals and the host's preference  
because we in here like music too  
 because (.) DR already has a sales-based hit parade called top twenty (0.7)  
 because we are not dansktoppen [name of the sales-based hit parade]  
 1991-11-03

Kenan's reply signals that *DEB's* hit parade is democratic in a minimal representative sense as it is first and foremost designed to be in alignment with DR's existing programme offers and expert evaluations of what "we in here" want. The danger is – it appears – that if listeners were to decide without input from the preference of the host, *DEB* would end up as *Dansktoppen*, a hit parade featuring mainstream Danish-language schlager/pop music. Kenan thus seems to legitimise *DEB's* minimal democracy by means of the classic argument against maximal, direct democracy: It would empower the uninformed masses.

If we return to the listener Lars' criticism, he actually identifies two problems with *DEB's* listener participation. One is the lack of listener empowerment in *DEB* as a democratic programme. The other problem, which is brought up in the final part of Lars's letter, concerns the "compassionate" interest of the host for listener's letters: It is a criticism directed at the intentions of *DEB's* hosts when using extracts from the letters as components of the pro-

gramme's overall structure. This criticism is not addressed in Kenan's answer but is treated in greater depth in a segment in which Mikael Bertelsen is the host:

((Sonic Youth's 'Sugar Cane' plays in background))  
 in the last barometer I was so lucky to have my letter read  
 .h writes stefan from herlev  
 but the happiness is short-lived when you discover that the imbecile host .h  
 has raped your (.) letter and abbreviated it to nothing (0.6)  
 to provide a tasteless connection between the song (.) he speaks over  
 .hh I am sorry if I abbreviated your letter too much and missed the point stefan  
 (.) but that happens sometimes .hh  
 when you try to get the words and the music to melt into one thing  
 (.) in a live radio broadcast  
 (('Sugar Cane' fades out, Nirvana's 'Oh the Guilt' plays during speech))  
 h the barometer would be nothing without yours (.) or the words of others (.)  
 >but sometimes there simply is not room for it all<  
 and then the letters change in pace with the music and the stopwatch  
 ((drums begin in 'Oh the Guilt'))  
 but that does not mean I sit here playing absolute ruler (0.4)  
 for all of you who try to help .h out with  
 making the programme more intelligent and <meaningful>  
 .h because that's most important (.)  
 that nirvana tonight (.) is number four with oh the guilt  
 (0.5) that's interesting  
 (0.3) but it has to come second  
 ((vocals begin in 'Oh the Guilt'))  
 1993-05-02

What the listener, Stefan from Herlev, has experienced is precisely the difference between interaction and participation in Carpentier's use of these concepts. On the one hand, Stefan expresses his satisfaction about being able to participate in *DEB*, but on the other hand, he does not feel represented. His letter touches upon a central aspect of *DEB* since one of the programme's core premises, which is implicit in the accompanying radio aesthetics (relaxed everyday speech, current music, and apparently spontaneous presentation of listener's letters), is that it must establish a natural progression that becomes an effortless part of a young listener's Sunday night.

In his response to Stefan, Mikael stresses that listener letters are the most important element of *DEB* and mildly rejects the idea that his handling of Stefan's letter indicates a general tendency. Let us, however, take a closer look at the documents accompanying the broadcast in the archive. Mikael's manuscript from that evening, 2 May 1993, when he replies to Stefan from Herlev, is represented in the following photographic reproduction:

The transcription above begins in the third paragraph of the manuscript, and it appears from the manuscript that Mikael has noted beforehand everything that he is going to say and do in relation to the letter and the accompanying music. He has marked the duration

13.

3.02.

Tænk hvis der stod "Barometerdreng" tatoveret i nakken på alle de drenge der skriver ind til Det Elektriske Barometer - så ville jeg kun score dem - for de er altså dybere og mere sjældne end de almindelige fyre her i Kjellerup - skriver Mona der i aften får tildelt "Frimærkelegatet" for at være en trofast skrivende lytter hver eneste uge.

I det næste halve år - er porto'en betalt - når der skal fortælles historier fra den lille flække.

I sidste barometer var jeg så heldig at få mit brev læst op, skriver Stefan fra Ilerlev - men kort er glæden når man opdager at den imbecile vært har voldtaget ens brev og kortet det ned til ingenting - for at lave en plat sammenhæng med den sang han snakker henover.

Du må undskylde hvis jeg gjorde dit brev blev alt for kort og uden pointe - Stefan - men det kommer til at ske nogengange når man prøver at få ordene og musikken til at smelte sammen til 1 ting i et direkte radioprogram.

(3.52)

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 CD: NIRVANA: OH THE GUILT. CD/2. Indlytes til: 0.03.

Var: 3.17.

0.00-0.25.

Barometret ville ikke være noget uden dit og andres ord - men nogle gange er der simpelthen ikke plads til det hele - og så forandrer brevene sig i takt til musikken og stopuret.

Men derfor leger jeg ikke enchersker over dem der prøver at hjælpe til med at gøre programmet intelligent og indholdsfyldt. For det er det vigtigste - at Nirvana i aften ligger på en 4. plads med Oh The Guilt - det er da interessant - men det må komme i anden række.

(0.25)

of the Nirvana track (3:17), when his technicians should start it (between "direkte radio program"/"live radio programme" and "Barometeret ville"/"the Barometer would," or 3:52 after the start of the previous track), and for how long he is going to talk over the track before the vocals begin (0:25). A comparison of our transcription of the segment with the manuscript shows that it by and large plays out as planned. The control of the spoken word is marked since there is minimal divergence between the script text and what is actually said, with the only differences being interjections and a different word sequence.

As can be seen from the above transcription and script, Mikael explains that Stefan's letter is handled in this way because it is difficult to produce a live programme while considering both the music and the time. He then emphasises that listener letters are more important than the music, which "must come second." He claims this in a narrative, which

– as we can see – is aligned with a track by Nirvana. The track begins while Mikael, addressing the listener, says that the Barometer would be nothing without letters. He finishes at the exact same time as the vocals on the track begin, which is the classic spot for a radio host to stop talking and fade up the music. It may be true that listener letters are more important to him than music, but the script shows that the dominant factor is *DEB*'s format, which structures and determines how he handles listener letters.

As a 'listener-determined hit parade', *DEB* is open to the potential for public participation and offers listeners an opportunity to influence the position of the hit parade's tracks. This reflects features from the maximalist democratic participation ideology, where democratic participation is defined as a social dimension not limited to the political system (Carpentier, 2011b, p. 17). *DEB* thus includes a participatory element, which is clearly distinct from *access* or *participation*. The voting, however, only constitutes a democracy at a minimally representative level since *DEB*'s editors alone determine the featured music. At the same time, letters are selected for the programme in a process that does not involve the listeners and in which listeners lack co-determination with respect to the role their letters will play in *DEB*. On the level of the individual programme, this seems to indicate that the listener is involved in a minimally participatory process, as the listeners' involvement – in spite of the maximalist forms of democratic ideals incorporated in *DEB* – is characterised by a great imbalance between the power of the listener and the power of the host/programme editors.

The contract between listener and host in *DEB* thus consists of the fact that portions of a listener's letter may be included as a constituent of a rigid composition. This composition does not necessarily disregard the general expression and contents of the letters, but these will nonetheless take low priority as a consequence of *DEB*'s overall design.

### **The flamboyant, minimal, and listener-focused host**

We have established that at the level of the individual programme, letters in *DEB* are being down-prioritised in favour of the programme's music. The next question is whether the imbalance in the power structure, which was revealed in the previous analysis, is also reflected in *DEB*'s inclusion of the listener over a longer period. The focal point will therefore shift to a primarily quantitative longitudinal macro-perspective in order to uncover the composition of the segment over time, with focus on the role of the host in the design of *DEB*.

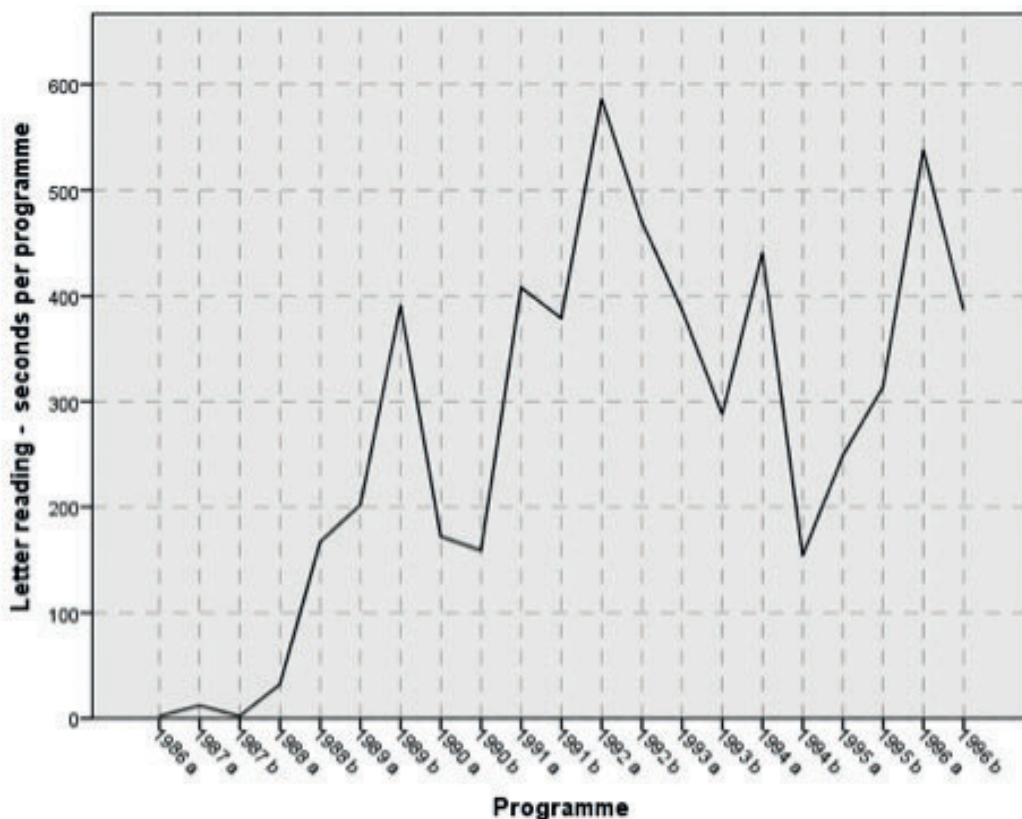
To initially delimit how much latitude the host has at her disposal for reading letters aloud in a given programme, we will consider *DEB*'s fundamental elements, which make up its core format over time:

- Programme duration: fluctuates between 47 minutes and 1 hour and 35 minutes in the first two years, then finds a steady level at approximately 56 minutes.

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- Music: the hit parade's 10 songs, plus four weekly new testers. These tracks must at a minimum be played during *DEB*.
- Summarisations: continuous summarisations of the week's hit parade and a concluding summary.
- Information: information about *DEB*'s postal address and at least one explanation of how listeners can participate in voting.
- Recurring sound clips: *DEB* jingles and idents.

The space in which the host can perform the listener letters is thus marked by a number of formal constraints. In more concrete sizes, we can look to the standard within pop music that a track should be approximately three minutes long, a standard based upon the classic 10-inch 78-rpm single (Chanan, 1995). This means that around 42 minutes of music will be played in the programme. However, as *DEB* typically represents 'alternative music', the average duration of tracks is likely longer, although this duration is in reality considerably reduced by the use of fading, talking over tracks, and 'radio edits' (i.e., shorter tracks produced for the radio). In the above example of a script from *DEB*, we saw how the segment was planned in detail before the live broadcast. Producing a radio programme with around 42 minutes of music as well as a number of regular elements within a 56-minute timeframe would thus logically create a need for running *DEB* as a tight composition.



If we look at the longitudinal development of time spent by the host reading letters from the listeners in *DEB* (Figure 1), we see that in the first two years (1986 and 1987), the host spends just a few seconds per programme reading letters. Later, reading fluctuates, but after 1989, it rarely falls below 200 seconds or three minutes and 20 seconds.

The above overview of the regular programme elements, which in principle occupy the entire airtime, provides a plausible explanation as to why, during the first two years, such a small share of *DEB* was spent on reading letters. This cannot, however, explain the dramatic increase in the amount of airtime spent on letters in 1989.

In our search for an explanation for this development, we must return to the fact that the letters in the first programmes were meant as listeners' means of voting. In the second-ever *DEB* (the first opportunity for listeners to respond), the host Karsten Sommer encourages listeners to participate as follows:

uh and you can vote for five songs of-  
the fourteen we have (0.3) played  
.hh I hope that as many as possible want to participate  
because the more who bother the more (.)  
and the more exciting the list will be .hh  
and now this is it for tonight  
take care  
1986-11-09

The host does not – as in later programmes – encourage listeners to tell him something about themselves or their thoughts on the music they vote for, and the listeners write only brief messages. In the same programme, Karsten mentions just one listener message. It is a brief note from “lena petersen in hillerød” regarding the band Gnags being on the list:

she wrote on her envelope  
hurray for the danish  
1986-11-09

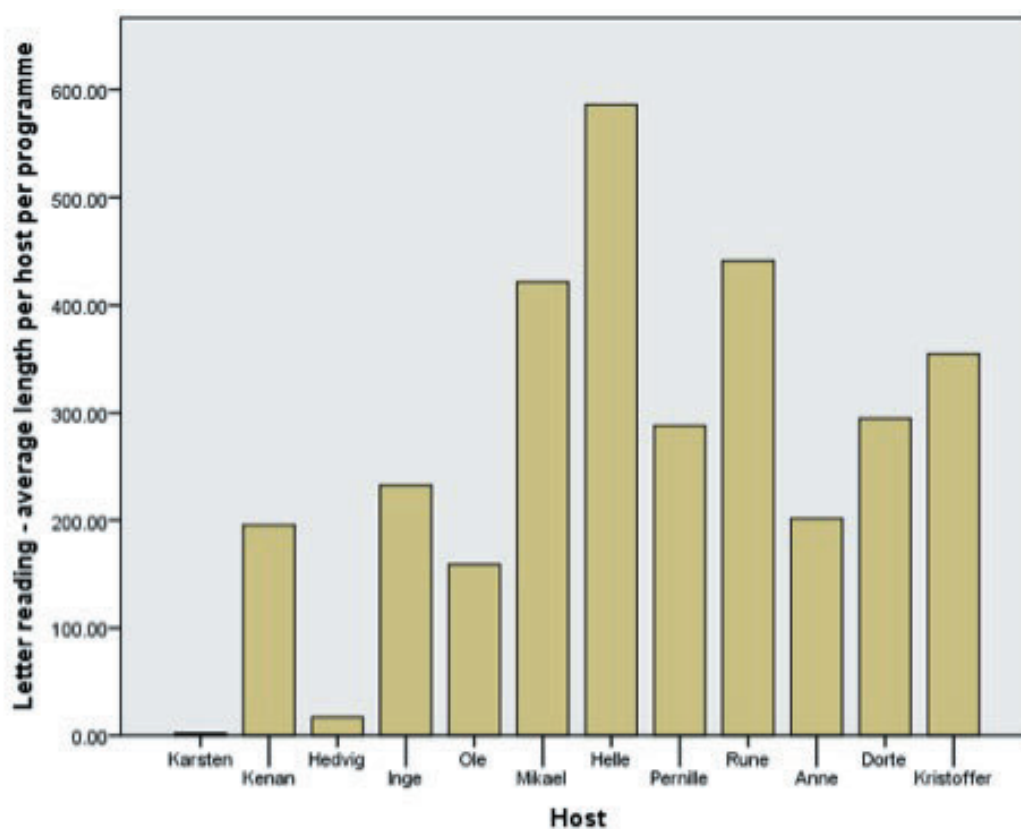
Another element of this early downplaying of listener participation involves how one chooses to define the role of the host. *P4*'s hosts are key figures, who tie programme segments together, introduce music, and act as hosts in certain segments (for instance, studio talks with guests). In the first *DEB* programme segments, *P4*'s programme host continued as host in *DEB*. When *DEB* got its own host from 1987 onwards, this marked an important movement towards a more in-depth design of the programme's identity. One of the first *DEB* hosts was pop singer Elisabeth Gjerluff Nielsen, who hosted in 1987 and 1988. She introduced listeners to a flamboyant persona, Countess Hedvig, with an interest in belly dancing and a gossip-loving, noble friend named Pusser:

we have a lo:t of records at stake both in pusser's pop gossip quiz  
a:nd the barometer itself (0.5)

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so get your note-taking device now (0.7)  
 then countess hedvig will repeat the list for you  
 while we listen to some (.)  
 <relaxing turkish belly dance music> (0.4)  
 >which by the way is something we attend  
 during evening classes every thursday<  
 (.) pusser and me  
 1987-11-01

Hedvig represents a host-centred version of *DEB* that involves a fictional universe and persona and leaves little room for listener letters. This is seen in Figure 2 (below), which shows the average amount of time various *DEB* hosts spend reading listener letters aloud in an entire programme, with the hosts listed in the same chronological order as they appear in the sample.



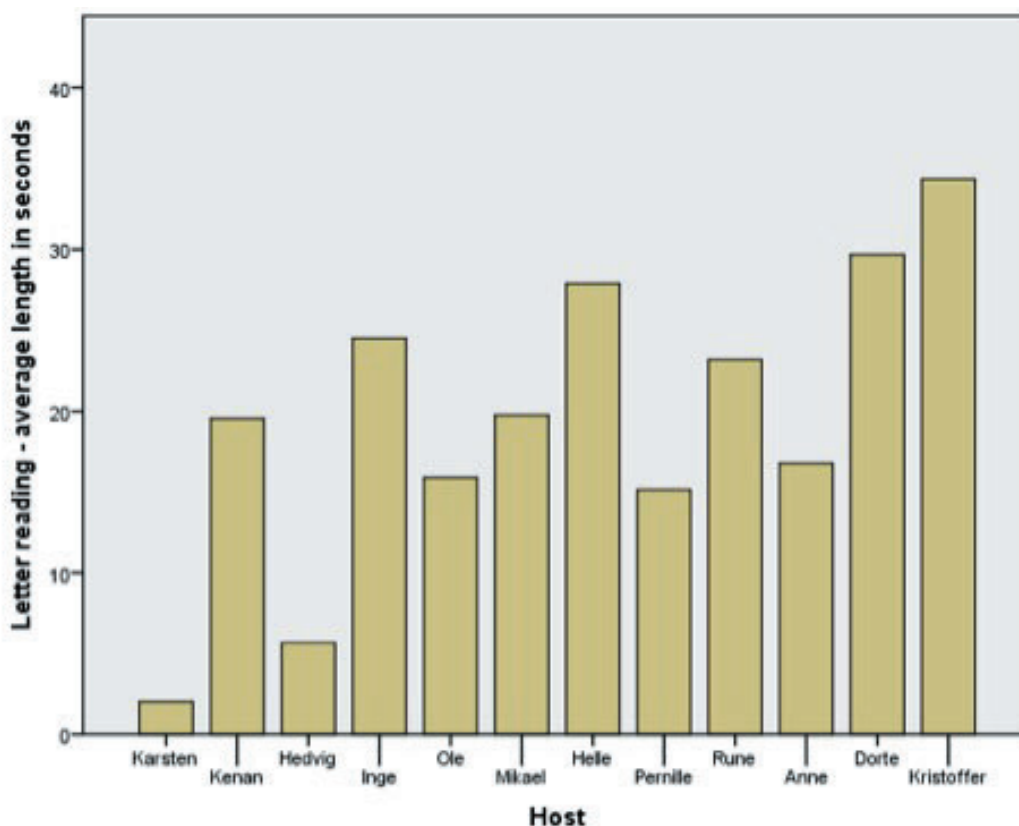
In Figure 2, we see that Hedvig spends 17 seconds on average, significantly less than the other hosts. The first host of the programme, Karsten, who includes almost no letters, is the only one to prioritise listener letters in the same manner as Hedvig. The others spend between 159 and 411 seconds reading aloud, i.e. between three and seven minutes. Kenan, who hosted *DEB* as early as May 1987, spends only six seconds reading letters in his first *DEB* (see Figure 1), but he hosted the programme for many years and therefore obtained



an overall average of 196 seconds (approximately three minutes), similar to that of the later hosts.

As it emerges from Figure 2, Hedvig's heavily host-centred version of *DEB* is not the standard after 1989. Neither is Karsten's minimal interaction with listeners. Rather, a more listener-focused type of host, who reserves about five minutes total to read listener letters, becomes the norm. We also see how time spent on reading letters hits its peak when Helle, as host in the beginning of the 1990s, spends approximately 10 minutes. If we return to the previous list of structural requirements for the programme, it is indeed difficult to see how a host would be able to spend more than 10 minutes on letters while adhering to *DEB*'s format. After Helle's record, reading letters stabilises at a level that (with some fluctuation) amounts to approximately 316 seconds. The inclusion of five minutes of listener letters thus becomes the standard version of *DEB*.

Figure 3 (below) may help us come closer to understanding what kind of host emerges in *DEB* over a ten-year period. In this figure, describing how long (on average) hosts read from individual letters, the 12 hosts are again listed in the same chronological order as in the sample.



If we compare the information from Figures 2 and 3, it becomes clear that there are several overlaps between hosts who spend a relatively long time reading letters during a whole

programme and hosts who spend a long time reading each individual letter. This is interesting because it demonstrates the emergence of a listener-centred type of host, who allocates considerable time to listener letters in the production of *DEB* while also spending a long time reading the chosen letters. This is especially true for Inge, Helle, Dorte, and Kristoffer. At the opposite end, Karsten and Hedvig are again found at the bottom, while Kenan breaks the pattern for the three previous hosts since, in later years, he spends a long time on individual letters, thereby lifting his total average.

As the longitudinal analysis of the role of the host in *DEB*'s design shows, structural requirements place an upper limit on the amount of time that may be spent on letters in *DEB*. However, there is no indication that structural changes in the number of tracks on the list are what lead to longer letters from listeners and the host's increased emphasis on letters. Rather, there seems to be a qualitative shift in the perception of the programme and the host's role.

The role of radio hosts in *DEB* changes in a participatory process, which takes place over a decade of interaction between listeners and hosts. This cannot be characterised as a process that takes place with equal co-decision-making on the part of the listener since *DEB*'s editors undisputedly decide which and to what extent listener letters are to be included. Nevertheless, *DEB* could not have gradually placed greater emphasis on listener-created content if listeners had not written letters with personal stories, expressing ardent attitudes towards and thoughts about the music on the list. It is thus clear that, through changed interaction practices and longer and more personal letters, *DEB*'s listeners contributed to a thorough redefinition of *DEB* over time, in which its hosts became more oriented towards providing space for the many listener letters in the programme and at the same time gave priority to the individual letter's presentation.

In *Media and Participation*, Carpentier (2011b, p. 352) offers a broad overview of participatory histories: "The 1960s and 70s provided the context for a wave of democratization" and "relatively intense forms of participation." In contrast, the 1980s was a "period of backlash when participation featured much less centrally on societal agendas." This general history may provide us with some clues to understanding *DEB*, which grew out of a 1970s media environment that emphasised emancipatory maximised participation through, for instance, listeners' telephone messages. However, as *DEB* was introduced in the 1980s, it seems that the Deweyan emphasis on listener inclusion had been exchanged for a more Lippmanian focus on the expert's ability to produce a superior media product. In this format, the Lippmanian approach to participation is delegated (Latour, 1999) to the letters in *DEB*, as they enable a smooth sound that is under the hosts' control at all times.

An understanding of *DEB*'s model of participation could therefore come from the media historian Scannell (1996, p. 151), who distances himself from media critical approaches that regard media as institutions reproducing the status quo. According to Scannell, these approaches fail to account for *dailiness* as the central structure of the broadcast media:

The broadcasting calendar creates a horizon of expectations, a mood of anticipation, a directedness towards that which is to come, thereby giving substance and structure (a 'texture of relevance') to everyday life (1996, p. 155).

*DEB's* orientation towards the joys and sorrows of its young listeners and the smooth and professional representation of the listener through the host is a pursuit of the essence of *dailiness*: to be a safe, weekly companion for teenagers during a developmental period with few reference points.

Scannell's perspective concerns participation as an apolitical involvement in and co-shaping of audiences' daily lives. In this, it is not necessarily a problem that listeners do not co-determine the segment's format and the selection or reading of their letters. It is, however, problematic when a listener's letter, as quoted earlier, questions the host's compassion since the letter, as an element in the segment's production, becomes subject to the hit parade's music. The hiding of *care structures* (the care for listeners inherent in the detailed planning of a programme so that the result appears natural and sincere) is a task that *DEB* shares with all TV and radio programmes (Scannell, 1996, p. 144 ff). However, for *DEB*, there is the special circumstance that its listeners act as co-producers of its content and therefore have unusual insight into its constituents. The fundamental challenge for *DEB* thus was and is to produce a hit parade based on its basic constituents, the music and the letters, without revealing the *care structures* in a minutely planned performance.

## Conclusion

In a three-tiered analysis of the nature of *DEB's* listener participation, we have shown how, at the level of the individual letter, listener participation is limited by *DEB's* threefold mediation of listeners' voices. This leaves the representation of listeners' letters in the programme completely up to the interpretation of the host, and *participation* does not provide an accurate description of the representation of listeners who are not co-decision-makers. Instead, listeners must be said to have *access* through the letters and to *interact* with *DEB* in a mediated form. At the programme level, listener letters are – together with the other regular elements – part of an overall design that is undisputedly decided by *DEB's* host, although listeners, through their letters, are guaranteed a degree of influence on the ranking of hit parade's songs.

Contrasting these meso- and micro-level analyses with a longitudinal analysis, we showed how *DEB* includes participatory processes at a low level, as the programme editors and the hosts largely determine *DEB's* development. However, listeners were seen to exert some influence on *DEB's* development through their letters since these provide crucial inspiration for the programme's changing focus over time.

In this analysis, participation in media emerges as a complex process that exists at various levels of *DEB*, depending on whether the programme is considered from a micro-, meso-, or macro-perspective. In spite of *DEB's* self-presentation as a 'listener-determined hit

parade' and inspiration from maximalist democratic participation ideology, *DEB*'s listener participation can best be described as minimally participatory since those parts of the programme that include participatory processes are characterised by "the existence of strong power imbalances between the actors" (Carpentier, 2011b, p. 354).

Within a digital humanities approach, Carpentier's concept of participation has thus proved a useful tool with which to critically question media's self-presentation. It seems a particularly fitting notion to introduce into a study based on material from a digital audio archive, which also presents a structural challenge to broadcasters' earlier unilateral status with regards to presenting and interpreting their archives as cultural history.

The assumption that media producers and consumers should be critical towards media as "ideological state apparatuses" (Enzensberger, 1970) is, however, not necessarily a perspective shared by *DEB*. Rather, the programme illustrates a development in the perception of media participation that took place during the last three decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, in which state mass media moved away from emancipatory left-wing ideas about democracy. The concept of participation, with critical theory as its theoretical foundation, thus only facilitates a partial understanding and characterisation of *DEB*, the aesthetics of which – a smooth, perfect, and professional sound universe – place it far from the authentic and gritty expressions of the 1970s.

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## Notes

- 1 S. Samsøe in interview with Mette Simonsen Abildgaard, 2007.
- 2 Quotes have been transcribed using conversation analysis symbols for emphasis, speed, and pause (Hutchby & Wooffitt, 2008).

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