Neil Verma: My name is Neil Verma. I'm an Assistant Professor in the Department of Radio TV Film at Northwestern University. It's March 25, 2017, and I'm in Chicago at the Fairmont Hotel here to interview Michele Hilmes, Professor Emerita of Media and Cultural Studies in the Department of Communication Arts at the University of Wisconsin, Madison.

Michele Hilmes has profoundly shaped how scholars think about and research media. She's known for four impeccably researched and argued books, including “Radio Voices: American Broadcasting 1922-1952,” a seminal text in radio history and feminist media studies, that inspired a generation of radio scholars, as well as “Network Nations: A Transnational History of British and American Broadcasting,” a pioneering work in transnational media history.

Her textbook, “Only Connect,” is also widely praised. Michael Curtin calls it, "The best cultural history of U.S. electronic media that is currently available for classroom use."

She's written some 50 articles and chapters, chaired dissertations for 27 doctoral students over more than two decades at Madison, and has edited volumes including, “The Radio Reader” and “NBC: America's Network,” with new work coming out on the history of the radio feature and on transatlantic television.

She's taught and lectured around the world. She was a Fulbright Scholar at the University of Nottingham. She has served on many editorial boards and has recently chaired The Radio Preservation Task Force, a landmark meeting at The Library of Congress.

We meet one day after Michele has received the distinguished career achievement award, the highest honor that SCMS bestows. As my colleague, Lynn Spigel pointed out last night, she is the first broadcasting historian to be recognized in this way. And it's a perfect time. We live in a Hilmes-ian moment in media studies. There is evidence of her influence everywhere. The growth of radio studies, television studies, and sound studies, three fields that are very difficult to imagine without her influence, her advocacy, and legendary capacity to enable the work of others.

The widespread use of her terms, sound works, streaming seriality, all over this conference. The way her questions, like how a medium asks who we are and who we are not, shaped inquiry into a broad array of media. The sophistication with which scholars approach race, class and gender in broadcasting-based texts, the dominance of archival research practice, and a commitment to stitch the experience of media history into our present moment.

Indeed, it has been remarked by several people to me at this conference that the fact that SCMS has an ‘M’ for media in it at all, is testament to Michele's influence.
Michele is known for her work on voices, and last night she spoke about community. I've had to look up a few of some of the materials sent in support of Michele, and so I thought I'd bring in some of the voices of the community that she helped to shape, so let me mention a few statements about what they had to say.

Many, like Bill Kirkpatrick from Denison University, and Derek Vaillant from the University of Michigan, speak of how she catalyzed scholars, and taught them how to really love media history, and if you've talked to her students, the word love comes up very often about how they feel about this subject, thanks to her. Colleagues like Mary Beltran from the UT Austin, and Alejandra Bronfman from UBC spoke of her generosity in collaboration.

Leadership was another theme. Chris Sterling from Georgetown emphasized her impact on her field, while her colleague Jonathan Gray called her, "The most important person in the cultural life of media and cultural studies at Madison," which is quite an honour. Elana Levine from UW at Milwaukee, calls Michele the figure in broadcasting history, and when Michele retired some 47 former students, colleagues and admirers, Cynthia Meyers, Lisa Parks, Allison McCracken, Eleanor Patterson, Norma Coates, Jonathan Sterne, a community of voices from all around the world created a podcast produced by her PhD student, Andrew Bottomley, thanking her and wishing her well. I was one of them too.

Michele, it's an honor and a pleasure to speak with you for field notes.

Michele Hilmes: Thank you very much, Neil. That was a wonderful introduction.

Neil Verma: I hope I got everything right.

Michele Hilmes: Oh, totally right. Especially all the superlatives.

Neil Verma: Oh good. Right.

Michele Hilmes: That was good. Honestly, that was really touching. Thank you.

Neil Verma: Great. Last night at your acceptance speech, you spoke a little bit about community, so we're going to talk a little bit about your career, and I thought that would be a great place to start. Community has been both a subject of something you've studied and also something you've tried to foster, so I wonder if you could talk a little bit about that theme before we got going, and what the term of community means to you.

Michele Hilmes: Well, you put it in an interesting way, because I was thinking about academic communities last night. But in a way, my work has always been concerned with the way that media, particularly broadcasting, connect communities and create
them, and one, of course, is the national community, the sense of national identity.

Neil Verma: Yes.

Michele Hilmes: Especially something like broadcasting that's so tightly tied to the national project in so many places. So I think that question of, you know, who we are, as you said, that's Toni Morrison's phrase, who we are, who we are not, has been a kind of a driving force in my work. I'll say that I mentioned a moment ago that reading your colleague Jake Smith's interview of Jim Naremore for this keynote series, made me think about how much Jim's perceptions had shaped my worldview.

And I was thinking about how national identity fits into some of his work. Also in the work of Bob Sklar, a mentor at NYU. I'll tell you a little anecdote. I wanted to call "Radio Voices," "The Nation's Voice," 'cause that was really the central concern for me, but the publisher said no, nobody will know where to shelve it in bookstores. So they said, "Radio Voices" would be better. I said, okay.

So I think, yes it's that sense of community and how media in particular shaped that and carry it across often borders in a transgressive, or in a kind of a boundary exceeding way, has been a major thread running through.

Neil Verma: Yeah, I think that's true. Okay, so we're gonna get to your college life, and your graduate school, and your teaching, and all that.

Michele Hilmes: Okay.

Neil Verma: But before we do that though, I wonder if you could take me back to your early life, and one of the questions, we often ask it in my program, our students and some of the people we meet are, did you ever have an ear-opening experience, like as a young person? Is there something that kind of sticks in your mind that maybe you didn't even realize at the time, but you did later on, or somehow connects that you feel in some way started you off thinking through listening?

Michele Hilmes: Well, I have to say, I was born just as television emerged as a medium.

Neil Verma: Yeah.

Michele Hilmes: And so, in terms of my awareness of radio, radio had been as a ... or you know, I'm just thinking of radio now in terms of sound, so that to me was a closed book until I finally did the dissertation research and realized what had been going on, on that aural medium unbeknownst to me for most of my life. But, I do remember that my parents, both, were musical. They loved music. And so there was always music playing in our house, either on the radio, which is again what my version was of that medium at the time, but also recordings and all kinds of things.
And what I remember specifically them listening to quite a bit were the ... you know the spoken word comic LPs from the 1950s and ’60s. The ones, let’s say there was one that satirized JFK. I forget the comedian’s name, I’m sorry about, but satirizing Lyndon Johnson, I recall. And these kind of comic records that my parents would put on and play, I have no idea where they came from, but I thought this is really interesting. What is this about? And I think that was probably one of those overall experiences that you might mention.

I’m gonna think about that now, and come back later, and-

Neil Verma: Right.

Michele Hilmes: Okay.

Neil Verma: We’ll do take two.

Michele Hilmes: Okay, good.

Neil Verma: Okay, so why don’t you take me back to your days in Indiana and tell me a little bit about what got you interested in media, in media studies.

Michele Hilmes: Well, I have to say I came to Indiana with absolutely no clue as many of us do, I’m sure when we’re undergrads. And I’d had a rather restricted Catholic girls school that I’d attended before university. And I think the only college guidance I got from the nun who was our counselor was, first of all you should go to the homeschooled of our Sisters of Providence, the religious order. I wasn’t interested in that. I said, I thought I’d like to go to Indiana, and she said, that place is a den of iniquity.

[Laughs] And I thought, okay! I’m going!

Neil Verma: Sounds good.

Michele Hilmes: Yeah. But what I really remember, not so much iniquity, but that it was like leaving a rather narrow environment and being in this intellectual smorgasbord, where you could take absolutely anything. And I think I did. I think my first year there I took only one department, I repeated a class in, and that was music theory. I don’t know why. I was just interested in music theory. But it was just a... these are wonderful public universities which were an inexpensive option for those of us who were coming up in the ’50s and ’60s. My parents had not gone to college. It was the place where you went. You just went to this great state university, and there are all these wonderful, intellectual resources there.

So to make a long story short, having no clue, having majored in art for a while, and political science, I didn’t know. Took a semester off actually, to try to figure it out. And then came back to Indiana where they had just started a film track in
the Comp Lit department. Literature had always been a very big interest of mine, and so now in this literature department was a film program.

Jim Naremore had a lot to do with setting that up, bringing together film classes from all over the campus and putting them into this program for which you could get credit. So I ended up as a film major. And it was just at the moment when IU was kind of crystallizing its concentration, and now of course it's gone on. It has this wonderful film program, and it's still in existence, and has really had so many leading scholars teaching in it.

But I feel particularly grateful just to have encountered Jim Naremore, who was a huge mentor, and supported and encouraged me and let me be a junior TA. It was an undergraduate teaching internship for his class. And then also, helped me to write a honors thesis in film. The first one I believe, at Indiana University, Undergraduate Honors Thesis. Which gets you into the library, and you have to do actual research into languages. I like languages, too, and that was the Comp Lit part. So I had to do research in French and English and incorporate that into the thesis.

So that was a hugely formative experience, and a wonderful place to be.

Neil Verma: Can you tell us a little bit about what the classes were like? What was a film class like?

Michele Hilmes: Well, I do remember a horror film class, taught by Harry Geduld, another professor there at the time, where we traced out the history of the horror genre and I have to say, before that class, I didn't like horror films. I was afraid. It would really ... I'd have to leave the room. But after sitting through two horror films per week for 15 weeks, I can now sit through anything. Just cold, you know? Doesn't affect me.

So that was wonderful. We had a lot of genre type classes. Jim Naremore taught a History of the American Film class. Again very formative. Hitchcock, Welles, Hawks, all these wonderful American directors. And they were also, I mean, the curriculum was still coming together. I know that there were many foreign language film classes, but I don't think many of them were around at the time that I was there, at least I can't recall it.

But I'll say one more thing. So one summer, Jim let me sit in on a seminar that he had put together. It was really a graduate seminar, and I wasn't taking it for credit, but he just let me sit in on it. Where his objective was to actually produce a book on one of the most iconic films that sort of blows out of the water many of our ideas about creative authorship and film, “Casablanca.” “Casablanca” as you probably know, was rewritten, re-written, had people coming in and insert comic parts, changed directors, it had a really vexed history in the studio, and yet it turned into this coherent, just a beautiful film.
And so the idea was that all the students in the class would take one aspect of it that he divided up, and they would all write their paper on it. And it would be published as a book. And that was fun. I didn't have a chapter myself, but I got to see these people working through these issues.

The book never came out. That didn't work, but that was okay. It was a wonderful piece of pedagogy.

Neil Verma: You mentioned that you taught as well as an undergraduate. Could you tell us about that?

Michele Hilmes: Well, I use that term loosely. I had an undergraduate teaching internship. I did very little. I think my only real task, let's see, I did a cover discussion section or two when a TA couldn't make it, and I felt totally intimidated and didn't really know how to ask my fellow undergraduates questions. But I could be helpful just distributing exams. Honestly, the teaching, they got nothing out of me. But what I got out of that class was simply how it works. What it's like to be teaching at that level, which was incredibly valuable.

Neil Verma: I wonder if you could say a little bit about the disciplinary originating of it in Comp Lit. Because this is true for a lot of film programs, that they came out of language classes, English classes, and also Comparative Literature. What do you think that brought to the study of film at this time?

Michele Hilmes: Yeah, I think you're right, I mean, also film classes would come out of art departments sometimes when people are more concerned about visuality and that sort of thing. But yes, I think that the most common trajectory was that people in English departments or Comp Lit, started thinking about film as a literature. And in fact I believe there's a journal with that title to this day.

And that's certainly what got me interested in it, was thinking about film as this incredibly important way to tell stories the same way that literature did and does. And it did shape the film. My honors thesis had to be on the auteur theory because this was something that carried over well-

Neil Verma: Yeah, of course.

Michele Hilmes: People could understand.


Michele Hilmes: Got it. Yes, we know what that is. But with this new emphasis on the visual and on screen composition and those kind of things, that of course, become the defining element of the field of cinema and media studies, the different way that film tells stories. But I think, you know we got things like the emphasis on that auteur moment, the director as author, which is still a dominant
conception, and only recently have people begun to look at the other kinds of authorship that go into film.

And not just the writer, you know that would be the other logical place. But all those people from set design to the below the line jobs. So I think that is something, merging from that literary model, and broadening out to a wider creative author perspective is what we derive that's very beneficial from literary studies. But also that our field had to break away from it as some point in order to develop.

Neil Verma: The question that I wanted to ask is that another important through-line in your work has been feminism and feminist media history. Can you think of a point where you began to assume the identity of a feminist media historian as that became an important part of who you are and how you write?

Michele Hilmes: I think it started with me; I was always a feminist from the beginning, I have to say. I think it started when I saw the Boy Scouts going off on a camping trip one time when the Girl Scouts had to go down and make pin cushions in the church basement. I thought, well, something wrong here. But in terms of carrying that sensibility, just to mention it, when I was in IU, I did not have one single female professor. I had a couple of TAs that were female, that were teaching, but there was not one. It was all completely men, and it was ... the TAs in the department were mostly male, so for me to get a little inside look at this, and be accepted, was actually quite a big thing. I wasn't sure if women really could go to grad school.

I mean, woman being told, don't go to law school, you know you'll never make it there. You know you can't succeed as a woman in this field. So those kind of perceptions, and then the beginning of feminist work, going to NYU and actually having some female professors and being exposed to feminism on a more theoretical level, I think was... and yes, was certainly a part of my life but also the whole point that film and then television, and I was sort of getting more interested in television around this time, was a female dominated art form in the sense of the audience.

And film spoke to women. The television audience has always been 60% female, you know. So how do you reconcile the fact that the theories are not talking about that with the fact that these are media that are so much involved in women's lives, and in the depictions of women representing women, et cetera.

So it kind of grew out of that, and then to have... to go to Wisconsin and have a colleague like Julie D'Acci, whose book on Cagney and Lacey and she hates it. Actually I shouldn't have said that. Julie hates it when people say her book is about Cagney and Lacey. It's not. It's about women in television. About feminism and television. And so that kind of example really I think shaped my work. Strongly.
Neil Verma: You mentioned a couple of times NYU, so why don’t you take us to grad school? What was that like? What were your classes like? What were your peers like?

Michele Hilmes: It was, as I say, a girl from Indiana, who hadn’t ever been to New York to suddenly be plunged into the middle of NYU, and New York City was... I cherish that particular that first semester, ’cause I felt that every morning walking out the door was an adventure. What were you gonna find? And NYU was like that, too. Such a collection of personalities in the Cinema Studies Department at NYU back then, we had it Annette Michelson. We had Jay Leyda. We had Bill Everson. We had George Stoney. I mean, these are people who developed the field, and they didn't come from any training in it, most the time. They had built up their own expertise.

And then other people were beginning, who had had some, at least a literary or other kinds of background in film, like Bob Sklar, like Bill Simon, and Bob Stam were there at the time. But it was an urban school. And people talked fast and they came and went fast, and if you tried to, you know, try to catch your professor and schedule a meeting. That was hard. There wasn't a lot of... it was a great intellectual community, but I wouldn’t say it was the kind of community that encouraged just a socializing and casual contact.

So in a way I always felt like I was fighting to get attention and to get time from my professors. But it was incredibly stimulating to be there when Bob Sklar was teaching, as far as I know, the first television seminar ever offered. And just so many smart people with so many smart ideas. It was quite a place. Lost my train of thought right there. [crosstalk 00:20:14]

Neil Verma: Well, I wanted to pick up one thing. What do you think of as like the kind of big intellectual forces that were shaping the curriculum at that time?

Michele Hilmes: Well, we had, oh, and a person I didn’t mention was Noel Carroll, teaching Film Theory, and Noel was really an astonishing guy who walked you through in his Film Theory class every theory that people had ventured so far about film, and tore it to shreds. Picked it apart. And you knew what all the weaknesses were in that film theory, and then he went on to the next and did the same. And I have to admit, you got to the end of the class, and you thought, well, what is a good film theory? And I think it woke you up to thinking you’re not bound by these theories, but yet these are helpful, they can reveal some things.

But what do we need to get to other questions? And that was, I think I took two semesters of Film Theory with Noel, and I think that was really a profoundly influential experience. You had a lot of people doing avant-garde film classes, like Annette Michelson. Well, I took a class on Dziga Vertov with her, and I think an avant-garde film class.

And of course that was New York at the time, so it was going on around you, and that was a wonderful aspect of taking, of being at NYU at that time. And I
think the openness to extending it into television studies, and bringing Brian Winston in, who had been this ... worked at the BBC and wrote on documentary and there was a sort of a breadth to the field there that NYU offered.

And, I don't know how I could forget this little thing, history. Because Bob Sklar with his attention to cultural history, and then you had people like Bill Everson, who had such a deep knowledge of film history. It was really quite an amazing program, if not the easiest place to be. But great.

Neil Verma: Last night in your talk you mentioned a little bit about Bob Sklar's VCR. And how this had an important role to play-

Michele Hilmes: The VCR.

Neil Verma: The VCR. So maybe you could tell us a little bit about that, and then maybe we can more broadly talk a little bit about the role of technology in how we study media.

Michele Hilmes: Yes, I have to say, we have to remember that this was the dawn of the VCR. We didn't always have these things in our house, hard as that is to imagine today. And so yes, it was 1978, and finally, I think VCRs had just become barely affordable. I don't know what Bob paid for his, but it had to have been $500 or so, which was lot of money back then. And the thing weighed about 60 pounds, and it was the size of a suitcase, and what I remember in particular was, you know you'd put a cassette in and you'd push a button to make it... You know it popped up, put the cassette in, it would have to lower itself, and this would take about 30 seconds... whir, whir, whir, the thing would settle. It was really, I'm talking... anyway.


Michele Hilmes: Yes. It was like, oh my god, is this machine going to work? And then, by gosh, you could watch television programs and you could watch a scene and say, oh, let's go back and watch that again. What's going on in this scene? You could record programs off the air, I mean that's the only source of them back then was recording programs off the air. And look at them out of their context as a standalone work.

So this was immensely, it was incredible. It was what really sort of created the possibility to create deep television. Not just as some kind of social force or as an industry or as a social practice, which we could certainly look at television as a whole, but to really focus in on the individual program, which is in the tradition of film studies.

And of course, yes, we also had to go to his loft in SoHo to do this, 'cause he couldn't schlep this machine into the department, I mean, that wasn't gonna
work. So having a seminar, again, a girl from Indiana going to a loft in SoHo was just, I thought, “Oh wow! This is film school at NYU!”

And the people produced really amazing analyses of programs in that class, so that was a really formative experience. And it was the VCR, you know, that made it possible.

Neil Verma: Can you remember some of things you were watching?

Michele Hilmes: I remember I wrote a paper on “All in the Family,” and looked at ... but I was looking at the sitcom as a way to bring in difference and dissent and then neatly contain it. Smooth everything over and then come back next week and do the same thing, and of course, other people have written about this. But, I don’t think they had written about it yet, not that I’m putting out my early graduate papers as anything. But it was just a way to think differently about what was going on in the show.

And I wish I could remember more now about who was in that seminar, and the kind of things we were watching overall. We watched some news, we watched some factual programs, but I think everybody was focused on this area of drama, comedy and then dramatic shows because again, more continuity with the film studies tradition.

Neil Verma: I think maybe it’d be good to pause, now that we’re at the VCR and just, if you could say a little bit more broadly, the span of your career, the kinds of ways you accessed materials has changed incredibly.

Michele Hilmes: No kidding.

Neil Verma: And it’s just ... it’s odd because in our field we often think about technology and determinism and how technologies do or do not shape or seem to shape different fields of human activity. I wonder from your perspective now, it certainly is true that it seems that having this VCR there in some ways changed television studies.

Michele Hilmes: Absolutely.

Neil Verma: You know. And I wonder if you could think of some other similar examples of, over the course of your career, where that you felt a sharp change, or a kind of choke point, where something shifted as a result of technology.

Michele Hilmes: Just to avoid seeming too technologically deterministic as we all know, it's not just technology, but how it’s put into use, and it took a little while for the video store to emerge, for there to become a place where people could easily rent films. At first just films. There were very few TV shows when they first came out.
And I'll just give this as an anecdote. I remember I was living in Mobile, Alabama at the time, and the first video tape store opened, and you walked into this, it was like a used bookstore kind of place, several levels. They had arranged the films by video distributor. I don't know why that made sense to this owner, but it seemed like that was the way he thought that people were going to be identifying what they wanted. And of course what happened when Blockbuster came out about a couple of years after that, and the big video... of course you want it by title, by genre, by author. So the ways that not only the technology emerged, but it got understood and organized. I mean, it really all had to happen in a few years.

And I recall when the first Blockbuster opened up in Mobile, the first thing I did was go out and rent, it was an Alain Resnais film, “Mon oncle d’Amérique,” which I had really loved when I’d seen it in the cinema. Had never had a chance to see for ten years. Went out and rented it and watched it and that was such a great moment.

Again, we've gone on from there. But it took a while for television to start to be treated as a medium that could be marketed by video. So of course, once I was at Wisconsin, they had this great media library that you could use for educational materials that you could use in your class. And they were organized by the professor who had commanded that the media center people tape whatever the show was. So you had the John Fiske collection, the Julie D'Acci collection. You had the Lynn Spigel collection. And there were others. These were the television people, but there were with the film... David Bordwell collection, the Lea Jacobs collection.

And I just remember that the Lynn Spigel collection hung on way after Lynn had left and gone on, but we were still using the Lynn Spigel collection in our teaching. And they were all taped off the air, and I remember, too that one of the things that they did contain, which would change when DVDs became the norm just a little while later, was that they had the interstitial materials. They came on, you saw some ads, you saw the station IDs, you saw promotions for new shows. You saw a little bit of programming and went to a commercial break.

I mean, all of that was caught on the video, because that's how video worked. Later, when finally distributors first of all began putting out some video sets of programs. I mean, that took a lot of shelf space when you had something like “Perry Mason,” which went on for ten years. I don't think they every did that in video to my knowledge. But that would be like two feet of shelf at least.

But when DVDs came out and that television albums became more feasible, we cleared out the media center collection and got rid of a lot of material. And I swear it wasn't a year, you know how when you throw something out, almost immediately, you haven't used it for years, but then two months later, oh my god, I need that thing.
Neil Verma: That's when you need it. Right. Of course.

Michele Hilmes: So we get a call from Cathy Johnson, who's a researcher at the University of Nottingham, and she's doing this project on interstitial elements at television shows, and do you guys... “Oh God! We just threw out hundreds of tapes that had interstitial elements from the '80s on.” So, that was a big change. And also teaching of course, you know with video, we had to cue things up, but you could also edit your little ... and then with DVDs, which at first was hard to edit, so we didn’t have the digital editing technology. At least most us didn’t. Great to have all that media release, but you couldn’t really use it as readily.

These, I think are big... we all lived through this, and we just sort of adapted but it made a big difference as to what we could study, what we could teach, and how we could do it. And then, of course, you have the digital moment, when all of a sudden these things start appearing online. YouTube comes out. I think I relied probably too much on YouTube in my teaching in the last ten years, 'cause there was such a wide variety of material out there.

So, being able... I'm sorry, I'm gonna go back for a moment to tell a story I haven't told before, but when I first started doing the research for “Radio Voices,” I needed to get a hold of radio programs. I looked for them everywhere, a few public libraries, you know they had bought these little box sets years ago, but I found that where the radio archive was. It wasn't in the libraries, it wasn't in archives, it was mostly in the hands of these amateur collecting organizations. The North American Radio League, and the one that I joined eventually, SPERDVAC, The Society to Preserve and Encourage Radio Variety, Adventure and Comedy, which-


Michele Hilmes: Costs fifteen dollars a year ... it is a mouthful. And you joined, and filling out everything by hand, this was not the electronic age, it's hard to imagine. Sending them out to California, they're located out there near L.A. Getting back in the mail this box that fit into a binder that at three inches thick of their tape catalog. What a treasure! I mean, I spent weeks just poring through what was available.

But then, you could only request, I think it was eight shows at once, and you had to fill out a little form with the right numbers, send that with a box of blank cassette tapes to California, wait four weeks, six weeks, get the box back, hopefully with the correct show. Usually it was. Correct shows loaded onto the tapes, hopefully you could actually hear them because a lot of it was pretty poor sound quality by then... and then as soon as I get my one box I would whip off the order form for the next one and send it out to California.

So, imagine that. And now, most of those groups have put at least parts of their library online. I don't know if SPERDVAC has. There are rights issues but let's
face it, American Radio, the rights issues got totally left in the dust by those collectors years ago. So now the Heritage of American Radio Drama Comedy, not everything selectively, is out there for free, or very little money.

And that's an amazing... and so I would say, here we have the advent of digital, the MP3 file, which could be shared, which can be streamed, which is so flexible. And that's really when we see the advent of sound studies as a field. Like the VCR, we could get this stuff, and listen to it over and over again, and share it with our students and all that. So, I think it's an amazing moment for sound, and of course there's been such a huge outburst of new sound forms, new sound work as well.

Neil Verma: That's a great segue into my next question, which is I mentioned earlier could probably be a whole hour on its own, but I think one of the great opportunities of having you as part of this series is that when you were coming up, it was sort of the moment where film studies became a thing, to use a contemporary expression. But also over the course of your career, several fields, television studies became a thing. Radio studies became a thing. Sound studies became a thing. And I'm wondering if you have some insights about, maybe thinking comparatively across those different moments, was it something for you... there was a key journal, or a key scholar, or a key conference, or maybe a key technology, or a key institution.

If you could speak a little bit about this topic, about how these different fields of media study, the moment where they become, where it suddenly feels like it's real. Where it suddenly feels like a viable intellectual and pedagogical enterprise.

Michele Hilmes: That's a great question. I don't know if I'm gonna be able to do total justice to it. I've been thinking about that for a long time. But just off the top of my head, I think, you know for television studies, it was the VCR, but it was also the advent of cultural studies. So now you had a body of theory that could let you ask the kind of questions that you needed to ask of television that were different from the questions that people had been asking about film.

And yes, they could be applied to film, too, and they were. But for television you just needed to have a set of theories that would allow you to think about every day life, an ordinary culture, and the structures of time, and the ways that television embedded itself into the home, and then reflect it. You know, gender, and class, and all those things. So those two things were necessary.

For radio studies, it was a different thing, because it was going back into the past. Because at the time, and again we hadn't had this sort of outburst of contemporary sound work. So the idea that this whole field of endeavor, this whole incredibly creative lively art, had been swept under the blanket of history, so to speak, when television emerged.
It certainly was a shock to me. If you had asked me when I went to NYU, the Cinema Studies, whether I would be looking at old radio programs ... what? Why? Why? Don't even know what they are! So that was what got me thinking that... because of cultural studies, but also sort of post-structuralist theory, this whole new idea about history and historiography and what produces knowledge. How historical knowledge is produced. What is the archive? These kinds of concerns that were very much a part of the post-structuralist moment.

And so being able to think about radio in terms of those varied knowledges and think about what created that absence in the archive, in the absence of our body of knowledge is what sort of drove, I think, not only me, but a lot of other people to sort of begin to discover radio. And then, of course, finally getting better access to the actual materials of radio.

Just to veer just slightly to the side for a moment, there's a whole thing about archival studies and had the development of media archives and although that had been, you know, there's a couple of really excellent books, like Haidee Wasson's, and also Carolyn Frick's, a study of how film became an object of study and a more respected cultural form because of archiving practices.

You know, the digital moment really sort of kicked archivists in the butt, too. It was like, “Oh my god! What are we gonna do about this?” And so that's another kind of key technology-related, but I think also scholarship-inspired moment of innovation we're still working on.

And then finally, the moment of what I'm calling... I'm pushing my terms still, sound work. The moment when all of a sudden it's not just radio anymore but these new forms of sound are bursting out all over, enhanced by, I mean created by the digital media revolution, which is what it was.

I think again makes us rethink how we understand the difference between media. How we can, how these media inter-penetrate. And in fact, as your book on Corwin demonstrates, how there are people who all along had careers that spanned these different disciplines or these different areas of creativity. But it was we, scholars, that were kind of boxing them in, you know, this is a film, this person does television. In fact, it was much more loose than that. Much more inter-medial and there was much more influence between those phases of their lives.

So I think that is, and again, something that technology helps us, we can now get access to all of these forms though one little laptop computer, that's all you need. So it's really... this is an amazing moment to me for things coming together. Not only trans-medially, but also across national borders, and that's something that we haven't mentioned, but media used to be a much more of a national box than it is, and now we're finally beginning to break out.
Neil Verma: A lot of things that you’re pointing to I think are really astute. Media archiving, post-structuralism, cultural studies and political economy.

Michele Hilmes: Yes.

Neil Verma: The Birmingham School I know has been very influential to you. I wonder if you could say ... do you think that some of these discourses come through specific books, or specific scholars? Who kind of lead the way on some of these things? Or do you think that they’re much subtler than that and they kind of percolate into our institutions a bit more slowly?

Michele Hilmes: Well, I think it’s certainly there are key figures that made a huge impact on how people thought about things. I mean, I think about Raymond Williams’ “Television: Technology and Cultural Form.” That was one of the groundbreaking moments to think about television studies differently. Even though I would quibble with him a bit, there’s a long tradition of British scholars looking at American TV and saying, “The horror!”


Michele Hilmes: I think Mimi White has written about that. But yeah, so even though you could see that kind of... but still that cultural negotiation. I mean it's good to have an outside observer saying, “What’s going on here?” That was a moment when... that was a book that I think made a big difference.

John Fiske was my colleague at Madison for ten years, and his reading, John Fiske and John Hartley's “Reading Television,” was another really... that book had a huge impact. I remember teaching using that in one of my first television classes down at Spring Hill College at Mobile, Alabama. Long time ago. And thinking, “Oh, this gives me just totally new ways to talk about television to students.” Then John Fiske, he would say, and he sort of became the poster child for everything that a lot of people didn't like about cultural studies, and wrote some brilliant books that had made a huge impact.

And I think, you know his name isn't coming up as much these days, I think it will return. But we sort of moved away from that moment and into other things. And then, in terms... I don't even know how many people I could point to in terms of feminist studies, because that has arisen in... it had such an impact on the field, and there were so many people doing wonderful work.

But I do know, in terms of critical race studies, when I wrote “Radio Voices” I gotta say that one of the first questions I asked myself was, “Why is it that when film evolved, you had D.W. Griffith's ‘Birth of a Nation.’” This was the big break through film and it's all about race, and it's very racist. And when radio comes out, it's ‘Amos and Andy.’ We're going through these same things again. What's going on here? Why is that?
So, for me, having his book come out by Toni Morrison right at the time when I was starting to think about this, it's her “Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination,” it was really just a breakthrough to see her talking about this kind of racial imaginary that American media had been rehearsing over and over again. Beginning of television, what happens? “Amos and Andy” goes on TV and creates another big discussion about what television was gonna bring to our American racial imaginary.

Neil Verma: Talk about how you came to Madison. You were in Alabama before? And just if you could tell me a little bit about what the job was like in the early years? What were the dynamics of teaching? What was the community like? Just kind of walk us through some of your early times there.

Michele Hilmes: Well, I have to say I think it's the luckiest thing in my life that I went to Madison, because it just... the expansion of your thinking when you are around such a community, incredibly smart people, not only your colleagues, but the grad students that come through, and I was telling people last night, I mean, it's true, I have supervised 27 grad students. That means 27 deep reads into an area of, subject area, that I would never had picked up on my own. I mean, how could you?

They're really getting to plunge into this with these smart people. It was such an education to be there.

Neil Verma: I've read some of those dissertation, too, they're pretty intense.

Michele Hilmes: They are intense. I mean, we really had a ... it wasn't just a dissertation mill-

Neil Verma: No, no, no.

Michele Hilmes: It was a dissertation... unless you think of mill as like hard grinding work, yes-

Neil Verma: No, whenever, whenever I came across a dissertation by one of your students, I expected appendices.

Michele Hilmes: Oh, gosh.

Neil Verma: Yeah.

Michele Hilmes: That's probably correct. But you know they were just really brilliant people. People often didn't make it through the dissertation process at ... it's too bad, they were smart people, too, but it takes a certain kind of talent to carry through that kind of project, and we really had some wonderful, wonderful folks come through.

So going to a ... and also, I have to say, leaving New York, we went to Mobile because of my husband's job. I was still writing my dissertation, and I, in fact,
wrote most of it down there, and I had a small child at the time. She’s a big child now. But I taught at a little college called Spring Hill College, 800 students, a Jesuit school, liberal arts. Interesting place. One of the first to admit women and African-Americans in Alabama. But very small, and you know where you have no one who is your real colleague in terms of your subject area in a department, and you're down in the Gulf Coast where you feel kind of, I felt very isolated.

And so, to begin. Finally I finished my dissertation, and that was out there, and I published a few articles, and then to realize that other people began to read my work, and it was a way that suddenly I had out of obscurity. And I got a phone call, it rang in my house, I was sitting there working. This was in the summer. I think it was around 1988 or so, and the person on the phone said, "Hello, this Tino Balio". Well, I’d read all of his work, he had been at the University of Wisconsin for so long. And I thought, I really, I literally looked at the phone, like, come on, you're teasing. This couldn't be. And he says, "I'm editing this book, would you like to contribute a chapter, I've read your dissertation."

It was amazing. I said last night it was like being discovered at Schwab's Drugstore if you’re Lana Turner. And I did, and that sort of put me in dialogue with some of the Madison people. Julie D’Acci and I were on a panel together at an SCMS Conference in L.A. It must have been, well, I'm not sure when it was, but probably 1990 or somewhere around there.

And so then when they had an opening when Lynn Spigel left the department to go out to California to USC, they invited me to go for a semester. And I wanted to go, but I had a 13-year old daughter at home, and a husband who had never been left on his own, with a child before. He did fine, incidentally. They both did fine.

But in the meantime, I went up to Madison. I had an appointment scheduled to do some research in the archives, and on a break I strolled over to Vilas Hall. Beautiful Vilas Hall. That's ironic. Or sarcastic, I should say. And I remember walking through the hallway, saw Bordwell, Jacobs, Fiske, here they all were. Was hard to imagine being there. But of course I accepted and spent that visiting semester in a deep blizzard that lasted most of the January and February in Madison, and realized, well, first of all, how much I was gonna have to up my game if I went to Wisconsin because teaching graduate students there was pretty intimidating.

And then finally, received an offer to join them permanently. Film studies goes back quite a ways. Television studies was just developing. I think John Fiske had been there about three years when I came in. But it was the kind of place that brought in students who they... they didn't bring in students who they knew or had any doubts about. We didn't bring in students who we didn't think could go all the way through the PhD. We looked for those people, and it was a privilege being able to do that because we could fund them.
All of the grad students that we brought into Wisconsin were fully funded by teaching fellowships. And they worked hard. But it was a way to support the folks and train them in a professional career, and I can't imagine a better place to be.

Sorry. Now I miss it. So I'm being a bit nostalgic.

Neil Verma: I wanted to get into a bit of your teaching, but since you've ended on that one point, one of the things about this series is trying to understand a little bit more about the contextual conditions that made the field grow, so part of that is institutional... the institutional part of that has to do with the state, the University of Wisconsin system is particular. Has to do with the time in the nation and internationally, and so some of those things resolved into very specific things, like graduate student's support, and some are a bit more nebulous.

So can you tell us a little bit from your perspective about the kind of general conditions that allowed their field and department to grow.

Michele Hilmes: Really, the late '80s and early '90s were, I think, pretty seminal in the development of media studies as an adjunct to film because around that time, first of all, the media or communication as an undergraduate major was increasing. And I remember when I first came to Madison in '93, our classes were getting bigger and bigger, there was a lot of demand for this area. And so we were in a position of not hiring as much faculty as we would like. I have to say that Wisconsin always held a tight string on the budget.

But we were able to build our program, and also just to benefit from that swell of interest by undergrads, and develop new classes and explore new areas, so that was I think a moment when just the swell of interest, generally, built the field. Also, there were organizations growing up to support scholarship in this field, and of course, SCMS right around that time started to be more welcoming to television work. They'd always been welcoming to sound work, although again, as I said, there wasn't that much of it going on.

But we had other organizations like... I was for a long time a member of Consoling Passions. That was a conference that was a yearly event, a yearly conference and an organization that just existed to put on that conference that was a feminist television studies perspective on media because feminism was not being, many people felt, adequately incorporated into the more mainstream organizations. And also television always remained kind of a marginal thing, but here was a conference where feminism and television were right at the center.

And so, it's still going today, these wonderful conferences once a year, or I think it's once every other year now, all around the country and in fact in other places too. That was a great way for feminist scholars to come together and to work on things. And various other kinds of... the Visible Evidence, the documentary
conference, sprang up. So I think the '90s were a very fertile period for media to bloom.

Neil Verma: The other question I wanted to ask about Madison is that, you've spoken a little bit about your colleagues, how important they were to you. The other thing is the archive. Right?

Michele Hilmes: Oh, yeah.

Neil Verma: And one of the things you’re known, one of several really important scholars in this turn towards archival research is a kind of fundamental bedrock aptitude that you have to have in this field.

Michele Hilmes: Thank you for reminding me of that.

Neil Verma: Yeah. So tell us a little bit about Wisconsin's archive and your work in archives and the way you teach students how to use archives.

Michele Hilmes: That is a really key point, and that is one advantage. Of course, other universities have wonderful archives, too. But I have to say that Wisconsin was one of the first places to begin collecting way back in the late 1950s. Not only the Wisconsin Center for Film and Theater Research, which started focusing on movie industry records and also into the archives, I mean actual films and television programs, but also, this is probably too much detail, but there's the mass communications collection was not actually handled by the Wisconsin Center for Film and Theater Research, but by a consortium of people from other areas of communication, notably journalism, who began... we got the NBC archive there because of their efforts and a lot of others. So Wisconsin had this commitment early on to collecting in that area and built up these wonderful resources that people could use.

We have the National Educational Television collection, which is huge. It's thousands of boxes and very few scholars have really explored it yet. It's so little explored, this is a sign, they still keep it off-site. It's when a collection gets hot they move it on...

Neil Verma: That’s right. Yeah.

Michele Hilmes: Right now, you have to order in advance. But it's a great one. It started movement for archival research, and I give a shout out here to my former colleague Tino Balio who began doing media industry research with his United Artists book, really before it became such a big part of, as it is today in media studies and in film studies, and then built those archives. And to hear Tino talk about the early days of the WCFTR when he was flying out to Hollywood and staying in the Beverly Hills Hotel, and meeting with these stars and directors. Edith Head, the costume designer and getting their, persuading them to... 'cause you could get a tax write-off back then. See, this was the thing.
Neil Verma: Ohhh...

Michele Hilmes: At that time, you could get a tax write-off. You would get your archive assessed and then you could donate it and take the tax exemption, the charity exemption, and that law changed in the 1970s, which really had an impact on archival collecting. But Tino was lucky enough to be there in those years. But that was a considerable job.

And so, as the resources developed, more and more people began digging into media history, and that tradition I think is one of the most solid... of course scholars in other countries are doing archival research, too, but I think we were fortunate here, maybe for that tax exemption, I don't know.

Neil Verma: Sometimes it's something like that-

Michele Hilmes: The federal government-

Neil Verma: Sometimes it is a one line on the tax form, that things grow around.

Michele Hilmes: But the archive's built here, and then people from all over the world come and use these archives, which are generally very accessible, open, fairly well-maintained. Don't get me started on some things, like the BBC-written archives are probably the best ones that I've ever been in. But they are proprietary, and you have to get permission for everything you use, and that has not been the tradition here.

Neil Verma: How have you taught students to work in archives? A lot of your students are some of the most accomplished archival researchers. Certainly in radio studies and television studies. I wonder if you can say a little bit about that.

Michele Hilmes: I think one’s love and enthusiasm rubs off-

Neil Verma: Right.

Michele Hilmes: And I have to say, I mean, I love an archive. I really do. My husband has not quite adjusted to this, but you know, I wanna go to ... but I need to spend two days in the archives. I love being in an archive. I love mystery novels, I think it's every time you go into an archive it's like you're opening a mystery novel. What are you gonna find?

And I think that rubbed off, and I also think that having those resources there, it's just a target, and then ... I'm mostly talking about media and cultural studies 'cause that was a separate program in film. But our film area... I guess I'm separating them, putting them together sometimes, but you know it was quite a tradition in film studies at Wisconsin as well. And I remember teaching many seminars. I tried this a few times with undergrads so that was a little more difficult. But always with grad students just to say we're gonna spend the next
three weeks of class, or four weeks in the archive. Find a collection, and analyze it. What's in it? What questions do you think you could ask using these materials that would be a contribution to what's out there already? What we know about film and media.

And they would come up with the most amazing projects. I mean they'd find these things that were really significant that nobody had ever discovered. I just remember one person managed to get a hold of an unprocessed collection of a radio star nobody had ever heard of. She was from Wisconsin, she donated her entire clippings archive, and just going through these dusty, you know... building up the career of this obscure but really interesting person.

And I think the real mark, here, I've give you, the real mark of a dedicated archivist is when once somebody hauled out a box and opened it. Again, it was unprocessed and clearly had not been touched for years. And mouse droppings fell out onto the table, and we're like, “Oh great! Mouse droppings!”

Neil Verma: Mouse droppings! That's a good sign! Right!

Michele Hilmes: Right! For a long time. So you know things like that, how can you possibly exceed the excitement of mouse droppings? So, that’s what I say about archival research.

Neil Verma: Excellent. We haven’t talked too much about kind of what you think as the big debates over the course of your career. I think a part of it because a lot of your work has been so archivally-oriented, and so kind of digging in very specific materials. So I thought I'd ask you, what in your mind are kind of the biggest debates that helped share the field? But more than that, what are some things that went on around the periphery of that, that people might not know, or think are very important?

Like I think, for instance, the influence of cultural studies is interesting case here, where it is some ways it was very acrimonious, but in another way it kind of entrenched questions of political economy into the discourse.

Michele Hilmes: No, I mean definitely the biggest battle, like kind of theoretical battle, was in the '90s over cultural studies and post-structuralism, or post-modernism. You remember the post-modernism debate in the '90s. And there was a lot of talk about the end of truth, and the destruction of knowledge, and a lot of that was very overheated. But what it marked, I think, was just a moment of producing knowledge differently, of understanding what the job of the scholar was differently, not proceeding necessarily in the line that had been developed over the course of the 20th century, which tended to canonize a certain kind of work, a certain kind of mainstream.

To put it bluntly, I mean, this is the moment when we start seeing the rise of African American studies, Asian studies, all these different approaches to
culture that had been actively excluded from the canon before. And it was cultural studies that allowed that to happen, by insisting that the culture of every day life was important, and that there was power involved. That was the other thing that media was really about, media and most other aspects of life, required an analysis of the ways that power of various kinds - race, gender, class - worked.

That was the '90s. And now, that's so calmed down and we so recognize that these different pathways to knowledge are important. That it's hard to recall how intense that debate got at the time. So going around, I mean, I think that an interesting thing... I mean, so this is built into media studies, this focus on power. So now for instance, I have a colleague in my former department, Lori Lopez, whose major area of study is media activism, specifically Asian-American media activism. How people use the media themselves to adjust and to challenge society. To adjust their position and to think about themselves and organize differently.

I think that's the kind of thing you just wouldn't have seen in a curriculum 20, maybe have to go further back now. Has it been that long? Thirty years ago, yeah, or god knows, when I first started IU, that would have been the unthinkable. I don't feel that I can speak with any authority, really, on the digital moment. I've certainly thought about how it affected the media that I've mostly studied. But I know that there is amazing work coming out, and there's gonna be more, assessing what this transformation of the way that information and knowledge is conveyed and understood, and how it can be accessed.

I think we're in the middle of another one now. And I look forward to seeing how it turns out, but in a way, I'm sort of glad I [inaudible – need clarification 00:59:25]

Neil Verma: Last night you spoke a little bit about the importance of media history, especially in our contemporary moment, and the importance of the humanities. I wonder if you could say a little bit about that? Do you feel like this is... we have a pretty large community now, certainly much more than at the earlier part of your career and that's partly as a result of your work. But at the same time, people feel as if, in a way there's less urgency around things like media history and humanistic approaches to cultural analysis.

Michele Hilmes: You know, it's interesting. I think that, certainly within the academy, the interest is not changed, but it seems like universities are under more and more pressure to show how the education leads to jobs. And I have nothing against emphasizing the STEM field, you know, Science, Technology, et cetera, but the thought that that should come at the expense of education in the humanities is a deeply painful one because I think the two are so closely associated.

You go to a university to learn to think, to learn to write, to learn to critique, to learn. I think you go to learn the history... what your culture is about. How your
society is structured. I mean, I don’t see how you can send someone out with a
degree in science who would be ignorant of all of those contextual... it's
incredibly important to contextualizing things, but it does seem like the
humanities have been under attack, and fact, when I first suggested when we
were putting together the SCMS website, the reconfigured website, when I was
on the board, we had a lot of discussions what was gonna go on there.

And I said, “I really think we need a stronger statement that’s about SCMS.
What is SCMS? What do we stand for? What do we do?” And I said, “I think
what we really need to say is that we are, we stand for the humanities. We
stand for a humanities-based approach to media studies because I think that’s
important.” And some people said, “Do you really think so, because couldn't
that hurt us? Is that really, would that be a wise way to identify ourselves?”

But other people said, yes, and that was kind of the consensus that emerged. So
we did. It hadn’t really been part of any statement about SCMS before, but it's
still on the website now. Because I wrote the “About” part, and it's been nicely
edited and changed over the years. But that part of it is still there, and I think
that's key.

Neil Verma: I went over the mission of this, and I thought to myself, well, you know, the idea
here is to figure out what are the specific and unique ways in which media
studies became institutionalized, became studiable, became understandable,
entered into a kind of academic life. Is there anything else about that that we
haven't touched on that you think we should talk about? That you think you
have specific insights on because of your career?

Michele Hilmes: You're asking me these hard questions.

Neil Verma: This is the easiest one.

Michele Hilmes: I wish you had submitted them in advance.

Neil Verma: Right, yeah. No, this is the, have you anything more to say? Right. No, what I
mean is just that it's an ongoing project, right? The institutionalization of
certainly a lot of the sub-fields that you're associated with. All of which they
now have scholarly interest groups.

Michele Hilmes: Yeah.

Neil Verma: Radio studies scholarly interest group. Sound studies. Television studies. All of
these areas are really quite anchored in a lot of the work and the practices that
you've been involved in.

Michele Hilmes: I helped to start the TV, television studies SIG.

Neil Verma: Oh, did you?
Michele Hilmes: Oh, yes, yes. That was a moment at SCMS. It wasn’t, I mean, there were a lot of people behind that, and it certainly wasn’t me, but yes. So yeah, that whole idea, actually that whole idea of having scholarly interest groups that can specialize in something-

Neil Verma: Right.

Michele Hilmes: I think was a very good one that people had a few years back.

Neil Verma: What do you think will be kind of the next steps in these kinds of efforts to institutionalize, that’s the word I’m looking for, to make them self-sustaining, internally coherent, but also growing ways of thinking about media?

Michele Hilmes: One thing, and this may be a more instrumental answer to that, but I mean lot of this happened at the time when people could more easily organize and talk to each other via digital media.

Neil Verma: Right.

Michele Hilmes: We could, we had a way to congregate virtually that could, you know, we would congregate physically, too. So people could form these groups and communicate with each other in a new way starting in the late 1990s, early 2000s. And I think that is something that will continue, and one that will allow people to enter into dialogue in different ways. Things in our field flow and that emerged as kind of an electronic journal, but a journal of a different kind, that was more flexible, that could be more informal, that would let people communicate in a different way.

Then there was the blog moment, which I think might be passing now. We had a wonderful blog called Antennae, that Jonathan Gray, and [crosstalk 01:04:26]

Neil Verma: Big fan of Antennae.

Michele Hilmes: Well, you contributed to it many times.

Neil Verma: Yeah, great, great blog.

Michele Hilmes: So that was a great way for people, again, a different form. And I have to admit, I loved it. I didn't contribute to it that much because I'm not that comfortable writing in that way. I just, you know, it's a different way for me to... I wanna check all my facts and make sure I’ve got... I should just let go and say something more informal.

But anyway, it does take a certain orientation. And it’s a useful one, and a good one. Okay, so now we’re getting post to that moment, and I’m sure there will be many other, podcasts, all these things that we have innovated, and they are wonderful. It’ll be interesting to see how that all comes together in the larger
picture because the other thing that you see is that, okay, there's more journals now than ever before. I just was involved with starting up this feminist media histories journal.

I mean, that's so specific. But what a great thing to do.

Neil Verma: Right, right.

Michele Hilmes: But every time you turn around, somebody's starting a new journal, which means that a lot of school, or a lot of departments around are, when people publish, they're saying, you know, is that a new journal? Like, how established a journal is that? Is that journal publication gonna count as much as this one in “Critical Studies in Media Communication,” or some of the other bigger more...

“Cinema Journal.”

And then, on the really disturbing side, there's the rise of those for-pay journals that I'm sure you've gotten solicitation. The ones that will publish anything as long as you pay them to do so. Do you ever get those in your inbox?

Neil Verma: Probably. I don't open them.

Michele Hilmes: Well, that's smart.

Neil Verma: I assume they're probably trying to steal something from me.

Michele Hilmes: Right. Well, they are in a way. And so, thinking about what's happening to our field. Publication. How much longer are academic publishers gonna be publishing books, and how is that going to change how we evaluate what is important. What has merit in our field? I think we're kind of entering into an era where that's gonna become more controversial. There's gonna have to be more discussions about how to negotiate this kind of opened up field of media.

What do we media scholars want all the time? We want an opened up intellectual universe. Let us in.

Neil Verma: Right.

Michele Hilmes: Let our point of view come through and don't be stuck in ways that would exclude us. Well, I think now, we media scholars in particular, might be the ones having to think about how do these new mediated modes of sharing, circulating, qualifying and evaluating intellectual scholarship, how is that gonna change over the next ten years? And, I don't know. Again, I expect to be sitting on the sidelines for this battle, which is kind of a nice place to be in a way.

But I think you, Neil, are going to be right in the middle of that.

Neil Verma: No pressure.
Michele Hilmes: No pressure at all. But you know, when you get it figured out-

Neil Verma: Okay, I'll call you.

Michele Hilmes: Please do. Let me know what's going on.

Neil Verma: Last question. What do you listen to these days? Are you listening to anything great that you wanna get on the record, and something you're excited about? Something that makes you kind of renew some of your interests? Whether new or old.

Michele Hilmes: Okay, this is very random, 'cause I listen to a lot of things, and I love a lot of things, but I love listening to the BBC online, you know we can do that now. They exclude their television from us, but they let us listen to their radio for free, right.

Neil Verma: Yeah. Don't say that too loudly, because I'm worried.

Michele Hilmes: Think they're gonna start, oh no. Well, I mean, I love BBC drama, and it just is so amazing to me that they are still producing drama, always have, with these fabulous stars. Stars of screen and stage are in the BBC drama productions, so I listen to them all the time. And there's other programs, too, but those in particular.

This is music. It's not sound work. But I think I might have mentioned this in a blog, which is where you would mention that kind of thing. There's this incredibly wonderful radio station from France, called Fip, F-I-P. France Inter Paris, I think it is. And it plays a mix of French and international and American music, where you will hear things that you will never hear on American radio, or probably streaming services. Classical, folk, jazz, hip-hop, rock, all mixed together in one of those wonderful kind of hippy, FM, from the '60s kind of modes. I recommend it. It's streaming. It's free, too, from the French.

Neil Verma: Excellent.

Michele Hilmes: Maybe for now.

Neil Verma: For now.

Michele Hilmes: For now. And then I have to say, as an historian, there are so many wonderful history blogs. History, I'm sorry, history podcasts out there. And I listen to quite a few of those, jumping around, but I particularly love living in New York, is “The Bowery Boys.” Have you ever heard that?

Michele Hilmes: Two guys ... well yes. Two guys who just, they take you around New York City, and you can either just listen or you could actually go, and they stand you somewhere, and you look at what's there, and they sort of fill you in on the whole background of how this place evolved.


Michele Hilmes: And it's really great.

Neil Verma: Yeah.

Michele Hilmes: They can be a little too cutesy sometimes.

Neil Verma: Of course.

Michele Hilmes: A little bit too much of that comic banter, but it's quite good.

Neil Verma: Outstanding. Well, Michele, this is been a really wonderful experience for me, and thank you so much.

Michele Hilmes: Neil, thank you. I really appreciate your questions.