Conversations with Bill Kristol

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Taped December 13, 2017

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I: Movies & American Popular Culture (0:15 – 20:36)

KRISTOL: Hi, I'm Bill Kristol. Welcome to CONVERSATIONS. I'm very pleased to be joined today by my old friend John Podhoretz, the editor of *Commentary*, co-founder of *The Weekly Standard*, and many other distinctions over the years. We're going to talk about movies or film, which is – Why does "film" sound so much more elegant than movies? What's the history of that?

PODHORETZ: I think the idea is that there were three terms usually used for the overall art form, right? There's *cinema*, *movies*, and *film*. So *movies* is the informal; *cinema* is the academically pretentious; and *film* is the aesthetic or something, I guess. I mean, in the end, they're interchangeable. Most people who like movies tend to call them "movies," on the simple grounds that it's a more appropriate, populist term for this. It's, I think the term that was invented by industry people to describe what was going on: that these were moving pictures, and then that was shortened to *movies* in the nineteen teenss or something like that.

KRISTOL: And you've written a huge amount about individual movies and about film, more generally. As I said, you and I have such overlapping interests in things we've discussed and written about. But this is the one area where you've done a huge amount and I've done nothing. So explain to a bewildered – not bewildered, but somewhat bewildered amateur. I mean, how did you get so interested in movies? What's the origin of it, and we can go through the kind of –

PODHORETZ: Okay, so I'm 56, and I grew up in Manhattan. My parents were movie-goers, quite passionate movie goers, and I was the youngest of four kids. And my sisters all went to the movies, and it was a thing that we did on the weekends to keep ourselves entertained. And I think that just as I think you were and I was, there's a certain type of boy who becomes a complete-ist, like fascinated by the overall question of something. So, like, if you're interested in baseball, you start getting consumed with baseball statistics, and you buy the baseball encyclopedia and you memorize —

KRISTOL: Yeah, that was more me.

PODHORETZ: And I did that, too. So you memorize baseball statistics or you learn everything you possibly can about football. And at some point, I guess, in my early adolescence I was gripped by this with movies. So that would have been, you know, in the early 70s, which happened to coincide with

probably the high-water mark of American moviemaking. The 1930s and the 1970s are arguably the two best periods for American moviemaking.

KRISTOL: So say a word about the 70s – you say it was a great decade. I mean, what made it great? What were the great movies? Was there some breakthrough? Or just a change in orientation or --

PODHORETZ: I mean, a lot of different things led up to the sort of explosion of powerful, adult and serious American filmmaking of the 1970s.

The studio system, which had governed all moviemaking in the United States, these five or six sort of cartel system, really completely broke down. So that they no longer *employed* directors and writers and actors; every production that was going to be made was, in effect, a kind of freelance job everybody was signed up for. And so instead of there being an assembly line there was a kind of – I don't know how to describe it – it's more like publishing books or something like that. There was a *thing* that people came together to make, and then they broke apart again.

And this coincided with the sort of general period of American liberation, like liberation from mores, liberation from sexual conservativism, liberation of language, liberation from the rules that said you couldn't show violence and all of that. And all of this.

And then the youth culture, the sort of elevation of the idea that, you know, youth was really what was important and not, you know, sort of serving old age.

So these young directors, young writers, young performers, all somewhat unconventional in the realm of this very prettified medium kind of took hold, and it was the go-to popular art form by leagues – not books, not novels, not television shows, nothing. Movies were what people talked about, they were what people quoted, they were the kind of lingua-franca. So that you know if you wanted to understand America in the 1960s, you had to see and have some understanding of *The Graduate*, or *Bob and Carol and Ted and Alice*, or *Midnight Cowboy*. These kind of serious, somewhat dramatic, kind of oddly toned productions that did things in realistic fashion that movies, American movies, simply hadn't really done before, which was just try to show life in some sense as it was or crystalize life as it was, as opposed to presenting an idealized image of American life or melodramatized an image of American life.

And that, a lot of bad came out of that. There was a lot of crap and a lot of pretentious stuff. But, at the same time, then you had this kind of series of, you know –

KRISTOL: So what are some of the big ones?

PODHORETZ: So the unquestioned high-water mark are the two *Godfather* films, made in '72 and '75 by Francis Coppola, based off of Mario Puzo's junk novel. So you have this very weird thing where Mario Puzo writes this pot-boiler novel about the mafia, which is arguably turned into a great, enduring work of art; certainly it's a work of popular art. Whether 100 years from now people will describe it and discuss it and analyze it the way they discuss Dickens or something like that, I don't know.

But, *The Godfather* and *Godfather 2*, which I think is a lesser movie, but *The Godfather* is kind of like the *Summa* of all moviemaking up to the time. It's a family drama; it's a crime drama; it's a period drama. It is formal. It is beautifully acted. It's gripping. It's melodramatic, but not too melodramatic. And it has this character arc about somebody, in this case Michael Corleone, moving from kind of innocence to experience, and along the way he is horribly and indelibly corrupted.

So it's like this great, American, tragic success story and it has something for everybody: so leftists like it because it's this portrait of capitalism as fundamentally a gangster thing; and there is a kind of conservative fantasy element to it about the enduring nature of family and the bonds of family that go beyond all, surpassing, you know, rules and regulations; and this formal beauty with which it was made

where it's like a movie, if you watch it, freeze-frame any scene and you can't imagine that it could have been done any better, at any moment, any shot.

So that's the big one. And it's violent, and it's long, and it's grand. It's grandiose. It's got nude women in it. It's got, you know, it's sort of this –everything that was old and new was all wrapped up in it. And then you have this whole other series of movies, included by deeply controversial people.

Like *Chinatown*, Roman Polanski's, you know, the movie that Roman Polanski made before he was arrested for raping a 13-year-old girl, which is a movie about the horrible, about the nature of sexual injustice – I don't know how else to say – corruption and injustice. This corrupt figure, this titan of Los Angeles, who it turns out is sort of destroying the nature of Los Angeles, meanwhile has engaged in an incestuous relationship with this daughter for her entire life, and the innocent detective who finds himself way in over his head about it. Great script by Robert Town; this amazing, brilliantly directed thing.

There's that. There's *Network*, the movie about, you know – a satirical movie about a TV anchor who goes crazy and then sort of the first reality television in which, you know, sort of TV newscast is taken over partially by Black Panthers and by psychics and soothsayers and pro wrestlers and all of that. This is 1976. It's 40 years before the Trump election, you know, so –

What else? What other great films from the 70s? *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*.

KRISTOL: There's the Spielberg – doesn't he really begin then with–

PODHORETZ: Right. So, in the middle of this decade, in 1975 comes – well, and then the – *Godfather* made more money than any movie before it, by leagues.

Then, two years later, comes *The Exorcist*, or a year later comes *The Exorcist*, which is, again, a very extremely difficult movie to watch that everybody in America saw. This punishingly dark, terrifying, you know, vision of demonic possession. And that made scads of money.

And then in 1975, Steven Spielberg, who I think was 27 years old, made *Jaws*. And *Jaws* is a potboiler, again, about a shark attack on an island, you know, Massachusetts resort island, like Martha's Vineyard. And it then makes way more money than either of those made. And it's released in the summer, and it has a teenage audience.

And, in a weird way, all this educated the studios over time, or the people who are making these movies, in the notion that you could make all these movies that would make good amounts of money and have a lot of cultural impact. But you could also hit these grand slams that would make 500 million dollars, would make everybody rich beyond imagining, would hit every audience, would get every viewer. And this was the beginning of what was called, what came to be called "the blockbuster era."

So *Jaws*, *Star Wars*, *Close Encounters* [*of the Third Kind*], which was Spielberg's movie after *Jaws*, *Indiana Jones*, which was Spielberg's movie – Spielberg and George Lucas's movie after *Close Encounters*. These movies changed the nature of popular culture, because suddenly you had way more people seeing them than had ever seen any individual movie before; and making three or four times the amount of money that anybody ever expected a movie to be able to make.

So just at those moments, just at the moment that Hollywood was reaching a kind of grand place of creating these cultural artifacts, it also was sowing the seeds of its own cultural and artistic destruction in the form of wild, commercial, seductive commercial success.

KRISTOL: Because these grand slams, these –

PODHORETZ: Because then you wanted to hit a homer – it's like, again, not to go to the baseball analogy, but in the dead-ball baseball era, great players weren't home run hitters, right? They hit .350, and they had a lot of base hits and they ran, they stole bases and stuff. And then came the homerun hitters and it was like, "Well, why have a single's hitter when you can have a guy who can score a run with one blow, and he's more exciting to watch?" But then you have more strikeouts and you have fewer, you know – So, it's like that.

And the problem was that, you know, as we progress over – jump ahead like four decades – Hollywood doesn't know how to make the movies that tell stories about America and Americans. It only knows how to make these gigantic, or it only tries – its entire being is now built around making movies that will function more as like roller-coaster rides that can get people to come, go to them over and over again, than it does in hitting the sweet spot by getting everybody to go to a movie because everybody else is talking about it.

KRISTOL: And that begins the decline of Hollywood's influence on the real culture, on popular culture?

PODHORETZ: Well, yeah. The motion-picture industry's influence, let's say. I wrote a piece for *The [Weekly] Standard* a couple of years ago about a director named Paul Mazursky. So Paul Mazursky, who died a couple years ago, was a comedy writer and occasional actor and then he helped create like *The Monkeys*' TV series. And then, he became a director in 1969; he made a movie called *Bob and Carol and Ted and Alice*.

So *Bob and Carol and Ted and Alice* is a movie about two couples, one is sort of a cute hipster couple, very attractive, and they go do every kind of 60s, touchy-feely thing. And then there's this kind of Jewish, totally middle-class Jewish couple who are totally wrong for each other. And this couple – there is a scene in the middle of *Bob and Carol and Ted and Alice*, a movie that made 180 million dollars at the box office when tickets cost three bucks. There is a ten-minute scene where Ted and Alice, the mismatched couple, are just getting undressed at night, and she's taking off her makeup and he's picking up a book and they get into an argument about, I don't know, the kids or picking up – I can't remember what it was about. But it goes on for ten minutes without interruption. And it was this, and this was – nominally the reason people wanted to go see it was like it was a sex comedy, because they were going to wife swap, that was the whole thing, like Bob was going to sleep with Alice, and Ted was going to sleep with Carol, and they go to Las Vegas to finally have this weekend together where they're going to wife swap. So that was kind of, ooh, sexy and, you know, *verboten* and all this.

But what made the movie is the ten-minute scene with the couple that is, that is clearly going to end up probably getting divorced at some point. No such scene could exist today. You couldn't get two minutes, you couldn't get an audience to sit for two minutes through such a scene. But it was a crystallization. It's very funny; it's brilliantly written. But it's a crystallization of a moment, you know, of the way people live. And that's not what people go to movies for anymore, at all.

KRISTOL: And who goes to movies these days, compared to when you started in the 70s?

PODHORETZ: Everybody went to movies in the 1970s. And, now, teenage boys go to movies. I mean, the classic Hollywood audience is young males, 30 and under. And that's why the most reliable form of commercial moviemaking, which has been true of the last decade, is movies derived from comic books, which have this built-in audience not only from comic books themselves, but from previous cinematic and television versions of comic-book characters.

And because special effects are now so dazzling that you can take these people, place them in these astonishing settings and make them look almost real. Whereas like when we were kids – So there's like a Superman series on TV. It was ridiculous. Like it was this kind of overweight guy, you know, George Reeves, and there's kind of a bulge in his stomach and then some wire picks him up and tries to fly him around, you know– It's preposterous.

And now, like, you know, you can put anybody in any setting and it will look like it's really happening. So the technology caught up to it; the source material is something that was presold, as they say. And if you do it well, if you're Marvel, which is the best one, if you do it well, you start off with an expectation that you're going to make a billion dollars off a movie worldwide.

So, that's what Hollywood now knows what to do. So you have, like, Marvel, the Disney – the plan for Marvel – it's now 2017 – they have a list of 20 movies they're going to make between now and 2024. There's no script, there's no director, there are no actors, there is only the product. It's a product line now.

So in that sense it's weirdly like the old movies, except that the old movies, they had this studio and they had sound stages and they had to keep them busy, and so they made a lot of Westerns – but they cost ten cents and they were made in two weeks. And now these movies cost 300 to 500 million dollars just to get off the drawing board.

But they're not about *us*. They're not about people. They're not about life. They're about escape.

KRISTOL: And they don't seem to be essential to the general culture as movies were.

PODHORETZ: Right. So, *Avatar*, which is largely – it's basically an animated movie, James Cameron's *Avatar*, which was released in 2009. So it remains the largest single box-office movie. It made 2.7, 2.8 billion dollars. And so the female lead character in the movie is named Neytiri. So in 1980, when ABC makes *Dynasty*, the show *Dynasty*, the biggest hit show of 1980, the lead, the female lead character was named Krystle – K-r-y-s-t-l-e, not K-r-i-s-t-o-l.

And in 1981 and 1982 the name Krystal was the second- or third-most-popular baby name in America. Neytiri did not break the top one thousand in baby names. This is the most popular movie ever made, right? So, billions of babies named Scarlett after *Gone with the Wind*, you know. This is one of the places where people get the names they name their children.

So that to me is a sign that the most popular movie ever made had no cultural reach, had no impact. That people didn't take it – they went to see it because it was like a ride; it was a 3D movie, which had amazing 3D, it's really a cartoon, they wore the glasses, they went a couple of times, so they could see all the effects over and over and over again. But the story meant nothing to them. The characters meant nothing to them.

II. From Movies to TV (20:36 – 39:39)

KRISTOL: Has TV replaced the movies in that respect?

PODHORETZ: Oh, yeah. So that's the other – So, of course, the great threat to movies – so movies. So let's say go back to 1946, the year after World War II ended. There are two mass media in the United States: There's the radio and there's motion pictures. That year, it was said 90 million Americans weekly went to the movies, because what else were they going to do?

KRISTOL: And the population was only – was probably 200 and something –

PODHORETZ: 200 million, or maybe less.

KRISTOL: Yeah.

PODHORETZ: So, half or 60 or 70 percent of the country –

KRISTOL: Is going to movies.

PODHORETZ: Went to the movies every week, physically. Because A) they didn't, there wasn't much else to do, and, there they were. They were reunited as family, had to go out together, you know, husbands and wives, getting together.

And then the next year or two years later was when television really broke through. And not only did television break through then, but there was this moment in 1948 when the Supreme Court ruled that the vertical integration of the movie business, where studios also owned the theaters that they projected the movies in, was an anti-trust violation. And the studios were forced to sell off their movie theaters. And this was incredibly damaging to them financially, because now they had to pay rent, they had to rent out the spaces or share revenue with somebody who was going to show their product.

And then television came in, and suddenly there was this rival medium, which was in your house, you know? And it was a real sense that the motion picture industry was like on the ropes. So what could it do differently for movies? And this is what started in the 50s and really exploded in the 60s was they could be more explicit, like movies are in your house –

KRISTOL: TV.

PODHORETZ: A TV's in your house, so it's got to be something acceptable in your house, so you can't – All the programming is very vanilla, you know, unthreatening, unchallenging, even though it's all westerns and kind of dumb family sitcoms and there's nothing that impressive. There are some like TV plays that make you feel good because they're a little more literate. But, basically, you didn't have anything that was even remotely risky.

And then the movies start taking risks. They get a little tougher; they get a little more violent. They get a little racier. They get a little sexier. And then the 60s, that really gets blown entirely out.

So, TV never progresses artistically much beyond this plain vanilla box in the house, because the cultural consensus was you didn't want dirty, you know, gross, dirty stuff in your house. And then TV progresses because cable television comes in. So TV is also over the air; it's regulated by the government –

KRISTOL: Three national networks.

PODHORETZ: Three national networks. And it's regulated. Literally, they're renting the airwaves from the government and they can be punished, fined, theoretically could be shut down by the government under the terms of the Federal Communications Act.

So then cable television comes in, which has two qualities, right? One is that it makes your reception good, which was really the reason everybody went crazy about cable, because TV reception was awful and what you looked at, you saw was wavy and there was snow and it came in and out like a bad radio station.

And then because you were paying for it – and it was a subscription service, you didn't have to have it; nobody ordered you to have it – then *they* could start showing dirty stuff. HBO, which was really the first pay-cable service could show movies with breasts in them and bad language and stuff like that. And when HBO started making programming in the mid-80s, it went very low. It made crap. But it made crap where you could see breasts. It made crap where you could, you know, that was – it was very clear that its value-added was explicitness, you know, sort of soft-core porn and stuff.

KRISTOL: Right.

PODHORETZ: Then something happened. So, as the movies get worse, as cable threatens broadcast television, broadcast television decides it's now got to get better, because now it has a rival. It could be plain vanilla because 30 million people would watch it no matter what. Suddenly there's a competition inside the house between TV and cable, and suddenly throughout the 1980s and then really exploding in the early 90s, broadcast TV gets a lot better. The shows get a lot better. *NYPD Blue* starts and *ER* starts and *Friends* start and *Seinfeld* starts. And these shows that are just –

KRISTOL: *Law and Order* was –

PODHORETZ: *Law and Order*, *30 Something*, *My So Called Life*. These shows come on that are sort of, it's almost like they're from another universe, another cultural-artistic universe. They are sharp, they're clever, they're daring, they're somewhat dirty, and they are also trying to give you a sense of what life is like now as opposed to, again, some fantasy image of America.

And then in response to that, suddenly cable is now threatened by broadcast. So HBO stops making junk and suddenly starts making really good stuff. Mostly – inevitably the one that you would mention is *The Sopranos*.

KRISTOL: I think of that as the breakthrough show.

PODHORETZ: That and *Sex and the City* were the two breakthrough shows of the new age of television. I mean the real breakthrough show of the new age of television was *Hillstreet Blues* in the early 80s, followed by *NYPD Blue* in the early 90s. But *The Sopranos*, which, oddly enough, follows in the line of *The Godfather*, you know, is, again, this kind of epic American story about, essentially, about a working-class family, well-to-do working-class family – only the family's gains are from monstrous criminality.

KRISTOL: Right.

PODHORETZ: And how they live and what this means and how the criminality affects them and what their lives are like and what their children – what becomes of their children because they are engaged in this horrendous activity. And nothing like it had ever been made for television – nothing that good, nothing that involving, nothing that gripping, nothing that sort of like, you know, elevating in an odd way, even though it was so violent.

Similarly, *Sex and the City*, which was just a show about four women, single women living in New York, had this very inventive structure borrowed from *Seinfeld*, and it was the ultimate fantasy show about, like, how you really wanted to live now, what people's lives were like in the fantasy world of the center of the universe. So TV, and from there TV just takes off, all these networks start making – all these networks are born and they start making all these new shows.

Showtime has shows, AMC has shows, TNT has shows, TBS has shows, FX has shows, and then fast forward another ten years and the streaming services start. Netflix, Amazon, really come in around five or six years ago. And suddenly there is this insane glut of watchable television that is exactly what the movies were like in the 70s. Dark, noire visions of America in trouble. Oddly enough, I think if you had taken to heart the messages of TV as cultural signifiers in five or six or seven years ago, you would not have been surprised by the rise of Donald Trump, because all the shows –

KRISTOL: Yeah, which shows?

PODHORETZ: *Breaking Bad*, which is a show about, you know, a high school teacher disappointed in the nature of his career, gets cancer, and then with a fallen-from-upper-middle-class wastrel kid starts a drug empire in hard-scrabble New Mexico among working-class whites whose lives have sort of tilted into despair. All these, *The Sopranos* – knock-off shows like *Better Call Saul*, which is a knock off of *Breaking*

Bad, *Ozark*, which is on Amazon [*sic* Netflix] –

KRISTOL: Could you argue that the zombie shows and all this, they're also sort of –

PODHORETZ: Absolutely.

KRISTOL: Dark and –

PODHORETZ: But they're basically like America after the financial meltdown is, like, not a good place for the people. They're all struggling to get by, they're all in debt, they're all consumed by it, and they're all tempted to take the easy way out with drugs or sex or criminality or something like that. And it was, I guess, the way people have tended culturally, to look at pop-culture artifacts as signs of something, the popularity of the shows, what were themselves a marker that something dark was –

KRISTOL: But those do become the – I mean, culturally significant, people are talking about them. And I guess the development – I don't know, when did this happen? – of having a serial.

PODHORETZ: Right.

KRISTOL: Is that the right term? I mean, a plot that develops every week.

PODHORETZ: Right.

KRISTOL: Young people just take that for granted. But, of course, in our day, every TV series, to my knowledge, was not a series. It was an individual episode.

PODHORETZ: Right, which is important.

KRISTOL: It had to end. It ended at, you know, 7:59[pm]. *Gunsmoke* had its resolution. You could watch next week's show if you chose, but there was no – And the same characters continued, but the plots didn't continue. And at some point they became serials.
Streaming, I guess, has changed the character of it some, because now you can binge watch them instead of watching every Sunday night or every Tuesday night or something.

PODHORETZ: Or taping it, right. But it's odd because I have young children, and so I have very little experience myself of the binge-watching experience, which seems to be something you could really only do when you don't have little kids in the house, because when are you going to have seven hours, you know, without interruption to watch something where there's a lot of cursing and nudity. I don't have it, myself.

But, yeah. So the difference there is, yeah, that it affords – there now are infinite ways to consume pop-cultural product. And, again, that's one of the things that has driven movies out of their once central position in the popular culture when they were really the only, it was the only game in town, where people at the top of their form, the top of their game, writers, directors, actors where – that was where they gave their all, that was where they, you know, where they tried to do enduring work.

And, you know, what pops into my head, like, a movie that doesn't even have, you know, I wouldn't say people talk about it or think about it much– So *Marathon Man*, which is a movie about basically what if Josef Mengele came to New York in 1976 and he comes cross-wise of a graduate student at Columbia for some reason – I don't really remember – and he tortures him, right? So there's a scene where Laurence Olivier tortures Dustin Hoffman because he wants information out of him, and he says, "Is it safe?" And he keeps saying, "Is it safe?" and then he takes a dentist drill and he jams it into his teeth.

So, everybody in America, for whatever reason, a year after *Marathon Man* knew the line "Is it safe?" Did they all see it? No. Maybe Carol Burnett did a parody of it, they saw the trailer; they saw the commercial. I don't know why, but for some reason that happened again and again and again, like little bits of dialogue, scenes, famous scenes, all of this were something that got sort of like embedded in the national consciousness. Movies don't do that at all anymore. Television does it some.

But since you don't have that thing where 50 million people have seen it, or have been through it, you have discrete groups who know it, like there are people who could tell you all sorts of things about *Game of Thrones*, across all kinds of cultural barriers; it's now the most popular show in the world. It's the most popular show in American television. But if you didn't know anything about *Game of Thrones*, it wouldn't be surprising.

KRISTOL: Right. And it doesn't exclude you from that many conversations, unless you – I mean, there are *Game of Thrones* conversations and then there are non-*Game of Thrones* – but it's not like you have to get the illusions to it, or the same with *Deadwood* and all these others, I would say.

PODHORETZ: Right.

KRISTOL: You could never have seen a zombie show or you could love them. But, you know –

PODHORETZ: Right. Yeah. So people then also have their groups, right? So they have their friends with whom they talk about *Game of Thrones*, and then they have their friends that they talk about politics with; they're not necessarily the same group. But I mean just to give you an example, the *Big Bang Theory* is the most popular, has been the most popular show on American television for a decade, on broadcast television.

And it is an enormous hit worldwide. And I have not seen more than two minutes of it, myself. That would have been impossible – I mean, I would have seen every episode of the *Big Bang Theory* 40 years ago when I was a teenager, even if I didn't like it, somehow, because you just, it would just have been in the ether, you know.

KRISTOL: Right.

PODHORETZ: And it would have been on twice a day and on broadcast, and everybody I knew would have watched it. And almost nothing has that.

But upper-middle-class people consume television now or consume quality television now the way upper-middle-class people went to the movies. And they even do it, oddly, in some of the same ways – like one of the marks of your cultural sophistication was you were a fan of foreign film, which was darker and more like chamber music than a symphony and sometimes very existential and, you know, very serious and more gripping, much more sophisticated than, you know, horrible American, you know, nonsense.

KRISTOL: Right.

PODHORETZ: The same way that people felt about European literature or something like that.
So now, suddenly, there's this big worldwide market for non-American television. Though I will have to say, it's not because it's more serious and it's more existential, you know; it's Europe. But because Norway is making detective shows and Ireland is making, Germany is making detective shows, and my aging parents sit at home ten hours a day watching *Borgen* from Sweden–

KRISTOL: BBC.

PODHORETZ: Yeah, any Detective McGillicutty of the Constabulary – and I don't even know what these shows are. And then there's like Israeli shows! Israel is a country of eight million people. There are like

three or four fantastically good Israeli shows. *Fauda*, a show about an Israel counterintelligence unit and *Hatufim*,[Prisoner of War] which was the source of *Homeland*. And then a show called *Srugim*, which is about young – it's sort of like the *Friends* of Orthodox Israeli, like six, young, Orthodox single people trying to navigate contemporary life in Jerusalem.

And, you know, like *Israeli television*? I mean, Israeli television was so awful, because why would there be a market, it's a tiny little country? How could they spend any money on television? Well, suddenly there's a worldwide market, Netflix bought *Fauda*. You can watch *Fauda* – you should watch *Fauda*; it's fantastic. And so, even there, sort of like, people who don't mind reading subtitles now have all this stuff they can consume.

KRISTOL: But I suppose what you're saying is it's not central in the way that movies were. I mean, it's not central to the overall cultural discourse.

PODHORETZ: Well, the question is, is anything? Do we have communal cultural experiences anymore? I mean, there's all this talk about how the NFL – like, you know, Donald Trump has gone after the NFL and the NFL's ratings are way down because of the kneeling issue. But the NFL ratings, I think, are way down because everything is: every large, communal activity does not have the draw that it did. And once it doesn't have the draw, the decline in its importance is going to be very rapid. Because the number of people who watch something just because everybody else watches it, right?

KRISTOL: Yeah, that's a huge point.

PODHORETZ: So if everybody else isn't watching the football game, if you are the sort of person who could watch it or could not watch it, you're not going to watch it. And then your son isn't going to watch it because you're not watching it, because he wants to watch it with you. And then, suddenly, you're down 20 percent, 25 percent if you're the NFL. We just don't have those – everything is atomized in a way that I think is both scary and healthy.

I mean, it's healthy because why should we all be having the same – we're a nation of 330 million people, why should we all be watching the same sports event? That's weird. That's like North Korea, you know.

KRISTOL: Right, right.

PODHORETZ: Where they force you to watch the same sports event. If you don't have to, why should you? And, on the other hand, there was some kind of binding glue to the culture that's now no longer working.

III. Back to the Classics (39:39 – 1:12:34)

KRISTOL: Now you mentioned earlier, I'm just curious, the 30s was the golden age before the 70s. Say a word about that in both the movies, and the kind of cultural significance of them, and sort of how that happened.

PODHORETZ: So –

KRISTOL: And do people still go back and watch those movies, or just people like us, I don't know?

PODHORETZ: Interesting. I don't know.

So you have to think about the interesting thing. So Charlie Chaplin starts making these shorts around 1910, something like that. It turns out that Chaplin is the first world, mass cultural figure, because how could there have been one before, you know? In 1915 he was the most famous man in the world, and I

read some stats somewhere that 80 percent of all Halloween costumes in the 1910s were somebody wearing some variant of Chaplin's tramp outfit – because what else were you going to wear that anyone could recognize, you know?

Wouldn't go as a lumberjack, there were still – half the people you knew were lumberjacks. You weren't going to dress up as a lumberjack, you know? So, there was Chaplin. So Chaplin, of course, was a silent comedian and this was the sort of paradigmatic – so the mass culture is growing at the beginning of the century.

And movies are one place; phonograph records are another. So only the voice, the first voice that most people heard in common was Enrico Caruso. There was Chaplin. And then in 1927 talking pictures started. It's still thought, by the way, that the most watched movie ever made might have been *Birth of a Nation*, you know, this horribly racist–

KRISTOL: Yeah, terrible.

PODHORETZ: But very amazing three-hour epic about the Civil War from the perspective of the South. But it was thought that maybe a billion people saw it in the space of, that half of humanity, somehow, if it was anywhere where there was electricity, somebody saw some or all of *Birth of a Nation*. Everybody in America saw *Birth of a Nation*. So there was this massification.

And then talkies come in. And around – the ability to combine saucy talk with this still-new thing, which is watching action before you, seemingly in three dimensions as opposed to, you know, seeing it on stage or something like that, that you, by the early 30s, all these amazing things were happening. Musicals, melodramas, movies about, social dramas about the Depression. Slapstick comedies, Marx Brothers comedies, what were called screwball comedies, which are these kind of romances that go crazy, you know, couples who can't figure out how to come together.

And, you know, what these movies had – most of them were in black and white and all this – what they have is – also because there was an imposed production code to prevent government censors. To prevent national government censorship, Hollywood decided that it was going to place its own restrictions on itself to avoid this problem. And it created an office that wrote a series of rules about what could and couldn't be said, what could be shown, mostly having to do with sex, some of it having to do with violence, some plotlines. That meant that most of what needed to be done had to be done – if you were telling a story about, you know, adultery or something like that, there had to be a lot of allusion. And if you were telling a story about like a horn-dog playboy, there had to be a lot of allusion to what it was that he was doing rather than showing.

And it turned out that that indirection that was forced on them was fantastic – like the demands of a sonnet or something like that, that they had to figure out other ways of showing things and being clever about things and figuring out ways of keeping, you know, if you couldn't show couples having sex, then you had to explain what it was that was keeping them apart, you know, so they could be apart long enough for there to be, you know, a happy ending.

And so these great screwball comedies, *It Happened One Night*, *My Man Godfrey*, *The Awful Truth*, which is a divorce comedy, *His Girl Friday*, which is a romantic comedy adaptation of a great play about newspapering. These movies, if you see them now, I think they're just as – in some ways they're *more* fresh than anything you would see now because they are smart, tough, unsentimental portraits of stuff without any modern gloss.

So if you can take – but, like, my kids, like they won't watch them because they don't like black and white, you know.

KRISTOL: Right.

PODHORETZ: We grew up watching black and white TV so I think we never had any problem watching black and white. They have some real difficulty with it, which I don't, I honestly don't understand. And then you have the other sort of great films of the time, you know. *Gone with the Wind* being the ultimate one, which is now a very, which is, I have to admit, I don't want to be like a social justice warrior, it's not an easy movie to watch. The portrayal of the glories of plantation and slave culture are difficult to watch; and, you know, the glorification of marital rape is difficult to watch. There's a lot –

But it is still, again, the most-seen movie ever made, and an epic feat of storytelling, four hours long. It's a movie that has made supposedly around two billion dollars in the course of its time and release just from ticket sales. And if it were a conventional movie, and it were half as long, it would have made four billion.

KRISTOL: Yeah, right.

PODHORETZ: Because you would have sold two tickets in the same time frame. So, it's by leagues the most popular ever made. And it still remains a kind of astounding feat of storytelling. Great – Frank Capra's movies, which are these two great populist comic melodramas, *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town* and *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*. Wonderful movies by a director named William Wyler, *The Letter Jezebel*, *Wuthering Heights*, you know, just there were so many.

There's a lot of – again, they made so much, these studios, there's so much crap. The crap is, you know, if you turn on – really, most of what they made was terrible, but most of that doesn't really endure.

KRISTOL: Right. *Philadelphia Story*, *Casablanca*.

PODHORETZ: *Philadelphia Story*, my favorite, well – So *Casablanca*, it's interesting. This is the 75th anniversary of *Casablanca*.

KRISTOL: Yes?

PODHORETZ: Right? So *Casablanca* is arguably the greatest example of Hollywood studio moviemaking. Because you had this movie, it's an unproduced play, and it's an accidental masterpiece. It's made in the studio system –

KRISTOL: Thrown together.

PODHORETZ: Thrown together.

KRISTOL: Quickly.

PODHORETZ: Well, sort of. I mean, they knew it was like a big budget – it wasn't like "Oh, my God, I had no idea that this was going to happen."

KRISTOL: Right, right.

PODHORETZ: They meant it to be like an A-list movie. So, Warners hires its best director, Michael Curtiz. They hired these screen writers who take the story, they throw, they fashion a script together, they end up with this kind of weird, absurd dream casting, Humphrey Bogart is a romantic hero, Ingrid Bergman as a sort of ambiguous romantic figure.

And, if you see it now, it is just, there isn't a second in it that isn't – it's like eating candy, from beginning to end. Now, *then* it wasn't like eating candy at all; it was a movie made about World War II, during World

War II, about, you know, refugees who were fleeing the Nazis who were going to get raped and killed by the Nazis if they were caught. And this whole question of whether or not this guy, played by Bogart, who was essentially America –

KRISTOL: Right, right.

PODHORETZ: Is going to – and it's obviously, the answer is contained within the question, but it's like he's run off to lick his wounds from his terrible romantic disappointment. Is he going to get into the fight? Or is he just going to stay off to one side and act like he's neutral? And then the woman who broke his heart steps into his bar, and then all this stuff happens.

And this movie, one of the things that's so astounding about it, and that is a classic Hollywood thing is that it has these mini-climaxes all throughout, which is also something that the great director John Ford did. Like, these scenes hit, you know? People start singing the "Marseillaise" in a bar in Casablanca, or Bogart, you know, orders his piano player not to play the song that broke his heart. And then you see his love affair in Paris. And then you see – you know, every character has a sort of moment of personal crisis. So that it's not just that it tells one's story, but that it hits over – it hits these points over and over and over again so like every 10 or 15 minutes you get kind of an emotional jolt.

And great musicals do this, too. That's like, if you go see *Singing in the Rain*, which is made in 1952, *Singing in the Rain* has a period in the middle of the movie, you know – it's a wild comedy about the introduction of sound into motion pictures. But there is about 40 minutes in the middle where you go from this big number called "Good Morning" to a big number called, then you get "Singing in the Rain," then you get "Moses Supposes," and then – it's like you can't catch your breath. It comes at you like a train, you know.

And it's a very weird – and this is one of the things that makes somebody who loves movies love movies, which is that they can grip you, they can enfold you, and also, unlike television, they have a beginning and an end. So there's a compressed period. If you're in a movie theater, the lights go down, you have this experience, and it ends. And the experience is somewhat communal, again, in a movie theater, because you're around a lot of other people and interesting things sort of happen, you know? A group consciousness starts to develop in some weird way, where everybody's laughing at the same joke or everybody gasps at the same, something jumping out at you or something like that.

And that, I think, is the thing that is most at risk for any moviegoer now: is that it's an open question whether there's going to be *any* communal movie-going experience 15 years from now. Aside from something like the superhero pictures or the comic-book pictures because – which would be more akin to, like, going, again, on a roller coaster ride.

KRISTOL: Right.

PODHORETZ: There will be these like enormous exhibition spaces where you'll go see the Marvel movie. And there will maybe be three thousand seats in it and that's all it's going to show, because it's not then going to stay open to show, you know, I don't know, the latest movie about, you know, *Selma*, about Martin Luther King marching on Selma or something like that. That you'll watch at home.

And the only things that will make enough money to justify public exhibition will be these gigantic productions. I could be wrong. Everybody that I know who works in the industry expects that this is inevitable. And so if that happens, it will have been 120 years of this medium, of the motion picture medium as a thing where you make this thing and project it in front of a group of people in a space, in the dark, with popcorn in your lap. That's a pretty long time, actually, if you think about it.

KRISTOL: Right.

PODHORETZ: It's a long time for one model to be the – I mean, so it's 2017, so like the first great movie places were built around now, so it's 100 years later. I mean, we don't read novels in serial form in magazines anymore. I don't know, I mean, maybe it's time, you know? This is just a standard progression, like the technological achievement of the 1910s was to have a movie at all.

KRISTOL: Right.

PODHORETZ: So now, if you watch it streaming – and, by the way, you can watch it streaming under *better* conditions. If you have a really nice 100-inch television set with speakers, you know, with the fancy speakers under it, and you can make your room dark, you're arguably having a better visual and aural experience than you'll have in any movie theater, where, you know, the projector bulb may be a little dim, and the sound may be a little muddy, and the speakers may need be replaced, and there's junk on the floor, making your feet stick to the floor.

KRISTOL: Right.

PODHORETZ: And all of that.

KRISTOL: That's a little melancholy, though, that the –

PODHORETZ: Totally.

KRISTOL: It seems like, you know.

PODHORETZ: Yeah.

KRISTOL: I guess I was a little too old, I mean, I wasn't too old – a lot of people I know love the movies of the 70s. But, I mean, I saw some of them, but they didn't mean that much to me, I would say. Whereas the movies of the 30s and 40s, not that I was an expert on them, but watching those on television growing up, and then sometimes at revival theaters, or at Harvard at the Brattle Square Theater and all that, you know, that really, those really do stick in my mind.

And I think part of it is the communal experience. I guess it needn't be, though. I mean, of course novels that you read alone stick in your mind, too.

PODHORETZ: No, but I think – again, I think what differentiates movies – it may have been true, you were also, you were like a contrarian in the early 70s, so your bias would have been to go to one of these things and go, "Ah, please."

KRISTOL: Right, right.

PODHORETZ: And there was a lot of that. Like there's a lot of, as I say, a lot of highly praised stuff then, like the movies of Robert Altman, for example, which were just crap then and are crap, overpraised crap now. And, you know, stuff like, it's not like – Coppola made a lot of bad movies, you know, along with his really good movies. It's not like these things –

And then one of the great stories, of course, is that this guy, Michael Cimino directs a movie called *The Deer Hunter* – it's still one of the great American movies – takes a screen play about guys playing Russian roulette in the Vietnam War and builds this infrastructure around it about a working-class town in Pennsylvania and the three guys who go off to war together and how their lives are both changed and ruined by the war. And it's a dazzling, astounding piece of work.

And then he destroys a movie studio with his next movie, which is called *Heaven's Gate*, which is an unwatchable piece of Communist bilge about a war between ranchers and farmers in Montana in the

1890s and goes on forever and is awful. And, literally, United Artists, he shut United Artists down because they spent the equivalent of like 250 million dollars and made about 11 cents and that was the end of the studio. And that was the end of him, too.

So you have there, right there you have the story of the director as king, which was the 1970s story, and then that's the end of the director as king. Because if you make the director king too much, he'll take your entire studio down.

But I'm struck also, when you mention like seeing revival movies, the difference then is – The 30s and 40s, again, one of the things that they were showing was ordinary life heightened, which I guess is what all novels, what novels do too, to the extent that –

And so the greatest American movies – like, I would say among the greatest American movies is a movie made in 1946 called the *Best Years of Our Lives*, again by William Wyler, which, again, is a story of three Americans coming home from World War II.

And one of them was a commanding officer in the Air Force who was, at home, a soda jerk. And he goes back home to his wife who has not been faithful to him while he was abroad, and he has to go back to work in the department store where he was a soda jerk. Having been a commander of men and a leader of men, he is suddenly in this humiliating position with a guy who was 4-F, bossing him around and being ugly to him and ugly spirited.

And a guy who has lost his hands in an accident in the war and has hooks. And then an older man who was a bank vice president who went off in his 40s to serve. And how they come home and they each have these stories and they intersect and interact with each other.

And the soda jerk ends up in love with the banker's daughter. And then there's this whole question about the kid with the hooks and whether or not he is going to allow the girl that he left to go to war to marry him because he does not want her to have to live with him as a cripple.

And it is three hours long, and it is so beautiful, and it is so powerful. And it's a story – we haven't been through World War II; we didn't have these experiences. It came out a year after. But it's about real people doing real things in real situations that are recognizable to all of us. And that's what a movie can do at its – heighten it, you know? Because there has to be a plot. And most lives don't have a plot.

And television can't. These TV shows, whatever they are, that's not what they do. They tell these kind of elongated stories that have a different form to them.

And, you know, mentioning a movie like *Best Years of Our Life*, which is a masterpiece and won many awards and is commonly understood as, again, a great work of popular art, you know, you can't use that as, you can't say, "Well, what's why people went to the movies."

KRISTOL: Yeah, because they went to see a million other things.

PODHORETZ: Yeah, yeah. They saw a lot of junk. But that's it at its best, and even when it was mediocre that's what it sort of tried to do. And that's why people resonated to it even in the 60s and 70s when they were, you know, trying to destroy all of it.

When you went to the Cambridge Art House and, of course, everyone in Cambridge thought that the lives in *Best Years of Our Life* were conformist and, you know, the soul sucking, you know, the soul-sucking, middle-class, American small-town life was so terrible and yet they couldn't get enough, people couldn't get enough of this stuff.

Because it wasn't just people going for nostalgia, they were going because you want to see something that reflects the troubles and perils and concerns and upsets of ordinary existence. And movies do that better than, when they do it well, movies do that better than anything, I think.

KRISTOL: And I suppose like novels, I mean they do it by of course, by dramatizing and, you know, compressing, and obviously *Casablanca* is not realistic in that sense quite, but the people in it are psychologically realistic and –

PODHORETZ: Right.

KRISTOL: And the situation is sort of realistic, though obviously exaggerated.

Westerns, I would say, the same. I mean, people mock Westerns for being ridiculous, but the actual drama of Westerns, the human drama of a good Western, *Stagecoach* or whatever, or *High-Noon* later on, is recognizable as a kind of – I think that's an important part of it.

And you're right, though, I guess the serials, yeah, they go on too long. It's like a novel, right? It begins; it has a certain pattern.

PODHORETZ: Yeah.

KRISTOL: Mini-climaxes.

PODHORETZ: Right.

KRISTOL: It ends. There's a kind of wholeness to it that you don't quite get with – I don't know, I haven't seen any, really any of these modern shows, but maybe you don't quite get with these shows.

PODHORETZ: No, I mean, in fact, you know, the classic problem with them is that they don't end when they should, and then everyone's like, "Oh, that season six was just terrible. I can't believe what they did," you know? It's like, why did they do it? Because they were being paid 30 million dollars to do it because it's a big hit, and that's TV. TV is meant to go on forever because people want to see it.

It's a funny thing about Westerns, you know, it is still the case 100 years into the motion pictures that the most – Westerns remain the most prolifically made movies in all of movie history. That from like the 20s to the 50s, half of all movies made in America were Westerns. A lot of them don't survive; a lot of them were made by these like low-budget studios. But the point is that there was an inexhaustible American appetite for this very simple story of, you know, lone guy comes into town, and there's an evil rancher and he's got to face him down and marry the schoolmarm.

And, you know, the – you know, they are excruciatingly boring, most of them; you can't believe how threadbare they are. And they just threw, they sent them around on these circuits, in these circuits owned by the movie studios because people just, they would watch them the way people watch, you know, the way a conservative watches Fox News. It didn't matter what the show was, they just –

KRISTOL: It was an American –

PODHORETZ: Yeah, it was the American myth.

KRISTOL: Yeah.

PODHORETZ: The American myth.

KRISTOL: The gangster movie, in a slightly different way, I would say –

PODHORETZ: But the gangster movie was for urban – like this was – remember America was still, in the 30s and 40s, was still largely rural, or it was in the transition period from rural to urban. And this was fare for non-urban people, like that's what they wanted to see was a guy on a horse, you know, around a campfire with a, you know, with a schoolmarm and somebody that he was facing down, who wore black and he wore white. And it was very basic drama.

But it's still a staggering fact to me that like, you know, thousands of Westerns were made. Thousands.

KRISTOL: Have we left out any important genres or moments or individual capstones for people watching who don't – like your kids who don't like, who haven't watched many older movies? I do wonder what will happen with those. I mean, I just wonder whether –

PODHORETZ: Yeah.

KRISTOL: *Casablanca*, maybe just because it's the 75th anniversary, one has some sense that it's having a bit of a – maybe that's just – maybe not, though.

PODHORETZ: Every time I – you know, we have this all the time, right? When you talk to young people and you realize, like, they're in their 20s and 30s, but they don't remember a world with the Soviet Union, you know, they don't really know what you're talking about or they don't –

KRISTOL: Right.

PODHORETZ: So the Marx Brothers, for example.

KRISTOL: Yeah, that's good –

PODHORETZ: So when I saw the Marx Brothers when I was nine or ten years old or something like that, those movies – like *Duck Soup* was only 35 years old. So like *Duck Soup* would have been the equivalent of having been made in 1982?

KRISTOL: Yeah, it would be like –

PODHORETZ: Now.

KRISTOL: A Spielberg movie or something.

PODHORETZ: Right, 1982. It's 80 years old.

KRISTOL: Yeah.

PODHORETZ: Like it's old, you know? It's like we're talking about – and there's been a whole development and comic styles and traditions and stuff like that where maybe it just seems less funny because the pace is quicker.

You know, one of the other interesting things about narrative changes as people got more and more educated, visually educated as they saw TV and stuff like that is, things are a lot faster because people understand the language of film. Like you don't have to show somebody – you could show somebody opening a car door and then show them in a house and you don't have to show them getting out of the car, closing the door, walking up to the house, ringing the doorbell and being let in. They make that transition. And so a lot of things are really slow for people now.

Even something like *Star Wars*. Again, the most successful movie ever made in some reckonings. The first 40 minutes of *Star Wars* are incredibly slow. I mean, they seemed lightning fast when I saw it when I was 16 and now it's like: he's there, he goes to the market, he's talking to his aunt and uncle, he looks out at the sky, there's a robot, he fixes the robot, he goes to town, *and then* the action starts. And you're like, what – how did – weren't people bored by this? And my kids were. I will say they were a little, they found it a little hard to take. And then they sort of got into it as it went.

But there's a lot of that. There's a lot of sort of like, people know things about narrative that we didn't know, in some odd way, or that Hollywood had not understood that we knew.

KRISTOL: And, as you say, history happens and so tastes build on earlier things, and it would be like going back to a very good but old novel, I suppose. You could appreciate it, but you still would find it a little, not quite gripping maybe, I don't know. Some, of course; the really great ones you would. But James Gould Cozzens or some middle-brow kind of, you know, good, high-quality – John Dos Passos, all these characters.

PODHORETZ: Yeah.

KRISTOL: I think if you read it now probably would be, you know–

PODHORETZ: No, you'd think–

KRISTOL: So the movies may be like that, or the old movies.

PODHORETZ: Something like that. Although, you know, I mean, they didn't dislike the Marx Brothers. Liked some of it. And they were much more impatient with the parts of it that everybody was always impatient with, you know, sort of the narrative part, which wasn't why you were there.

KRISTOL: Right.

PODHORETZ: But I'm just struck by the fact that we, even the movie –Ffor example, right now in the movie theater there are two or three movies that I would say serve this role of telling you something about America and the condition of America, and people, the way ordinary people live.

One of them is called *Lady Bird*. It's a story about a 17-year-old high school student in Sacramento, California in 2002, which doesn't sound very promising, just laying it out like that. But it's about her conflicts with her mother; her desire to leave town and go to college.

And then there's another, oddly enough, also partially set in Sacramento, California, called *Brad's Status*, which has Ben Stiller in it. And it's about a man taking his son to see Harvard. He's a high school senior and a very good student and a serious musician, and he is being taken to see Harvard. And his father is a disappointed, middle-aged man who is consumed with envy of the four guys that he went to college with, all of whom are wildly more successful than he.

These are both extremely good, sharp, smart movies about the way we live now. And they earn very little, though. So, *Bob and Carol and Ted and Alice* made 180 million dollars, and *Brad's Status* has made five and has a gigantic movie star in it. So, you know, people don't go to the movies for this, is the story. That's not what they're – *Brad's Status* could have been a huge hit in the 1970s.

Another interesting example: So, *Midnight Cowboy*, which is the first and only X-rated movie to win Best Picture, in 1969. And, oddly enough, is a movie not explicitly, but with – explicitly in one sense but not another – a gay-themed film about – and it's a portrait, it's a story – I don't know how else to describe it – it's a story about loneliness. It's about a guy who comes to New York from a small town, has no friends, has no company, knows no one, and is dying of loneliness until he strikes up an odd friendship with a

guy who tried to steal money from him six months earlier who's a crippled loser living in Manhattan, and they live in a dump in Times Square.

And it is brilliant and depressing and sad. And it made a fortune. It made a huge fortune. It has a terribly sad, unhappy ending. And it made a huge fortune and won an Oscar. And it could have won, it could win an Oscar today, because now movies win Oscars that don't get a lot of box office. But could it be like a central cultural document? No. No one would know about it.

KRISTOL: But we can still enjoy them.

PODHORETZ: Yeah, it's good.

KRISTOL: And they're being made.

PODHORETZ: And they're being made. But you have to go find them.

KRISTOL: And, as you say, one of the great things about movies is, once made, they exist and –

PODHORETZ: Except for these Westerns, a lot of which melted. You know, the film stock –

KRISTOL: But hopefully they kept most of the good and great ones.

PODHORETZ: Now nothing is made on film stock. So –

KRISTOL: But the good and great ones were preserved, mostly, so you can see them. So that is, it's like reading old novels: they don't – it is, whatever their ups and downs in terms of fashion and box office, they don't disappear.

PODHORETZ: Right. Although, it's very rare that – I can think of almost no case in which somebody says, you know, there was a movie made in 1942 – Like, what is the story about *Moby Dick*? *Moby Dick* like vanished for 70 years until it was sort of revived in the 1920s. It was a big flop, and it – Melville stopped writing for 40 years because he was so disappointed by its reception. And then, 20 years after his death somebody dug it up, and then suddenly it was the great American novel.

I can't think of hardly any case in which somebody says, you know, "There was a movie made in 1942 and it's a masterpiece." And, you know, "No one ever saw it." And every now and then there was something where a movie would go out of circulation, like these great Hitchcock movies of the 50s, like *Rear Windo*w. There would be rights, dramas, and then they would go out of circulation and they would come back with real fanfare, and people go, "Oh, my God, this is fantastic." Which it is, *Rear Window* is a fantastic movie, which you should see if you haven't seen it.

But there's very little of that. Like there's – Rediscovery is not a big thing in industry, because these things get their shot, you know, and they either go or they don't go. And, you know, there's no like – my God, you know, there's no Trollope, like a guy who's thought of as third-rate and then suddenly someone comes back and says, "No, he was the greatest novelist of the era." There's no movie that has that, or director or really has that. Everyone's gone through the critical wringer one way or the other.

KRISTOL: But young people still have a chance to watch these movies.

PODHORETZ: All of them. And they should.

KRISTOL: And they should.

PODHORETZ: And particularly if they're in black and white, because, like, they're really good and everybody young seems to have this bizarre bias.

KRISTOL: On that note, we'll reconvene in a couple of years to see whether we've started a stampede towards black and white movies.

PODHORETZ: Oh, I'm sure. This is the beginning of the revival.

KRISTOL: That's good. I like that. John Podhoretz, thank you so much for joining me.
And thank you for joining us on CONVERSATIONS.
[END]