KINONIK

HUD (1963)

Directed by Martin Ritt

WEDNESDAY September 9th 7PM

SATURDAY September 12th 2PM / 7PM

16mm Cinemascope B&W



There is a sequence in **Hud** that 1963 audiences understood in their bones that we've now forgotten how to read. Under the hard sun and endless sky of the Texas panhandle, cattle are driven into a pit. Dust and clouds drift with the lowing of the cows. Homer Bannon has spent his life building this herd. He watches as his son Hud checks the action of his rifle. No one told Homer to call the state veterinarian. It was just the right thing to do.

His son had a different idea. Hud had wanted to sell the sick cattle to unsuspecting neighbors before the contagion was evident, take the money, and drill for oil. The disease was only theoretical, after all. Nobody could yet prove these particular animals would hurt anyone. Why should a man swallow a ruinous loss over a harm that hadn't happened?

Homer belongs to an endangered consensus which believes you spend enormous public effort to prevent a disaster before it lands, acting on the theory rather than the corpse. When Hud reached theaters, the United States sat at the high-water mark of exactly this kind of ambition: foot-and-mouth held at bay since 1929, screwworm on the verge of total eradication, brucellosis being ground out of the national herd one tested cow at a time. Unglamorous collective machinery built on the premise that the right moment to stop a plague is before you can see it.

We're living through the destruction of that machinery, during the quiet it produced, after a campaign to rebrand the quiet as proof it was never needed. The governing doctrine of the season, spoken from podiums as innovation and from benches as restraint, holds that regulating a theoretical danger is a kind of tyranny.

Hud Bannon makes this philosophy magnetic, which is the film's deepest honesty. Paul Newman is so beautiful, so easy, so right in his contempt for his father's scruples that audiences left theaters wanting to be him — a reaction that appalled Ritt and Newman both, who had set out to indict the man and instead minted an icon. James Wong Howe shot him in a black and white so lucid you can feel the heat coming off the dust, and the camera loves Hud the way the country would learn to love him: completely, and against its own interest.

Because Hud wins. Homer is right, and Homer is ruined, and the last sixty years are the slow tally of how thoroughly the son inherited the earth.