

'The Sown and the Waste'

Or, the psychedelic writing of film history

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Abstract

The word 'psychedelic' was coined in the 1950s by psychiatrist Humphry Osmond to describe hallucinogenic drugs like mescaline and LSD – but this essay will not be about either the history of 'head' films or how to write film history on acid. What I want to do is to show what film historians can learn from J.H. Hexter's writings on the rhetoric of history, including a look at what he meant when he wrote about how historians use language 'psychedelically'.

Keywords: film, history, J.H. Hexter, psychedelic, waste

The word 'psychedelic' was coined in the 1950s by psychiatrist Humphry Osmond to describe hallucinogenic drugs like mescaline and LSD – but this essay will not be about either the history of 'head' films or how to write film history on acid. What I want to do is to show what film historians can learn from J.H. Hexter's writings on the rhetoric of history, including a look at what he meant when he wrote about how historians use language 'psychedelically'.

Osmond invented the word because existing terms like hallucinogenic and psychotomimetic implied that the mental states induced by the drugs were like those produced by mental illnesses, hallucinations, and psychoses, and he sought a term that 'had no particular connotations of madness, craziness, or ecstasy, but suggested an enlargement and expansion of mind'.¹ In a paper delivered to the New York Academy of Sciences, Osmond presented a number of alternatives, but preferred (because it was 'clear' and 'euphonious') *psychedelic*, 'mind-manifesting' (from the Greek words ψυχή [psyche; 'mind', 'soul']), and δῆλος (delos; 'manifest', 'evident').²

Soon, 'consciousness-expanding' became a more common English translation,³ and while it may be a less exact rendering of the Greek it certainly

achieves Osmond's goal of including 'the concepts of enriching the mind and enlarging the vision'.⁴ During the 1960s the word psychedelic gained wide currency and by 1971 the historian Hexter took it up (only the slightest bit tongue-in-cheek) when describing how 'writers of history' may use language with 'intent to expand the consciousness of the reader'.⁵

The second record

Hexter (1910-1996) was a distinguished historian of the 1450-1650 period and wrote very little about moving images, but his works on the writing or rhetoric of history remain highly relevant today to historians of all kinds, including film and media historians. They include a number of articles and an idiosyncratic, brilliant, and very funny book titled *The History Primer* (1971).⁶ I will present some of Hexter's key ideas in the first and the third sections of the present article and show their applicability to the writing of film history in the second and fourth sections.

In theoretical discussions of history-writing, Hexter's unique contribution has gone somewhat underappreciated. There are several reasons for this. Hexter devoted much energy to long, in-depth, often highly-polemical reviews of the works of other historians,⁷ and others may have been wary of engaging with his work on historiographical rhetoric because of his well-deserved reputation for pugnacity. In a retrospective article about English civil war historiography, he describes with considerable relish his own role in it:

For those who considered historical writing a species of gladiatorial combat and who revelled in the outpouring of scholarly gore, those years and especially the decade 1946-56 were the best of times, a golden, or perhaps a crimson age. They brought to the fore several lively historians whose outstanding shared trait was a voracious appetite for mutual mayhem.⁸

Historians who devote themselves to 'critique' may, Hexter writes, 'attract a certain amount of attention' among their peers, enough 'to win labels like "brilliant", "fierce", "devastating", "acerbic" and so on, a type of attention that has its points if one does not too much mind being perceived as Attila the Hun in the throes of indigestion'. The 'encomiums' they are awarded, however, tend to be 'ambivalent'.⁹

The most important reason for the relative neglect of Hexter by other theorists of historiography is probably the deliberately anti-philosophical,

jocular, and seemingly unserious style of writing he used. His aim was to deflate the pretensions of philosophers, particularly old-school analytical philosophers of science like Carl Hempel, who tried to impose their models of proper science on practicing historians without any real understanding or appreciation of the historian's craft. Hexter was also trying to show how important issues of historiographical truth and knowledge could be discussed in common-sense terms, without recourse to a specialised vocabulary unfamiliar to many practicing historians. However, since the theoretical debates about the nature of historiography have largely been conducted by philosophers and philosophically-minded historians, Hexter's insights have too often been dismissed or ignored.

Hexter's deep concern with liberty and his belief in the crucial importance for the development of liberal institutions in the English-speaking countries of the defence of inherited rights by the parliamentarians in the run-up to the English Civil War, along with his evident antipathy for Marxism, has perhaps also led some people to write him off as a conservative. In an article from 2007, the famous theorist of historiography Hayden White mentions Hexter *en passant*:

Indeed, being interested in the past 'for its own sake' and being interested in the past for what it can tell us about our present 'situation' constitutes the principal difference between conservative and radical historiological reflection. It is the difference between, say, Ranke and Marx or, to take modern examples, J. H. Hexter and Foucault.¹⁰

Given White's evident allegiance to 'radical reflection', it must probably be taken as back-handed praise at best for him to say that Hexter stands in the same relation to Foucault as Ranke to Marx, but I think Hexter might have found it quite satisfying.

To Hexter, the 'overarching commitment' and 'top priority' of all historians was what he called the 'Reality' rule: that 'historians are committed to render the best and most likely account of the human past that can be sustained by the relevant evidence'.¹¹ This is simply, Hexter avers, what 'Ranke intended' with his famous dictum that historians should study the past '*wie es eigentlich gewesen*'. However, this does not mean that Hexter was naïve about how historians' works are shaped by who they are.¹² On the contrary, he insisted on the importance of what he called the historian's 'second record'. The first record is the historical record: the materials, documents, and remains from the past that concern the issue the historian wishes to examine. The second record is the knowledge (in the broadest

sense of the word, including life experience) that historians bring with them to their work: '[p]otentially, therefore, it embraces his skills, the range of his knowledge, the set of his mind, the substance, quality, and character of his experience – his total consciousness.'¹³

As an analogy for describing the very heterogeneous context of a person's second record, Hexter speaks of 'The Sown and the Waste', the title of a chapter in *The History Primer*. Hexter uses 'the waste' in the sense it was used in the Middle Ages. It is not a 'desert' where nothing will grow. The waste may lie further away from the farm, beyond 'the sown' (the carefully planted and cultivated fields) – but it can be used for grazing, requires less labour to maintain, and will yield a bounty that, while not as systematic and predictable, is nonetheless well worth having.

Some of the historian's second record is knowledge of a scientific and systematic kind. That is the sown. Certain knowledge comes from personal life experience, from the very fact of being human. That is the waste. As an example, Hexter uses how the worries he had experienced as the breadwinner of a young family, his health not being the strongest, had helped him better understand certain provisions of the imaginary state in Thomas More's *Utopia*: surmising that More, at the point in his career when he wrote *Utopia*, might well have suffered from similar worries, it made perfect sense that he should have been particularly ardent in his praise for the way his ideal state ensures the welfare of widows and orphans.

In an important commentary on Hexter's historiographical ideas, Louis Mink writes that this is a 'poor example' of how historians may draw on their own second records to understand the past, because it 'ignores one of the most sensible and generally accepted of epistemological distinctions, that between the "context of discovery" and the "context of justification"'.¹⁴ While Hexter does not use these terms, he is well aware of the issue. He points out that there is not 'so much as a hint' in his writings on More about how he drew on his second record, and he continues:

This is not to be construed as reluctance on my part to admit to relying on my way of using the second record; to do just that, both to recommend and to defend such reliance, is precisely my purpose in this chapter. What the lack of overt reference to my private and personal experience in the examined instance implies and is intended to imply is that *my* personal experience is not viable evidence about anyone or to anyone but me. However fully persuaded I may be of the actual similarity of More's anxiety and mine about our families, ... I cannot argue that my experience *proves* anything about his, because of course it does not.¹⁵

Faithful to his commitment to explain everything in plain language, Hexter does not use the terminology of 'context of discovery' and 'context of justification', which are technical terms in the philosophy of science and not self-explanatory. His distinction between what convinces *me* and what can be used to *prove* something to the satisfaction of others is so similar to it that I would not be surprised if this passage was a deliberate reformulation of the philosophical conceptualisation. What Hexter *does* disagree with is the idea that the discovery process is entirely irrational, about which one cannot really say anything, and also that justification must conversely be entirely a matter of logic and rational argument.

Ruminating in the waste

According to Mink, the way Hexter uses his own experience as a way to understand More and *Utopia* is also a 'poor example' because it implies that historians can only understand what they have some personal experience of. Hexter makes quite clear that this is not what he means:

This is not to suggest that in order for him to sense a certain perspective or perception of life in the person or group he is studying, a historian must actively share that perspective or perception. In the particular case under consideration, however, it actually did happen to help.¹⁶

In order to connect the dots of the historical record into some sort of coherent pattern, historians must inevitably draw on their own experience and understanding of human life and behaviour. Since we must inevitably rely on our background knowledge of the world when we discuss the past, the question must be "*how, and how best?*"¹⁷

Hexter is insistent that historians should keep an open mind and not turn away from insights because they do not come from organised bodies of knowledge; a historian who does the opposite 'gratuitously deafens and blinds himself in advance on ground at once dogmatic and irrelevant'.¹⁸ In many film studies programs, the place of practical filmmaking courses has sometimes been a source of controversy because they are not felt to be properly academic, lacking the systematic and 'sown' character of the more theoretical disciplines. It seems clear that the work of pioneering film historians like Jay Leyda, Jean Mitry, and Gösta Werner benefited from their experience as filmmakers.

Charles Musser has emphasised the fact that being a filmmaker is important for his historical work: '[p]erhaps the place I learned the most about film, the pursuit of sustained intellectual thinking on a particular topic, and the creative act of producing work of any kind – was working as an assistant editor for two years on Oscar-winning *Hearts and Minds*.'¹⁹ Musser's experience helping with assembling many different kinds of film material into the hard-hitting whole that is *Hearts and Minds* (Peter Davis, 1974) may well have helped him reach one of the important insights of his work on the early American cinema: in his article on the film exhibitions at the Eden Musee in New York in 1898, Musser describes how the shows integrated films, slides, and a lecture; audiences 'did not see a random pot-pourri of films but carefully structured programs which made the exhibitions distinctive'.²⁰ Musser continues by discussing the significance of the show *Panorama of the War* (about the Spanish-American war):

This program, in particular, is comparable in many respects to more modern documentaries using silent stock footage, although the models of production and exhibition are radically different. At the Musee, post-production was located in the projection booth and achieved on the screen rather than in the editing room and on the projection print. With the showman responsible for post-production, creative contributions were made by both cameraman and exhibitor.²¹

This is not to say that one has to be a filmmaker to do work of comparable distinction as a film historian, but in this case it did happen to help.

Another relevant case is the work of Tom Gunning on early cinema. In a retrospective article about the development of the concept of the cinema of attractions, he describes the impact of avant-garde filmmakers like Ernie Gehr, Hollis Frampton, and Ken Jacobs, who 'not only looked carefully at films from the period of early cinema, but incorporated them into their own works'.²² For Gunning, they were a formative influence: having the experience of watching these films as part of his second record allowed him to comprehend early film in a new and different way. Gunning writes:

Speaking personally, the influence of the fresh perspective on early cinema opened up by these filmmakers played a key role in not only refocusing my attention on this period, but re-contextualizing the films, liberating them from the teleological approach that classed them as 'primitive' attempts at later forms.²³

From the start, Gunning took care to emphasise that his use of insights drawn from the study of avant-garde film to illuminate early cinema was not a claim about any deeper likeness between the two. He writes the following in an early article from 1983, 'An Unseen Energy Swallows Space':

In the natural sciences there is the concept of the pseudomorph, a phenomenon that closely resembles another phenomenon – rock or plant – without being truly related. ... As a historian of cinema with interests in both early film and in the achievements of the American avant-garde film, I must confess that the relations I will describe between the two movements are, to some extent, pseudomorphic. The immense gulf separating the technical, economic, and ideological aims of the pioneers of cinema from those of the avant-garde films made in the U.S. since the 1940s can be bridged only by the most dubious leap of faith.²⁴

Gunning acknowledges that he is drawing on the waste of his second record; the avant-garde cinema does not explain or relate in any systematic way to early cinema, but Gunning's familiarity with the avant-garde allowed him to see things in early films that looked similar, things others had missed, even if the similarities were more apparent than real.

Musser's and Gunning's work have both been tremendously important and influential, even if they have disagreed over the relative importance of the insights discussed here. Musser, while acknowledging the importance of attractions, has attached relatively more significance than Gunning to the kind of coherent narrative structure found both in shows like those at the Eden Musee and in many films before 1906.²⁵ Nevertheless, I am certain that neither of them would deny the enrichment of our understanding of early cinema through the new perspectives opened up by the work of the other, work where both of them were helped by their familiarity with very different kinds of film, bearing out Hexter's observation that 'ruminating in the waste of his second record can be a profitable thing for a historian to do'.²⁶

Translation and consciousness-expansion

Readers of historical accounts have second records too, and this means that they do not all come with the same knowledge and preconceptions of the past. If history is about the actions and sufferings of people in the past, to understand them readers must also engage with the thoughts and ideas that accompanied and actuated those actions. Hexter observes that simply

presenting a logical argument about how the people of the past must have been thinking is unlikely to convince readers who do not believe – because of background assumptions in their second records – that anybody would ever think that way. To convince readers who find it difficult to accept that people in the past may have had motives and priorities very different from their own requires more than logical justification, it requires translation.

Hexter again uses his own work on Thomas More's *Utopia*²⁷ as an example. The design of 'More's ideal commonwealth' is in many ways 'austere and unabashedly repressive'²⁸ – the uniforming and regimentation may bring the shuffling worker-helots of *Metropolis* to mind. The purpose of these totalitarian institutions, Hexter wished to convince his readers, was to curb any manifestation of the mortal sin of pride. However, faced with at least some completely secular readers accustomed to thinking of human society from the perspective of modern sociology and actively unsympathetic to a Christian moral outlook, translational language was necessary.

Hexter explains how, into a long passage of evocative language about 'the monster Pride distilling its poison' and many similar phrases, he introduced the sociological concept of 'conspicuous consumption and conspicuous waste' to 'jolt' the reader 'who resists thinking of pride (and perhaps of anything else) in a theological framework', and who therefore, if he is to understand what Thomas More was up to, needs to 'adjust his habitual set of mind to a set of terms that he is not habituated to or that he is accustomed to regard with suspicion'. Dropping in this unexpected phrase 'may hopefully assist him to alter perceptions about human conduct that he readily fits into a pattern around the congenial concepts of conspicuous consumption and conspicuous waste in a way that fits them into a new pattern whose centre is the sin of pride'.²⁹

Hexter emphasises that the historian must try to translate *from* the present-day language the readers are familiar with *to* the past language they do not grasp, *not* the other way around (which leads to anachronistic simplification). In the example here, Hexter does not want his readers to translate the theological concept into a modern-day sociological framework they may be more comfortable with, but rather to make them aware of something familiar which the past would have understood as an expression of the sin of pride.

Beyond making readers understand the concept of sinful pride through this kind of translation, Hexter also wants to expand their consciousness to feel the force and importance of it, to feel why More thought it so destructive that the extraordinary regimentation of life in *Utopia* was a price worth paying for defeating it. The loaded and colourful language Hexter uses

to describe the destructive effects of the sin of pride is designed to make them palpable to the reader. Hexter lists the phrases he deploys, including the following:

'vain and needless things'; 'sickness of soul'; 'beasts of burden to keep idlers in luxury'; 'mass of wastrels'; 'blood and sweat of their subjects'; 'schemes of megalomaniac self-glorification'; 'outward, vain, and wicked things'; 'the waste and the misery'; 'the monster sin of pride'.³⁰

He describes them as 'charged, perhaps supercharged; almost every phrase is heavily loaded with affect'.³¹ The aim is to make the reader more receptive to a certain way of organising human experience, a particular 'pattern of human response'.³² This increased receptivity can be described as an expansion of consciousness, and the language that hopefully brings it about can therefore be called 'psychedelic'.

The psychedelic use of language goes beyond the translational, because it is cumulative. 'A reader who has expanded his awareness enough to encompass [one pattern of human response] is more ready than he was before to expand that awareness again to encompass [another, related pattern of human response]'.³³ The term 'psychedelic' evokes swirling, garish colours, hallucinatory intensity, and ineffable visions, but while I think that Hexter rather enjoyed the *frisson* a word so redolent of countercultural spaciness would have given many of his decidedly square and tweedy fellow-historians, he strove to explain that what he meant by consciousness-expanding was something 'familiar' and not at all 'strange, mysterious, and mystical'; it is comparable to the mental cultivation involved in learning to appreciate and understand 'music, for example, or painting, or one's friends'.³⁴

In my own work, a consciousness-expanding experience I recall particularly clearly was reading Robert Wohl's masterful book *A Passion for Wings: Aviation and the Western Imagination, 1908-1918*.³⁵ I discovered it serendipitously in a bookstore (ruminating in the waste, as it were), and even though it seemed to have only the most tangential relation to the dissertation I was then writing on Danish silent cinema, I bought it because it was such a beautifully-designed and wonderfully-illustrated book.

I was immediately struck by the opening of the book: Wohl begins with a marvellous description of Wilbur Wright's flight at Hanaudières near Le Mans in western France on 8 August 1908. In more invention-oriented histories of aviation, the Wright brothers' first flight near Kitty Hawk, North Carolina, on 17 December 1903, is usually given pride of place. Since the brothers did not give public demonstrations – they wanted to sell their

invention to the United States military as a secret weapon – it had little cultural impact at that time. Only after European inventors tried out inferior machines (Santos-Dumont's flight on 23 October 1906 was little more than an 'uncontrolled hop',³⁶ and the Danish inventor Jacob Ellehammer's 'airship' had no controls and was tethered to a pole) did they decide to go public, and it was the flight at Hanaudières and those at Avours in September, before much bigger crowds, that made the Wright brothers world famous and sparked a wild international effort to equal and surpass their achievements. It was this effort to conquer the air that inspired painters and poets (and filmmakers too).

Through his organisational choices and his emphases, Wohl shows that for the story he wants to tell about the cultural and imaginative impact of aviation, the flights in France in 1908 matter much more than those in North Carolina in 1903; he uses narrative structure psychedelically. It is also important for the argument Wohl makes that he enables his readers to visually distinguish between a Wright flyer and an Antoinette monoplane, and, further, to appreciate their respective aesthetic qualities. Wohl's descriptions and carefully chosen illustrations are used to psychedelic effect, to allow the reader to appreciate the particular beauty of the Antoinette.

This brings us back to Hexter's analogy with the appreciation of art and music:

What goes on in effective instruction in music and art appreciation is the expansion of the consciousness of the learner so that he can take in an experience hitherto alien to him because of its strangeness; what he will, hopefully, have achieved at the end is not only a *reception* of that experience but a *receptivity* to a whole range of new experiences and perhaps a permanent alertness that will enable him to respond to experiences even beyond that range.³⁷

In my own case, beyond the psychedelic effects intended by Wohl, making me much more attentive to the cultural impact of early aviation, his book also made me more receptive to early aviation's interconnections with and significance for film and filmmakers. It allowed me to see how the excitement over the new art form of cinema was frequently conveyed through comparisons with the wonder of aviation. Many important figures in Danish film culture around 1910 were aviation enthusiasts, and a few (like Carl Theodor Dreyer) were aviators themselves.³⁸

More generally, the development of early cinema historiography shows how important it is for historians to increase the receptivity of their read-

ers. The great increase in scholarly attention directed at early cinema, spearheaded by Gunning, Musser, and others, required an expansion of consciousness among film scholars not just to make them see that the study of what had previously been thought of as primitive cinema could yield many new insights and inspire other parts of the field, but to make them acknowledge the importance of history to the discipline, which was far from self-evident at the time. For example, Musser recalled how Annette Michelson told him that he had fouled up a very promising academic career by devoting his energies to early cinema.³⁹

This example shows quite clearly how psychedelic rhetoric may be necessary for arguments even to be heard. The assent of readers to the proposition that the formal characteristics or the original programming of early films are worth studying at all must be 'psychologically prior'⁴⁰ to any arguments about how or why they came about and what they were.

Sophisticated astonishment

To take just one specific example of the use of historiographic rhetoric to make readers receptive to a rethinking of 'primitive' cinema, we can look at a series of psychedelic effects in Gunning's essay 'An Aesthetic of Astonishment'. The purpose of his rhetoric is to make his readers understand why it would have made sense for people like themselves – clever, worldly, sophisticated – to react with astonishment and unease to the onrushing trains in the early film shows. Gunning begins by describing the widespread myth of early film spectators panicking because they thought a real train was coming at them:

The first audiences, according to this myth, were naive, encountering this threatening and rampant image with no defenses, with no tradition by which to understand it. The absolute novelty of the moving image therefore reduced them to a state usually attributed to savages in their primal encounter with the advanced technology of Western colonialists, howling and fleeing in impotent terror before the power of the machine. ... Thus conceived, the myth of initial terror defines film's power as its unprecedented realism, its ability to convince spectators that the moving image was, in fact, palpable and dangerous, bearing towards them with physical impact. The image had taken life, swallowing, in its relentless force, any consideration of representation – the imaginary conceived as real.⁴¹

In this passage, Gunning plays up the terror supposedly felt by early audiences to the point where the irony becomes evident, suggesting that it is not plausible that the Lumières' train arriving was as terrifying as the myth would seem to require. Gunning also uses the word 'savages'. It is not a word that any modern, culturally-sensitive academic would normally employ; it belongs to the imperialist age where the early films were made. Gunning's use of it makes us realise that the myth describes the terrified early audiences in a way that, if translated into the idiom of the 1890s, is equivalent to calling them savages. Gunning assumes that many of his readers are likely to have picked up the myth of the terrifying train somewhere along the way without being committed to it as a result of careful scholarly reflection; and to these readers Gunning says, in effect, 'you know, the way you view early film spectators is really like the way colonial overlords looked down on their subject populations as unruly, uncivilised primitives' – obviously a position few film scholars would want to embrace.

Gunning ups the ante by imputing the same colonialist mind-set even to areas of film studies little concerned with the historical details of early film shows:

The terrorised spectator of the Grand Café still stalks the imagination of film theorists who envision audiences submitting passively to an all-dominating apparatus, hypnotised and transfixed by its illusionist power. Contemporary film theorists have made careers out of underestimating the basic intelligence and reality-testing abilities of the average film viewer and have no trouble treating previous audiences with similar disdain.⁴²

Gunning here also suggests that his arguments have relevance beyond the discussion of the experience of the earliest spectators.

As an alternative to the myth, Gunning proposes a historical contextualising of the early film shows, arguing that they should be seen in relation to other entertainments like the magic theatre, where astonishing sights were shown; the craft of its illusions 'consisted of making visible something which could not exist, of managing the play of appearances in order to confound the expectations of logic and experience'.⁴³ Stage magicians tended to be vocally opposed to any attempt to claim occult powers rather than mastery of technical skills and sleight-of-hand, and nobody believed that the illusions of the magic theatre were real. Here, Gunning can implicitly appeal to his readers' own experience of stage magic and safely assume that they share the assumption of the 1890s audience that the tricks can all be explained rationally, and that those who claim that they

are real are charlatans. Moreover, Gunning emphasises that the audience the magic theatre addressed 'was not primarily gullible country bumpkins, but sophisticated urban pleasure seekers, well aware that they were seeing the most modern techniques in stage craft'.⁴⁴

Having thus hopefully made his reader receptive to the idea that early spectators, much like themselves, were not unsophisticated enough to be fooled into thinking they were watching something real, Gunning then proceeds to explain why such spectators might still react with gasps and startled movements to the images of the cinematograph by pointing out an unfamiliar fact:

in the earliest Lumière exhibitions the films were initially presented as frozen unmoving images, projections of still photographs. Then, flaunting a mastery of visual showmanship, the projector began cranking and the image moved.⁴⁵

It was the shock of this sudden transformation of the still projected photograph, familiar from magic lantern shows, into lifelike movement that took the breath away from the first spectators. Gunning underscores his point by quoting Georges Méliès' recollection of his experience of the first film show; he had just had time to snicker at the lack of novelty in a show of projected photographs when the image began to move: '[b]efore this spectacle we sat with gaping mouths, struck with amazement, astonished beyond all expression'.⁴⁶

In the rest of his article, Gunning goes on to link his account to his broader theory that the first decade or so of filmmaking can be described as a cinema of attractions. In describing it as an aesthetic of shocks and distractions, he overstates his case when he claims: '[c]ontemplative absorption is impossible here'.⁴⁷ While they may be in a minority, there are several contemporary accounts by early filmgoers where they describe themselves as having been completely absorbed by the images and the reveries they stimulate. I also think that while Gunning succeeds admirably in rescuing early film spectators from the condescension of posterity, he too easily accepts a view of the audiences for later story films as passively enthralled by the enticements of the narrative.

Despite these disagreements, I believe 'An Aesthetic of Astonishment' is a good example of how a film historian can use language in the way discussed by Hexter to change the second records of his readers. The example here can be seen as part of the wider effort to do away with the term 'primitive cinema' and the condescension it implied, an effort that has allowed us to

gain a deeper understanding of the earliest moving pictures and thereby to increase our knowledge of the cinematic past.

Conclusion

Hexter embraced the idea that “the failure to find the *mot juste* can be as damaging as insufficient research.”⁴⁸ The word ‘waste’ is a carefully chosen one. Hexter’s use of it is surprising, because we are accustomed to think of waste as something that has no use or value – but this is also the point. He wanted to make his readers aware that there were resources ‘in this abundant and rich range’ of the historian’s second record that others, out of an exaggerated and scientific fastidiousness, might wrongly dismiss as having no use or value.⁴⁹ By describing the consciousness of both historians and readers, as well as their second records (as divided into the waste and the sown), Hexter also sets up the importance of the use of psychedelic rhetoric, because ‘imbedded’ into the waste of some readers’ second records may be ‘non-logical traits’ not ‘wholly responsive to the efficacy of logical argument’; to change their views, psychedelic language is needed.⁵⁰

In this article, I have sought to show how excellent film history has resulted from following, consciously or not, Hexter’s recommendations that historians should not be afraid to draw on the resources of the waste of their second records or to use the language of their accounts psychedelically. However, some readers may worry whether they are stepping onto the slippery slope of postmodernist history-is-fiction anti-scientism if they follow Hexter’s advice. It may add to their misgivings that the authors of the book *Is History Fiction?*, the Australian historians Ann Curthoys and John Docker, who describe themselves as ‘deeply sympathetic to postmodernism’ and ‘deeply sympathetic to poststructuralism’,⁵¹ characterise Hexter as a precursor of sorts, even if they see as unfortunately retrograde his commitment to what they derisively call history’s ‘rigorous manly Rankean capacity’⁵² to ‘convey knowledge of the past as it actually was’.⁵³

I would argue that the strength and attractiveness of Hexter’s position lies precisely in the way it combines an open acknowledgement and a deep understanding of the rhetorical character of historical writing with an equally deep commitment to the ‘Reality rule’, insisting that the ‘authenticity, validity, and truth’ of a historical work ‘depend on the effectiveness with which it communicates knowledge (not misunderstanding) of the actual past congruent with the surviving record’.⁵⁴ I share Hexter’s commitments, and I think that the articles by Musser and Gunning and the book by Wohl

all communicate knowledge about the actual past – about the creative role of some early film exhibitors, about the reactions of spectators to the earliest moving image, about the cultural impact of the first heavier-than-air flights. They communicate this knowledge effectively, in part by expanding our consciousness, and thereby, perhaps, they sow our wastes.

Notes

1. Letter from Osmond to Abram Hoffer, 5 April 1956, quoted in Dyck 2008, p. 2.
2. Osmond 1957, p. 429.
3. The preface to the 1964 anthology *LSD: The Consciousness-Expanding Drug* glosses 'the psychedelics' as 'literally, mind-manifesting or consciousness-expanding compounds'. Solomon 1964, p. ix.
4. Osmond 1957, p. 429.
5. Hexter 1972, p. 139.
6. Hexter 1972. See also Hexter 1967 and the articles collected in Hexter 1971.
7. See the articles collected in Hexter 1979a, 1979b.
8. Hexter 1982, p. 185.
9. Hexter 1979a, p. 6.
10. White 2007, p. 247.
11. Hexter 1972, p. 304.
12. Nor does it mean that Hexter can simply be described as an 'own-sakist' historian, as his interest in the history of liberty clearly shows. In a penetrating article, W.H. Dray has discussed the complexities of Hexter's position, both Whiggish and anti-presentist. See Dray 1987.
13. Hexter 1972, p. 105.
14. Mink 1980, p. 18.
15. Hexter 1972, p. 131.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 130.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 125.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 131.
19. Musser [2012].
20. Musser 1981, p. 81.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 82.
22. Gunning 2006, p. 34.
23. *Ibid.*
24. Gunning 1983, p. 355.
25. See Musser 2006 [1994].
26. Hexter 1972, p. 131.
27. Hexter 1952.
28. Hexter 1972, p. 128.
29. *Ibid.*, p. 137.
30. *Ibid.*, p. 135.
31. *Ibid.*, p. 136.
32. *Ibid.*, p. 139.
33. *Ibid.*

34. Ibid., p. 141.
35. Wohl 1994.
36. Ibid., p. 42.
37. Hexter 1972, p. 142.
38. Tybjerg 1998.
39. 'Annette Michelson ... sagte mir einmal, daß ich mir mit meinen Bemühungen um das frühe Kino eine vielversprechende akademische Karriere verbaut habe'. Musser 2003, p. 89.
40. Hexter 1972, p. 141.
41. Gunning 1995, p. 114-15.
42. Ibid.
43. Ibid., p. 116-17. The typo 'pay' corrected to conform with original article text in Gunning 1989, p. 33.
44. Ibid.
45. Ibid., p. 118.
46. Ibid., p. 119. Quoting from Sadoul 1948, p. 271.
47. Ibid., p. 123.
48. Hexter 1979c, p. 133 n4. Quoting the characterisation of himself in Palmer 1979, p. 123.
49. Hexter 1972, p. 125.
50. Ibid., p. 133.
51. Curthoys & Docker 2006, p. 181.
52. Curthoys & Docker 2013, p. 208.
53. Hexter 1971, p. 68.
54. Ibid., p. 48.

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