

Preface

He's afraid, really afraid, of where a thought
like that, taken to its conclusion, might lead.

—Hans Fallada, *Alone in Berlin*

This is another book about resistance, this time resistance to reading. If intellectual freedom is a pre-condition of free speech and political freedom, then the texts we choose to read, or not to read, matter. Because the dream of academic responsibility involves reading texts carefully, giving an objective, detailed account of an argument evaluated on its own terms as well as by the standards of impartial judgement, it inevitably takes time. At a push, interpretation can be delegated to third party intermediaries—the soft underbelly of censorship—who are always keen to save us time.

Those with prior immunity to critical thinking prove useful. Those who believed they were the opposition, now thoroughly acquainted with fear, find themselves card carrying fellow travellers. Discursive, conceptual, and narrative devices are deployed in accordance with pre-determined strategy and verifiable outcomes. Self-replicating arguments have logical consequences that shape the terrain of struggle and call for countermeasures from multiple sources at multiple levels. Criticism by hearsay inevitably passes by way of dogmatic bickering over competing authorities only to arrive at the terminus of sectarianism. Which is not to say that pacific inclusiveness cannot also be part of the problem rather than the solution, and lead to a familiar destination.

Recall the protagonist of H.G. Wells's *The Sleeper Awakes* who finds himself in the year 2100 with 'this world of base servitude in hypertrophied cities' in the grip of a totalitarian conspiracy. He comes across a copy of *Heart of Darkness*, which he hasn't heard of before. Is he looking at a representation of primitive times or an image of the present? 'How long had he slept?' he asks himself.

Clair illuminated and fought and is everywhere in this text. My thanks to Tony Voss for his meticulous reading and encouragement, and to David Johnson who helped despite seeing much that he didn't like.

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