Wortley Hall
War – and Peace
May 2014

WW1 and the Media

Notes based on *openDemocracy* articles. These can be read on the oD website > OurBeeb…
RW's classic *Communications* is still very relevant to any debate on the media.

1. The BBC's WW1 Centenary planning embraces a huge provision of programmes over four years. Can we expect a reasonably balanced, fairly objective, approach to this commemoration? If not, why not? A quick response on this, keeping comments very brief.

2. Already we may have seen Jeremy Paxman's 4-hour documentary 'Britain's Great War'.
   David Elstein's review of this (openDemocracy > Our Beeb…) will be considered. The points discussed will be general.

   a) "There are always two disciplines in play when broadcasting tackles history: one is broadcasting, the other is history. The needs of broadcasting usually come first, as with Paxman…"

   b) How did the programme rate as actual history? Not well. In the brief moment when reasons for the War are canvassed by Paxman he refers to the need "to honour treaties, defend the Empire and protect Britain". He tells us that Britain was "gripped by the fear of invasion" and that the High Command believed that the enemy might land at any time. In fact… discussion on various points made by Elstein.

   c) "In just four episodes… it would not have been reasonable to ask of *Britain's Great War* that it offer the kind of context ITV's 26-part *The World at War* so notably managed".

   d) Even so, "The Paxman series was …superbly assembled, full of quirky detail, and presented in stylish…fashion". The fashion for 'celebrity' presentation on TV of history, art, science and whatever, with music… A help or a hindrance.

3. ***Faction***: three hours of high budget drama devoted in early 2014 to the famous *37 Days* between the Sarajevo assassination and the formal declaration of war by Britain. We'll pull out general issues from the exchanges between Elstein and the writer of the TV film drama ***37 Days***. Viewing of the film is not essential for this. Participants can refer to their experience of film and drama to advance the discussion.

4. *The Media and War* - the problems and ways to address them…