


The Centre for Medical Humanities

16th February 2011, Birley Room Hatfield College

5.15pm Followed by wine & canapés

Please contact Polly De Giorgi to book, Polly.degiorgi@durham.ac.uk, 0191 3347008



The Brightly Coloured Bell-Jar

I recently described the impact of mental illness in dominant, unequal societies offering some stark financial facts, with doctors in England in 2005 writing 29 million prescriptions for anti-depressant drugs, costing over £400 million to the NHS and in 2003, the USA spending more than \$100 billion on mental health treatments. The World Health Organisation predicts that within 20 years, depression will be the biggest health burden on society both economically and sociologically.

But are we in danger of pathologising every aspect of our lives; and whilst we're offered 'magic-bullets' in our obsessive pursuit of well-being, isn't there a danger that we are blunting our experience of being human?

We're told that the arts offer a sure-fire route to happiness; but is that what we're after, and are the arts being used as sugar to coat the bitter pill of medication. Is there room for the ugly, angry and the pessimistic in this debate?

This paper will explore the relationship between the arts, mental health and our sometimes neurotic aspiration to well-being.

Clive Parkinson

Clive Parkinson has written and presented widely around the arts and health agenda sharing his hands-on experience as a practicing artist and his strategic understanding of the field through research and development. He has worked for the NHS as an artist in a hospital for adults with learning difficulties and as a senior mental health promotion specialist; and within the cultural sector was development director for Arts for Health Cornwall. As current Director of Arts for Health at Manchester Metropolitan University his work focuses less on the built environment, ill-health and deficit, and more on public health, well-being and community assets. <http://artsforhealthmmu.blogspot.com>