

Research in Practice.

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Proposed question for Independent Inquiry: 'How do psychedelic environments impact our wellbeing?'.

This essay is an exploration of three key words supported by images, artists and independent research that reflect my interests. Examining concepts and a variety of contexts will convey a concluded question to approach my dissertation proposal.

Psychodelia is my first keyword. Psychodelia constructs abstract and vivid forms, driven by the style that lifts my mood I feel at ease when examining the artwork. "Psychodelia was a cultural bridge between the abstract and surreal that lasted a short period in its pure state, before being co-opted by mass marketing and fashion"(Heller, 2017). Additionally, "Psychedelic art" is often considered a synonym for "cosmic art," "transcendental art," or "visionary art" (Krippner, 2016) and was inspired by drug taking within the 60's. These art styles communicate spiritual and mystical elements that are beyond the physical world.

Psychodelia has been communicated in various ways throughout history creating iconic legacies. 'The Beatles' (1960-1970) are an iconic English band who made a continuous impact and influence on culture during the 60's who are open with their astonishing experiences using psychedelic drugs, in an online article by Rolling Stone magazine, reporter Mikal Gilmore (2016) states that "[t]heir vision of the transmigration of the soul was an eerie and credible rendition of what taking LSD might sound like". In addition, one of their most iconic films uses this style, which is the *Yellow Submarine* from 1968, which contained many contextual elements seen within culture at that time including the Vietnam War and

protests for peace, further protests regarding civil rights the assassination of both Martin Luther King and John F. Kennedy and the space race with the first landing in 1969 as a response to these events much of the iconography within the film using this style can be seen as escapist from reality.

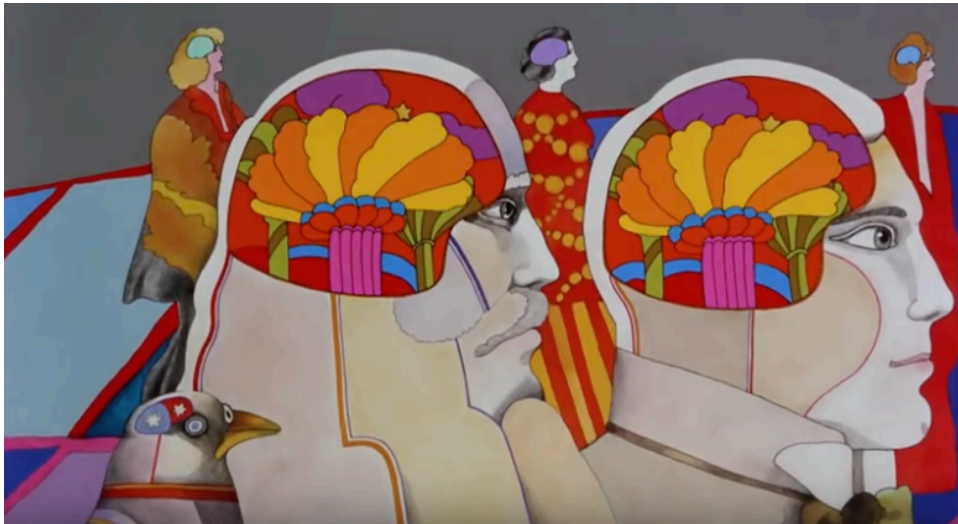


Fig. 1 Still from '*Yellow Submarine*', (1968).

The adventurous, hallucinogenic animated film *Yellow Submarine*'s storyline was inspired by the tracks that the Beatles sent over to animator George Dunning and producer Heinz Edelmann, visually the hand-drawn animated film used psychedelia, pop art and art deco as inspiration and additionally elements of montage to layer up the scenes. The colourful film is reminiscent of cartoons with the film aimed at children.

Within psychedelic artwork artists enter a new world of imagination that deviate from what is normal. "Psychedelic art, as well as the other cited clusters, is indebted to the modern movements of abstraction and surrealism" (Krippner, 2016). The stylisations can be perceived as whimsical, dynamic, or abnormal. However, my interpretation of psychedelic

art is that it's very expressive, meaningful and has a positive impact among society by conveying colourful patterns and meticulous artwork that improves mental health and is a powerful resource to use in creating happier, healthier lives. "An emerging body of research shows a clear link between our surroundings and our mental health." (The Aesthetics of Joy, 2019). This suggests we can live a more fulfilling life through design, as there is a correlation between our environment and our wellbeing.

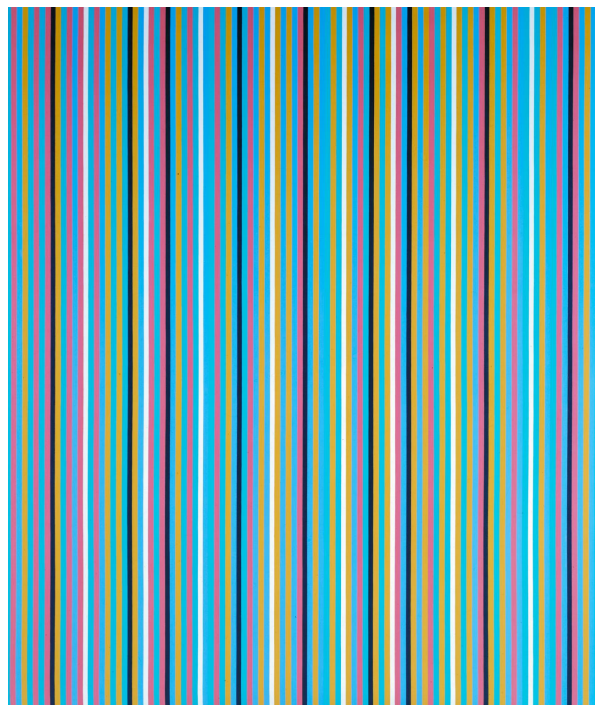


Fig. 1 '*Achæan*' (1981)

Bridget Riley is an English painter born in 1931 and is one of the most important figures in the history of art. Beginning with observation and research of Riley's artwork "Riley's art transforms impure hues into pure, projective perception" (Riley & Shiff, 2016). Riley's art reveals aspects of optical vibrations and illusions and was key in the development of psychedelic art within the 1960's. The paintings communicate explorations of geometric

shapes and colour altering perceptions that apply an innovative style. In the oil painting on canvas above titled *Achæan* (1981) which was inspired by ancient Egyptian tomb paintings and the local landscape, perception is altered.

Riley's paintings incorporate "geometric shapes and colour to trick the eye and explore the nature of perception" (Tate, 2021) and uses the colours blue, yellow, red and turquoise to create a rhythm and optical illusion when viewing the painting. These colours were brighter and more vivid than the colours she had used before. The process of painting involved manipulating different coloured strips of gouache and the placement of one colour next to another.

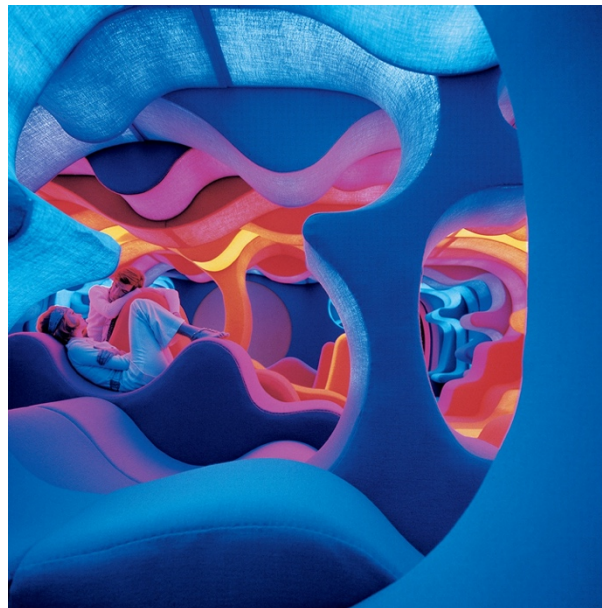


Fig. 2 '*Verner Panton Design AG*' (2000).

Within a contemporary context, Verner Panton (1926-1998) is a furniture and interior designer. Panton (2020) states that

‘When we create an environment the colour planning is of vital importance. It is not enough to say that red is red, and blue is blue. I normally work with parallel colours, whose shades follow each other in the spectrum. Thus, I can control the colour-temperature in the room and create a certain mood.’

The interior cave entitled ‘Panton Fantasy Landscape’ as seen in Fig. 2, is exhibited in Vitra Design Museum, Germany. Furthermore, the use of luscious colour is highly expressive and conveys a strong ambiance. The contrast embodies balance and a compelling form. It can be inferred that the art movement visualises retrofuturism, which is how people visualise the future although influenced from the past, these elements make the surroundings aesthetically pleasing to the eye. The forms are organic and connect smoothly. The colours symbolise a calming, cool expression that complements each other. The texture is soft and the composition is random but flows fluently. The lighting is filtered through the fabric adding luminous tints thus creating enchanting elements.

Environment has been defined as ‘All of the external abiotic and biotic factors, conditions, and influences that affect the life, development, and survival of an organism or a community (A Dictionary of Environment and Conservation, 2013). Furthermore, continuing my research it has been stated that the word also can be identified as ‘the physical, non-living and living, surrounding of a society with which it has a reciprocal relationship’ (Principles of Environmental Sciences, 2008) which focuses on these factors and highlights that the living world is included within its relationship to society, contrary to the previous narrower definition of the word ‘Environment’.

Investigating further into the different aspects of the environment, research indicates that there are different areas of the term 'Environment' that contain surroundings that differ from each other. For instance,

'An urban environment is a dynamic, changing spatially and structurally defined set of the economic, social, political and administrative system acting concurrently and independently to meet real and perceived needs of its residents and other users.'

(Simulation of the Urban Environment, 1972).

It can be inferred that this specific environment may be called a 'city', 'region' or 'nation' depending on the orientation.

In contrast to urban environments, there are natural environments that have entities such as trees, species, and ecosystems. "The predominant meaning has traditionally been our nonhuman surroundings, with an understood dichotomy between what is a result of human influence and what remains untouched" (Identity and the Natural Environment, 2003). This definition states the complexity of the term, as nature can be subjected to human influence through support, tolerances, and what is planted or exterminated.

Subsequently, studies have been conducted regarding green areas within natural environments that show positive influences towards mental health and wellbeing. These

highlight the environmental and social benefits related to green space as being 'important to mitigating urbanisation-induced environmental effects and increasing the quality of life of citizens. In these studies, urban green space is defined as a range of parks, street trees, urban agriculture, residential lawns, and roof gardens.'

(Human–Environment Interactions in Urban Green Spaces, 2015)

The studies focus on physical and mental health benefits, such as positive social interactions, connecting with nature, and exercise through walking within such areas. This illustrates that the structure of environments contributes to healthy behaviour, motivates activity, and improves general health. Equally important is blue environments 'rivers, lakes, and coasts seem to have intrinsic qualities that promote restoration and wellbeing' (Identity and the Natural Environment: The Psychological Significance of Nature, 2003). Thus, highlighting the importance of nature as a whole.

Expanding my research into environmental studies further, mental illness in rural areas conveys a pattern with alcohol abuse/dependence and major depression being the most common. 'Rural residents have been shown to have higher levels of depression, domestic violence, and child abuse, and demonstrate higher involvement in behavioural health risk factors such as sedentary lifestyle and smoking.' (Rural Mental Health: Issues, Policies, and Best Practices, 2012) This depicts economic instability, an insufficient decrease of support towards residents, and evidence that shows adults who live in rural areas had poor to fair health.

In addition, the problems of pollution add to the urban crisis. 'The concentrated nature of our industrial facilities; the over-crowding and congestion of unregulated land use patterns,

particularly in the inner city' (The Inner City Environment and the Role of the Environmental Protection Agency , 1972). focuses on the pouring pollutants in populated areas conveying environmental degradation from the solid waste problems in the inner cities.

Subsequently, these factors not only contribute to our survival, but most importantly our wellbeing. Designer and author Ingrid Fetell Lee has researched and created a variety of work that shows the hidden influence of our environment that influences our emotions and wellbeing. Lee empowers people to find happiness through design.

Wellbeing is my third keyword. Defining 'Wellbeing' is complex as the definitions depend on the context, which can be influenced by economic surroundings, social aspects, and ethnicity. An article written by Joseph Kangmennaang (date), titled 'Wellbeing is shown in our appearance, the food we eat, what we wear, and what we buy' states that 'National wellbeing is complex and multi-dimensional and reflects the lived experiences of people and communities.' Views on wellbeing convey a variety of different components, exploring the concepts that include a wide range of subjects which impact the emotional state and basic functions that are associated with behaviours, thought process and physiology. 'Humans are fundamentally emotional creatures, and emotional experience is an inherent part of human existence. Our feelings drive us to engage in particular behaviours and are hallmark features of many aspects of human existence.' (Health, Happiness, and Well-Being: Better Living Through Psychological Science, 2015.) Our wellbeing relies on our ability to alter our negative emotions and strengthen our positive emotions by learning effective ways to control them. Additionally, evidence shows certain strategies can improve our well-being by using cognitive processes and changing our habitats. Therefore,

'Emotions ranging from peaks of ecstasy, to the agony of a broken bone, to the depths of depressions, colours virtually all aspects of our lives. Regulating emotions, especially in the face of stressors, is often no easy task, yet it is essential to effecting coping on an everyday basis.' (Health, Happiness, and Well-Being: Better Living Through Psychological Science, 2015.)

Views on wellbeing range from internal and external factors. Internal elements include aspects such as mental illness, 'Mental illness is a clinically diagnosable condition that significantly interferes with an individual's cognitive, emotional or social abilities.' (Mental Health: A Person-centred Approach, 2013). Mental illness is common and includes experiences of depression and anxiety. In addition, inactivity is proved to cause damage physically and mentally as "[s]edentary lifestyles carry at least twice the risk of serious disease and premature death" (Bayer,2019) this is further supported by groups such as the World Health Organisation.

In addition, 'Maslow's hierarchy of needs' is a theory that prospects the role of human needs, from the most basic to the more advanced that are broken into three areas that people need to progress in life.

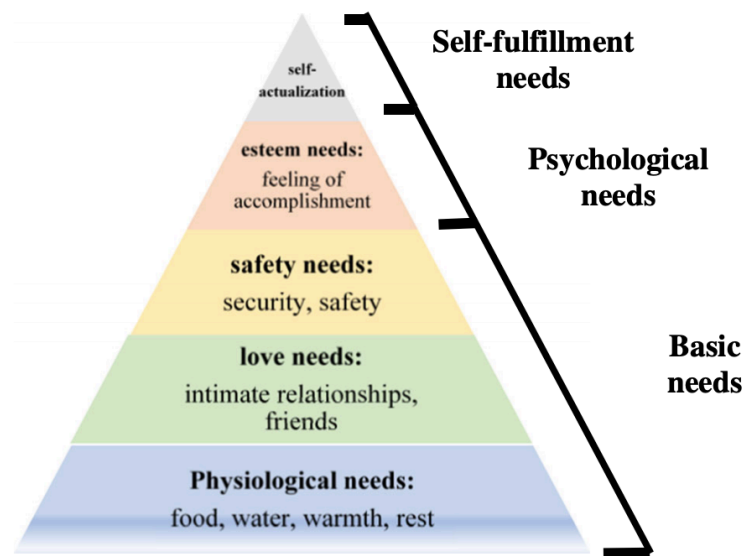


Fig. 3. *Rethinking the Place of Love Needs in Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs*, (2017).

Physiological needs are on the lowest level of basic needs within Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, within this includes food, water, warmth and rest. The fulfilment of the basic needs is mandatory to achieve a higher level of hierarchy. The physiological aspects contribute to the mind and body, thus leading to self-fulfilment and happiness. It can be inferred that transitioning our environment with colour, design and a new sense of ambiance contribute towards wellbeing. An article titled 'Colour Design Schemes for Long-term Healthcare Environments' by Arts and Humanities Research Council states that

'Evidence is now accruing to demonstrate that healthcare environments can have a major influence on the speed of recovery of patients as well as their mental state; even more important perhaps is the fact that poor environments can hinder a sense of well-being which in turn impacts on recovery rates.'

(2007)

This suggests time spent in a health care environment can do more harm than good to one's health. 'The skilful use of colour can help to overcome the sensory deprivation caused by lack of visual stimulation associated with drab or monotonous environments.' (Arts and Humanities Research Council, 2007). Colour strategies can form therapeutic sensations; however, one design is not a remedy for all, spaces need to be carefully considered to suit diverse needs relating to each illness, yet these environments are still crucial and can be used to benefit one's health. These spaces can be devoted to healing and aiding through design.



Fig. 4. *Imagining A More Joyful Childrens Hospital*, (2019).

Entering the health care system usually begins with a pessimistic mindset due to injury or illness. Ingrid Fetell Lee quotes from an article titled 'Imagining A More Joyful Children's Hospital, (2019)' that 'Hospital environments as they are today eschew colour and nature, often have little natural light, and tend to be as antiseptic in their aesthetic as they are in their hygiene.' Fetell Lee proclaims that there is a phenomenon known as distraction theory,

which states 'positive distractions can help take patients' minds from their condition, which in turn alleviates their anxiety' (Imagining A More Joyful Children's Hospital, 2019). This suggests encountering artwork within hospitals can alter your state of mind, in summary, we should create an environment of wellness, and not illness.

In conclusion, firstly I investigated 'Psychodelia' which obtains a variety of aspects such as the drug substance and the impact it had among society, particularly in the 1960's. This led to a high influence among creative industries, artwork and mental health. Research has shown the impact of Psychedelics was a mainly positive outcome, thus creating a speculation that has raised questions as to whether it should be allowed to be investigated further. I am drawn to the unpredictable artwork that constructs unique forms depending on the individuals experience, I find every story tells something different from analysing each piece, as can be seen in Bridget Riley's expressive paintings and Verner Panton's compelling scenery.

This led to my second keyword 'Environment' which studies different surroundings depending on people's upbringings and understandable situations, for instance, 'Urban' and 'Natural' environments both hold distinct qualities that differ from one another. These habitats hold great importance to one's mental health, an urban or city environment positively gives greater opportunities and can be visually stimulating, however pollution, business and the overwhelming nature of the environment can also be negatively received. Natural surrounding can be positive and make the individual feel more connected with the earth, in contrast those from a rural community may feel that they need to leave to gain work and social skills. Leaving a natural environment would not be from choice if the opportunities were there, which guided me to the third key word 'Wellbeing'.

Views on wellbeing acquired significant studies that conveyed multiplex elements, for instance, there are compound mental illnesses that effect each person and their mental state. Most of the research found a person's wellbeing was mostly negative, this can be due to trauma, illness or their genes. There is an obvious lack of support from the government due to low resources, by taking matters into our own hands, legally, led me to the question 'How do psychedelic environments impact our wellbeing?'. The use of colour, style and shape can be used within architecture, interiors and exteriors to help aid people's mind-sets. Ingrid Fetell Lee embraced these concepts and brought design to life, which showed positive outcomes. We have the power to make an everlasting change, there is hope for a brighter and worthwhile future.

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Fig. 2. 'Verner Panton Design AG' (2000) Available at: <https://www.vitra.com/en-us/magazine/details/panton-fantasy-landscape> (Accessed:18/03/21)

Fig. 3. 'Rethinking the Place of Love Needs in Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs' (2017) Symposium: Revisiting Maslow: Human Needs in the 21st Century. p.537-538 (Accessed: 22/04/21)

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