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LIVING in A DREAM

AI / VR Immersive Exhibition

#Livinginadream

🌐 livinginadream.org



As part of the Cambridge Festival 2023, Living in a Dream is an exhibition about dreaming, depersonalisation and how we experience our self and body in our dreams.

Through a series of immersive audio-visual installations and Virtual Reality (VR) artworks, visitors can explore the concept of selfhood during dreaming.

The exhibition is the result of a collaboration between a team of interdisciplinary researchers and creatives from Cognitive Neuroscience (led by Matt Gwyther) and Illustration (led by Dr. Nanette Hoogslag). The exhibition has arisen from the Living in a Dream project (Principal Investigator Dr Jane Aspell) which investigates how our sense of 'self' is experienced during dreams, and how this can be affected by disturbances that happen whilst we are awake.

The exhibition draws on almost a thousand dream reports collected as part of the research study, focusing on people (without a clinical diagnosis) who experience depersonalisation symptoms, which include feeling detached from their body and perceiving themselves as unreal.

To bring these reports to life, MA Illustration students creatively re-visualised them, resulting in twelve immersive artworks that use a range of audio-visual installations and cutting-edge technologies such as artificial intelligence and virtual reality. The result is an exciting collaboration between art and science that provides a unique insight into the construction of dream experiences and the nature of self.

The Team



Dr Jane Aspell

Associate Professor of
Cognitive Neuroscience @ ARU
Head of Self & Body Lab
Principal Investigator

Matt Gwyther

Researcher, Cognitive
Neuroscience @ ARU
Research lead & Artificial
Intelligence advisor



Dr Nanette Hoogslag

Course Leader
MA Illustration @ ARU
Illustrator, Researcher

Emily Godden

Course Leader,
Digital Media Production @ ARU
Virtual Reality advisor



Living in a Dream research project international collaborators:

Co-investigator: Dr. Anna Ciaunica (University of Lisbon & UCL)

Co-investigator: Prof. Bigna Lenggenhager (University of Konstanz & Zurich)

Co-investigator: Prof. Jennifer Windt (Monash University)

Research Assistants & Interns: Hamish Miller, Sarah Coyle, Gwynnevere Suter

Bial

The Living in a Dream research project is funded by a Bial Foundation grant awarded to Dr. Jane Aspell.(PI) and collaborators Dr. Anna Ciaunica, Prof. Bigna Lenggenhager & Prof. Jennifer Windt.

About MA Illustration

This project presented a unique challenge to the students involved. Not only did they apply themselves to support scientific research, but they also engaged in critical investigation of a range of emergent media, particularly Artificial Intelligence (AI). AI technologies are having a revolutionary impact on creative industries, and illustration in particular, but their use is not without controversy and questions surrounding their impact on human-computer creativity are ongoing. The students engaged with these technologies and found new ways of image creation.

In 2022, the focus of the MA Illustration shifted to illustration for social change, an innovative and growing area of visual communication that addresses complex social and environmental issues. Illustration skills such as visual storytelling, visual mediation, observation, creative thinking, and image making are highly sought-after, with more and more illustrators taking part in change-making processes in various fields such as organisations, policy development, health and education, social entrepreneurship, development, and applied science and health research.

Our Masters in Illustration is unique in this focus and Living in a Dream collaboration is one example of the work students have been involved in.

Find out more about the MA Illustration course [🔗](https://aru.ac.uk/study/postgraduate/illustration)
ARU: <https://aru.ac.uk/study/postgraduate/illustration>



The Students



Jewel Chang

 @jewel_chang1228

Dream-P016_11



Xinyue Peng

 @xyue97

Dream-P009_11

Dream-P113_6



Ann Meg

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Dream-P016_2



Yuxin Gu

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Dream-P157_14



Kelsey Wu

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Dream-P250_8



Suhong

 @suhongzhou719

Dream-P031_2



Cheney Zhang

Dream-
P113_1/9-P151_12



Jinpu

Dream-P240_1

Research

Background

The majority of previous research on depersonalisation has focused on changes to the body and sense of self during wakefulness. However, little is known about dream experiences in people with depersonalisation. This is surprising because many of the individuals with depersonalisation describe their daily waking experiences as being “dream-like”, and not feeling fully present or real.

Humans spend roughly a third of their lives asleep and much of this time is spent dreaming. Dreams have been described as the quintessential virtual reality, with simulation theories considering them as ‘self in a world’ experiences. However, self-experience in dreams can differ significantly from waking life, including dissociative experiences and alterations in cognition, metacognition, and bodily experiences.

Certain types of less common dream experiences involving the body and sense of self such as outside observer dreams, dreams with distinct bodily sensations, and changes to bodily perception, have similarities with the types of anomalous bodily experiences found in waking depersonalisation.

We conducted two Bial Foundation-funded studies to examine the impact of depersonalisation traits (in non-clinical samples) on people’s experiences of themselves and their bodies during dreaming.

Our first study’s findings suggest a degree of continuity between waking depersonalisation experiences and specific aspects of bodily and self-experience in dreams, including outside observer perspective dreams. In our second study, we carried out a 14-day dream diary study to delve deeper into individuals’ dream experiences. Results from both studies will be revealed this year.

For more information on our research, visit the Self & Body lab, and to follow progress on the Living in a Dream research project, visit livinginadream.org and follow @mpdgwyther (Research Lead) on Twitter.

Self & Body lab





Depersonalisation

Depersonalisation (DP) is a condition that causes a person to feel disconnected from their body and sense of self. This feeling of detachment and estrangement is relatively common, with 26-74% of people experiencing it at least once in their lifetime. However, for some people, these experiences persist and can be diagnosed as Depersonalisation-Derealisation Disorder (DDD), a psychiatric condition that affects 1-2% of the population.

The Living in a Dream exhibition explores depersonalisation (in those without a clinical diagnosis) and its association with bodily selfhood during waking and dreaming. The exhibition also marks the launch of a new ebook edited by Matt Gwyther, which includes first-hand accounts, scientific research, artistic interpretations, and possible therapeutic directions related to depersonalisation and dissociation. The ebook is available for free online, but you can support the Unreal charity (which raises awareness and provides support for people with DDD) by purchasing the ebook version. 25% of the sales will be donated to the Unreal charity.

By making this collection accessible, we hope to increase awareness of depersonalisation and dissociation experiences and support those who are affected by them. If you are concerned about symptoms of depersonalisation please take a look at the Unreal charity website for advice and support at { <https://www.unrealuk.org/> }

Scan the code to read the collection online. Use the promo code Livinginadream23 for 20% of the eBook.

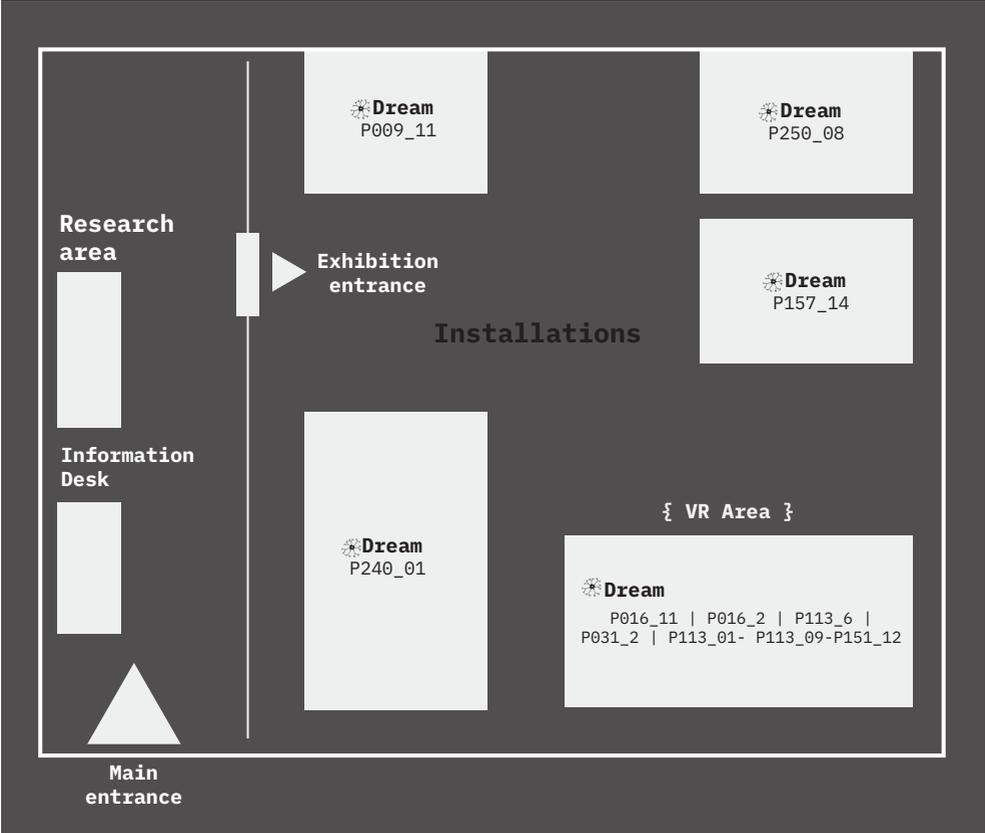
If you are concerned about symptoms of depersonalisation please take a look at the Unreal charity website for advice and support.

unreal

Living in a Dream:
essay collection



Map



The Dreams

Xinyue Peng 彭新月



Dream - P113_6



Key themes
Tactile and Somatosensory

Delves into the somatosensory aspect with the dreamer vividly recalling the tastes of food and the sensation of a bee buzzing against their neck.

Kelsey Wu 吳依蔓

Dream - P250_8



Key themes
Vestibular & balance and anomalous body experience

In this abstract dream, the individual experiences a kaleidoscope of colours and floats into a landscape of hills and a forest, where they encounter distant, flashing lights.



Yuxin Gu 顾雨昕



Dream - P016_11



Key themes
impaired movement

In this dream, the individual experiences impaired movement as they struggle to swim in a deep, dark pool with an insufficient flotation device, ultimately leading to a feeling of drowning and causing them to wake up tense and anxious.



Find out more about how these dreams were brought to life at livinginadream.org

Jewel Chang 張雅筑



Dream - P016_11



Key themes

False awakenings and multiple dream layers.

In this dream, the individual experiences false awakenings and impaired movement as they are repeatedly chased by an unfamiliar man and struggle to alert their parents, only to find themselves trapped in a cycle of waking up within the dream.

Xinyue Peng 彭新月

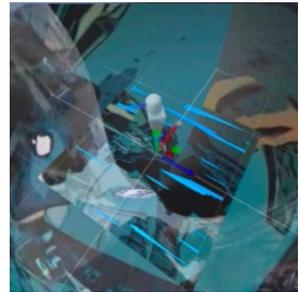
Dream - P009_11



Key themes

Alienation from surroundings, anomalous body experience

Features a strong negative feeling and a sense of detachment from the dreamer's body, described as heavy and floating simultaneously.



Cheney Zhang 张芊熠



Dream - P113_1/_9/P151_12



Key themes

Anomalous body experience and alienation from surroundings

In these three dreams, the themes of anomalous body experiences and changes in dream perspective are explored through a combination of surreal body distortions, altered limb sizes, and third-person viewpoints. Notably, a dreamer experiences their left arm is shorter than their right, and the third dreamer watches themselves converse with their father from an external perspective, unable to hear their own words.

Suhong Zhou 周苏红



Dream - P031_2



Key themes

Alienation from surroundings, uncanniness, natural beauty

In this dream, the individual experiences a sense of alienation from their surroundings and a touch of uncanniness while appreciating the natural beauty of a garden outside their house as they pick flowers and take a leisurely walk.

Jinpu 左金璞

Dream - P240_1



Key themes

Narrative and movement

In this dream, a woman is pursuing someone who attempts to hide, with a series of interconnected events unfolding. The dream's narrative is constructed through a cohesive sequence of action fragments, creating a meaningful storyline.



Ann Meg 马欣悦



Dream - P016_2



Key themes

Alienation from surroundings and movement

In this dream, the individual experiences alienation from their surroundings and movement as they navigate a hill without feeling their body, and encounter a seemingly blind man who becomes threatening and follows them, all while the dreamer remains an observer with limited connection to their own emotions and physical sensations.

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