

One World, Many Games

A Lived Research Proposal

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Fracture and longing

We already walk through layered worlds. Memory changes a street; private associations change a room. Two people can occupy the same place and find themselves in very different stories. I want to understand what becomes possible when an experience is designed around that difference.

My subject is asymmetric shared realities: experiences in which participants share physical ground while inhabiting different narrative or perceptual worlds. I imagine two travelers moving through the same holodeck, each on a different quest. Their paths cross. What can happen between them?

The difficulty interests me as much as the possibility. What counts as meeting when the people involved understand the encounter differently? Is physical co-presence enough? Does it require an emotional connection, mutual influence, or some recognition of the other person's story? Can an encounter matter to both people without meaning the same thing to them?

This summer I want to explore how those encounters might be made. I am beginning with questions about perception, narrative, and the relationship between participants, and will work toward small experiences through which I can test them.

Why this inquiry

Mixed reality passthrough, spatial anchoring, and adaptive storytelling give us ways to make subjective multiplicity explicit. Different images and narratives can occupy the same physical setting. The design problem is how those differences affect the people sharing it.

Individually tailored realities can isolate people. I am interested in designing situations where different perspectives make an encounter richer, and in understanding where that possibility breaks down. How far can the participants' experiences diverge before they lose the ability to act together?

Consent and awareness are part of this inquiry. I want to distinguish a productive uncertainty within an experience from manipulation or accidental deception. Participants need ways to understand what they are entering, communicate discomfort, and leave.

There is also a question of language. What happens to a shared gesture when each person reads it through a different story? Can a common vocabulary develop during the encounter, or does meaning have to be negotiated as the experience unfolds?

How I will work

Thought and memory

I will return to Umberto Eco's *Six Walks in the Fictional Woods* and Italo Calvino's *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler* to examine how a narrative can hold different routes through it. Calvino's interrupted beginnings make the reader's search for continuity part of the experience itself. Merleau-Ponty's work on perception will help me think about the body, memory, and the histories we bring to what we see.

Alongside this reading, I will draw on game design, narrative agency, multiplayer storytelling, and asynchronous interaction. I want a vocabulary precise enough to describe how distinct experiences can affect one another.

Other practitioners

I will seek conversations with artists and designers whose work approaches these questions. Ant Hampton's *Etiquette* is a particular point of reference: two people sit together while private instructions organize their encounter. Janet Cardiff's walks let a recorded voice and another time enter the place where a participant is standing. I want to understand the techniques that make these relationships work.

The layered city

I will walk familiar parks, alleys, and transit systems under different narrative premises. One day the subway is a hidden archive; another day it is a crumbling underground court. What becomes noticeable? How do the premises change my behavior, my attention, or an encounter with someone else?

I will document these experiments and the friction they produce. Self-awareness, alienation, euphoria, disorientation, and wonder are all responses I want to observe, including the moments when an overlay stops working.

Two small experiments

A shared quest, different mythologies

The first prototype will be an alternate reality game in a shared physical setting. One player searches for a relic, another for a missing map; a third protects a secret. Their paths intersect, but their reasons for being there differ. I want to see how an action can serve one story and become an unexpected event in another.

Interviews after the experience, together with records of play, will help me compare what each person thought was happening with the encounters the game actually produced.

Two overlays, one place

The second prototype will use Meta Quest 3 passthrough and spatial anchoring to place two narrative overlays in one physical environment. Participants will have distinct experiences while remaining able to encounter and influence one another.

Field tests will combine observation with participants' accounts of what they experienced. I will work within the limits of field of view, passthrough fidelity, and fatigue, and include accessibility in the design from the beginning. The prototypes will change in response to that feedback.

Toward the portfolio

I do not yet know which form the fall project will take. It might be a ritual, a journey, or a layered game. The small experiments should help me discover what is compelling enough to develop further, and what can be made to work between actual participants.

The question I want to carry through the research is how an experience can make room for different worlds while giving the people inside them something to do together.

Reading

Umberto Eco. *Six Walks in the Fictional Woods*.

Italo Calvino. *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler*.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty. *Phenomenology of Perception*.

Stanislas Dehaene. *Consciousness and the Brain*.

David Eagleman. *Incognito: The Secret Lives of the Brain*.

Oliver Sacks. *Hallucinations*.

The original research schedule

2025	Proposed work
June 1-10	Theoretical immersion and question mapping
June 10-30	Interviews, self-experiments, and experiential observation
July 1-25	ARG and mixed reality prototypes; iterative testing
July 25-31	Reflection, synthesis, and documentation toward the fall project

Edited reading edition, September 2026. This edition revises the language and layout of the April 2025 proposal. It retains the research questions, proposed experiments, and original schedule. The schedule records the plan at the time of writing.