Project Proposal

Line of Enquiry

How can a design system mediate the translation of a single poem into multiple visual interpretations, while preserving multiplicity without collapsing into chaos?

Project Overview

My project investigates perception, translation, and authorship through generating images from written text. Using Matsuo Bashō's haiku '*The Old Pond*' as a fixed textual anchor, my aim is to create a platform that invites participants to submit written descriptions of their mental visualisation of the poem. These written perceptions will then be translated into abstract visual compositions through a rule-based system designed and authored by me.

Rather than using generative AI or automated image synthesis, the system draws from a finite and evolving dataset of images that I create and add weekly. In this way, I act as a mediator, designing the conditions, constraints, and visual language through which perception is translated, while allowing participants' interpretations to determine the outcomes. The resulting images and texts will accumulate in an online archive, forming a collective record of how a single text generates multiple ways of seeing.

Background and Context

I am interested in how individual perception can be translated into visual form, as well as the multiplicity and subjectivity inherent in interpreting a single text. In contemporary visual communication, there is a growing reliance on AI to generate images from prompts, often bypassing the nuances of human perception and authorship. This raised questions about agency, creativity, and the mediation of meaning. Essentially, I wondered: who truly shapes images, and how do we preserve human subjectivity in visual language?

By creating a system where participants' interpretations of a poem are translated into visualisations through a curated dataset of my own images, my work intervenes in this landscape. It is relevant to debates around the ethics of generative AI in design, the value of human-mediated curation, and the ways in which collective perception can be visualised and archived. It also proposes a method for engaging audiences in active interpretation, offering an alternative to passive consumption of pre-generated or automated imagery.

Positioning and Shift in Practice

My practice initially approached translation through animation and hand drawing, exploring how movement, time, and texture could alter perception. Through dialogue, critical research, and iterative testing, I recognised the limits of hand-drawing and animation as a tool for measuring perception, as it

shaped interpretation rather than revealing it. This led to a shift in position from author to mediator.

In this project, I will no longer attempt to create changing perceptions myself. Instead, I will collect perceptions as data and design a system that visualises them. Meaning emerges through the interaction between participant, system, and archive, rather than through a singular authored image.

Methods and Production

Authored Visual Dataset

I will produce a growing library of abstract visual assets (lines, textures, tonal fields, shapes) informed by memory, atmosphere, and material experimentation. These assets will be categorised manually (stillness, movement, density, temperature) and form the visual vocabulary of the system.

Rule-Based Translation System

Participants will submit short written perceptions of the haiku. The system will take keywords and descriptive qualities, then assemble images using predefined rules that determine composition, layering, opacity, and spatial rhythm. The system will be coded and will not rely on AI image generation, allowing me to critically engage with questions of automation, authorship, and control.

Public Archive

Each generated image will be stored alongside the participant's written description (and minimal contextual data, such as name or age). My aim is for the archive to grow over time, visualising multiplicity through accumulation rather than variation within a single image.

Audience and Engagement

The primary audience includes:

- designers and illustrators interested in translation and authorship,

- readers of poetry,

- participants curious about how their own perception compares to others'.

Engagement will occur through:

- direct participation via the platform,

- contribution to a shared archive,

- slow, reflective viewing rather than instant consumption.

Project Outcomes

By the end of five weeks, my aim for the project is:

- a functional online platform for submitting and generating images,

- a populated archive of visualised perceptions,

- a clearly articulated system that positions me as a mediator.

My project remains intentionally open-ended, allowing the archive to continue growing beyond the unit while the system itself stands as a resolved piece of research and practice.