

Digital Jade Nurturing

My project Digital Jade Nurturing It stems from a personal memory: when I was a child, whenever my grandmother missed me or wanted to express her blessing, she would reach out her hand and gently, repeatedly stroke the top of my head. The rough, warm texture of her palm, accompanied by her murmured words, carried a direct and sincere sense of affection. Now, living far away in another country, her longing has lost its physical object. Through my family's video calls, I can see her still raising her hand, but now she can only rub her palm again and again across the smooth surface of her phone screen, over my image.

This repetitive motion—half futile touch, half silent remembrance—Her love, like so many digital emotions today, slides helplessly across a smooth, frictionless surface, leaving no real trace.

It is from this scene that my question arises:

How has the convenience of digital technology, through the elimination of tactile resistance, flattened the depth of emotional experience?



Panyu — The Ritual of Nurturing Jade

Her gesture reminded me of the traditional Chinese ritual of panyu (盘玉), or “nurturing jade.”

In ancient China, jade was believed to possess spiritual vitality—it was not only something to be worn but also something that needed to be cared for. Through the warmth of the hands, the oil of the skin, and repeated daily contact, a piece of cold and hard jade would gradually become smooth, warm, and luminous. This slow, intimate, and repetitive physical interaction was not merely material maintenance but also a form of emotional dialogue. The relationship between the person and the jade deepened through touch and the passing of time. For this reason, jade was regarded as a living object, capable of remembering the warmth of its owner's body and the traces of years gone by.

This idea of “nurturing an object through touch” is deeply embedded in my memory of my grandmother.

When I left home, she gave me her cherished Ping'an kou (平安扣)—a circular jade pendant passed down from her mother. In Chinese culture, the Ping'an kou symbolises completeness and protection. Its circular shape conveys wishes for safety and continuity, while the



hollow centre represents “emptiness,” reminding one to remain humble and open. For my grandmother, the pendant was more than a protective charm; it carried the emotional continuity and blessings of three generations.

When she now touches the screen with her fingertips, her motion is almost identical to the gesture of panyu.

But this time, her tenderness lingers on glass and digital pixels—unable to make physical contact. The relationship that once could be nurtured through touch can now only exist on the digital interface. What was once warm has turned cold.

It is precisely within this rupture that my reflection begins:

How might digital artefacts regain “emotion” and “warmth” within a medium designed for smoothness and control?

Practice Response: The Interactive Prototype of Digital Jade Nurturing

Since my research question focuses on the relationship between digital technology and emotional warmth, I created an interactive installation using TouchDesigner to respond to this inquiry.

Through a real-time camera, the system detects the movement of the participant’s hands. When the hand appears, a digital jade pendant at the centre of the screen begins to rotate—mimicking the traditional panyu motion. This slow, circular movement translates the physical ritual of caring for jade into a digital form. The installation invites participants to move gently and attentively, to feel the subtle friction generated by their own gestures.

The simple act of extending a hand—hovering, touching, drawing circles—becomes a way of communicating through the screen. The jade is no longer a static image but a responsive, living surface that reflects the participant’s presence.

My initial intention was to make the colour of the jade gradually change over time, mirroring how real jade absorbs warmth and alters through years of touch. However, due to technical limitations, this temporal transformation has not yet been fully realised. Nevertheless, the core idea remains: **nurturing is a continuous process, not an instantaneous one.**

In this way, the experiment responds directly to the call made in Designing Friction—to create digital technologies that leave room for humanity. As the text states:

“Digital technology should create environments and situations in which we can truly connect with each other, as well as with the unknown, the uncontrolled, with all senses, all elements, all emotions.”



Emoticons don't have wrinkles — Designing Friction

Luna Maurer's performance *Emoticons Don't Have Wrinkles* articulates a vivid critique of frictionless digital culture.

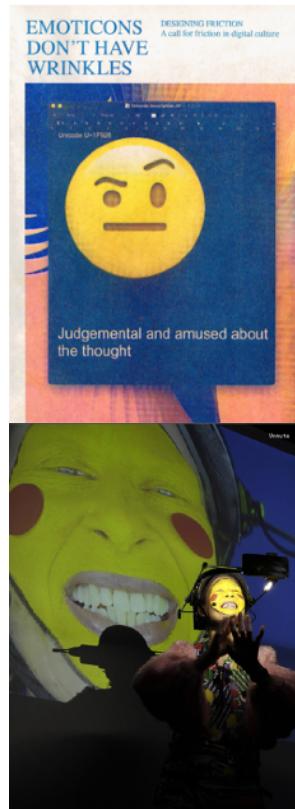
By painting her face a uniform yellow, transforming herself into a giant emoticon, she becomes a living interface—a symbol of perpetual positivity, perfectly smooth and expressive, yet stripped of individuality and texture. The work does not merely describe the issue; it *performs* the consequences of a world where emotion is transmitted through standardised digital symbols.

In the performance, Maurer's body functions as both medium and critique. Her exaggerated gestures, slow movements, and visible awkwardness create a sensory experience of friction that resists digital smoothness. The long pauses and bodily tension make the audience uncomfortable, forcing them to confront their dependence on the seamless immediacy of digital communication. Through this embodied resistance, Maurer's stance becomes clear: to recover emotion from the aesthetics of frictionlessness, we must reintroduce slowness, imperfection, and vulnerability—the very qualities that define being human.

This notion of friction as care strongly resonates with my project Digital Jade Nurturing. Like Maurer, I recognise that digital technology has transformed our interactions with things into interactions with devices, flattening touch into data. The convenience of digitalisation has diminished the emotional depth of our connections by erasing tactile resistance. Instant sharing, cloud storage, and algorithmic "memories" create the illusion of connection but strip away the rituals that once gave intimacy its weight. Emotion, deprived of its texture, becomes a consumable image.

Yet, while Maurer's work reveals this condition through discomfort and confrontation, my project responds through tenderness and restoration. Her piece is oppositional—it provokes awareness through unease. Mine seeks to design an experience where friction becomes gentle, rhythmic, and nurturing. The interactive process is intentionally slow, encouraging participants to pause and feel emotion through duration rather than speed. Maurer reintroduces resistance through the human body; I encode it into the interface itself—through temporal delay, gesture recognition, and the gradual (though not yet realised) colour transformation of the jade.

Both works share the belief that friction is not failure but care—an act that gives emotion time, weight, and attention. Where Maurer disrupts perception through discomfort, Digital Jade Nurturing invites reflection through intimacy.



Reflection

Designing Friction has led me to consider how digital technology makes our emotions increasingly flat—lacking the physicality, texture, and warmth that once grounded human connection.

It exposes the ideology of seamlessness that dominates design today and calls for resistance, texture, and imperfection to return as design values.

In my own project, this becomes a new question:

How can digital artefacts, within a medium built for smoothness, regain materiality, emotional texture, and human warmth?