The need to be proud

Toward a new aesthetic of giving

Salomé Guesdon

Research work in product design

From gleaning to donation, 2025,
photograph taken during the workshop
in collaboration with Antti Ahtiluoto

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Research work in design
under the supervision of Mrs Pradeau

Diplôme Supérieur d'Arts Appliqués,
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Forewords

Car boot sales, resale shops and second-hand places are some of the places I spent time in when I was growing up. First, when my parents chose to donate our clothes to the Red Cross store near our home, or when we had to turn to this kind of consumption ourselves, first out of necessity, then more recently, after a digression to mass-market chains, out of ideology. So, I was taught to always see the value of the things we had and to never take them for granted, and so, for what we had, we also had to give back, respect for respect, food for food, service for service. This has led to a desire to work on the notion of transmission. However, because of my practice of eco-responsible product design, I chose to work on objects linked to giving and, more specifically, on the aesthetics of intermediary objects in the action of giving.

Photograph opposite: *Un don à la benne (A donation to the bin)*, photographic series, N°1, 2025, ©Salomé Guesdon

Introduction

In recent years, some charities have seen a drop in the quality of donations received, and it is now more difficult for them to find clothes in good condition that can be resold. While most clothes are stained, ripped, others are also soiled, turning collection points into dumping grounds, a far cry from altruistic donations. This transformation of collection points, such as clothing skips, into dumping grounds, sometimes un-authorized, undermines the esteem in which donations and associations are held. Although their primary objective is to reintegrate people into working life, these associations are involved in a different model of exchange, one that is far from the reflexes of over-consumption. Donation, for example, which "is based on an ethic and a logic that are not those of the market and profit, and even oppose them"[1], seems to relate to environmental as well as social issues, which design must now, more than ever, address. Thus, how could design get people to donate more and better while shifting their consuming habits? Indeed, if we consider design can influence

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1. Maurice Godelier, 1996, *L'énigme du don, édition Flammarion*, 320 pages. quote translated by us.

Photograph opposite: *Un don à la benne, (A donation to the bin)*, photographic series, N°2, 2025, ©Salomé Guesdon

perceptions and behaviors, how could it contribute to re-imagining donation practices? In other words, can the form of the object, through which a donation is accomplished, transform the perception of the donated object, moving it from the status of waste to that of resource? In addition, how can the designer use aesthetics to invite local residents to rediscover the practice of giving and sharing so as to shift consumer habits towards a more responsible, shared approach?

Photograph opposite: *Un don à la benne, (A donation to the bin)*, photographic series, N°3, 2025, ©Salomé Guesdon

Part 1

A history of giving: focus on UK charities

Over London by rail way, 1872, Gustave Doré,
© Bibliothèque nationale de France

Birth of charities in the UK, a religious and industrial context

Today, giving is considered as an act of generosity, which is not compulsory because it must be spontaneous. Indeed, it can mean "to make a gift", but also "to present freely and without expecting something in return [something to someone]"[2] as it is the case for a donation or, in a more general way for charity. Charities[3], for that matter, are a part of UK cultural folklore with over 169,000 charities appearing on the Charity Commission's register in January 2024[4]. Like in many other cultures, charity comes with religion. For example, in Christianity, charity is embodied as a possible expression of love for others; in Islam compulsory alms giving known as zakât is the third pillar. These religious practices can structure the psychology and imagination of those who give. Besides, we learn in an article from the INTRAC that "in the UK there is a rich and centuries-long tradition

Previous photograph: Mark Lester as Oliver Twist in a scene in the workhouse from *Oliver!*, a 1968 musical adaptation of *Oliver Twist* by Charles Dickens, ©IMDb.com (Copyright, fair use)

2. Definition of Wordreference

3. Definition of charity from the Collins dictionary : 1) Charity is kindness and understanding towards other people. 2) A charity is an organization which raises money in order to help people who are sick or very poor, or who have a disability.

4. *UK charity and not-for-profit sector statistics* 2024, janvier 2024, article from PolicyBee

of charity, mutual help, volunteering and advocacy that can be traced back well into the Middle Ages"[5]. In fact, in the 12th and 13th centuries, the Church established over 500 hospitals to care for the elderly and frail, marking the 13th century known as the "Golden Age of small associations of piety"[6]. In the early 16th century, Henry VIII initiated the split with the Catholic Church in Rome, which led to the English Reformation. This was a major factor in the formation of modern philanthropy, as "the differences between Protestant and Catholic teachings on poverty and charity meant that a new secular concept of giving began to emerge, which shifted the emphasis from the status of the donor's immortal soul to the real impact of the gift in the present."[7] The 16th and 17th centuries saw the rise of charitable trusts, alms houses, and efforts to address social problems through organized philanthropy. Moreover, by the 17th century, formal structures emerged, including the Statute of Charitable Uses (1601), which formalized charitable activities.

During the Victorian era, the industrial revolution led to a rapid growth in population and migration from rural areas to cities, causing a wide and unbridgeable gap between the poor and the rich and many families were obliged to share the same cheaply-built home. At that time, paupers were given aid by charitable organizations so that they would not have to go to the infamous workhouses which were brought into existence in 1834 with *The Poor Law Amendment Act*. This law highlighted the role of the voluntary sector – rather than the state – in dealing with the deserving poor, as opposed to the undeserving poor[8]. The workhouse was deliberately intended to be such an awful place that it did little more than keep its inhabitants alive, in the belief that more charity would simply encourage the poor not to bother looking for paid work. "Cities, then, became concentrations of the poor, surviving off the charity of those more fortunate"[9]. Still, the industrial boom was matched by a boom in philanthropy led by figures like Angela Burdett-Coutts, George Peabody, and Andrew Carnegie, who argued the wealthy had a duty to use their resources "to benefit the community and the

5. Olga Savage with Brian Pratt, January 2013, *The history of UK civil society*, published by the INTRAC, 20p

6. *Ibid*, p. 3

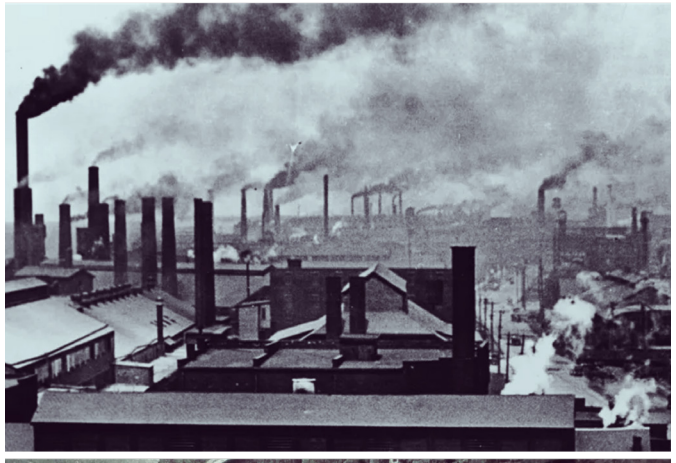
7. Rhodri Davies, 20th August 2020, *A timeline of modern British philanthropy*, published on sofii.org

8. «les pauvres sont les membres d'un ordre social intouchable et, gardant leur dignité de travailleurs, ne doivent compter que sur des actes philantropiques privés pour améliorer leur ressources; les autres, «déchets» de la société, sont seuls habilités à solliciter une aide publique.» p150, extrait de Monica Charlot et Roland Marx, 1978, *La société Victorienne*, edition Armand Colin, 222 pages

9. Mark Cartwright, april 2023, *Social Change in the British Industrial Revolution*, published on World History Encyclopedia

poor"[10]. In the same period, William Booth founded the East London Christian Mission in 1865 to combat urban poverty; it became the Salvation Army in 1878. Urbanization shifted charity from personal, community-based aid to organized, large-scale efforts supporting anonymous recipients, marking a new era of collective philanthropy. Since then, motivated initially by religious and then by secular reasons, the UK has been a fertile ground to charities that have tried to help poor people to have a decent life, to avoid stigma and shame.

10. Bethany Hansen with Sharon T. Ellens, 2017, *Philanthropy and the Industrial Revolution*, published on learningtogive.org



Above: Undated view over rooftops of large factory complex, unspecified location
© Photo by Welgos/Getty Images
Under: Coal delivery at Long Row, Blaenllechau near Ferndale, 1910
© Ellyn Harries

Above: *I Daniel Blake*, Ken Loach, 2016,
in front of the food bank.
Under: *I Daniel Blake*, Ken Loach, 2016,
in the food bank, Katie is starving
and Daniel tries to help her.

Between shame and dignity, the part of charities.

Nowadays, charities are still working to maintain poor peoples' dignity, to help them regain their autonomy. Indeed, (in France for example), it is not rare for people in need to feel ashamed to ask for clothes or food, for their families or themselves[11]. Those feelings and situations have been very well depicted in the movie *I Daniel Blake*, by Ken Loach, which came out in 2016. The movie shows the story of Daniel Blake, a 59-year-old English carpenter, who is forced to turn to social assistance following heart problems. One of the most powerful scenes takes place in a foodbank when Katie, a starving unemployed single mother tries to eat from a tin of tomatoes. This scene shows the atmosphere of shame and stigma that people can experience while waiting outside of a food bank in full view of passers-by. But sadly, as Daniel Blake puts it in a spray-painted message on the wall of his Job centre, "I, Daniel Blake, demand my appeal date before I starve", the poverty rate for families on universal credit stands at 54%[12] .Moreover, the Trussell Trust, an anti-poverty charity

11. Benoît Bréville, May 2023, *La honte et la faim*, Le monde diplomatique

12. Sarah-Jane Coyle, June 2023, *I, Daniel Blake on stage is a powerful representation of real people struggling in the cost of living crisis*, published on The conversation

that operates a network of food banks across the UK, reported a 37% increase in demand for food parcels between 2021/22 and 2022/23 and another 4% increase between 2022/23 and 2023/24. This continues a general trend of increasing need for food parcels[13].

To overcome those feelings and to tone down the need for food aid, some charities try to bring help in other places than buildings or parking lots. Some organizations, for example, try to restore people's dignity through charity shops, as Clothing Collective[14] does. After noticing that there was a growth in the charity shop sector but that people in need were unable to get access to clothes, Clothing Collective's aim was to enable individuals in need to readily go into any charity shop and choose their own clothes. The association provides "gift cards" to people in need, allowing them to get access to clothes from partners' charity shops. Thanks to people's donations, these gift cards can be funded, providing clothing for those in need and also helping to fund the work of the local charities, enabling them to continue their work of caring for vulnerable members of their community.

Like for clothes, other charities have also developed new ways to give access to food. *The Food Bus* of the charity Be Enriched[15] is just one example. Be Enriched is a charity based in South London that focuses on reducing social isolation through food. One of their projects is the Food Bus, a double decker-bus which reaches areas experiencing high food insecurity or lacking access to affordable food. Each week the Food Bus aims to offer groceries, cupboard items and more, at a lower cost price, allowing people to meet and eat together.

In addition, most charities also promote solidarity, and, even if that goes without saying, interaction between people can also help individuals in need to regain their confidence and dignity. The project Incredible Edible[16] started in 2008 in Todmorden to encourage people to reconnect with the soil, the seasons and each other. They started to plant food in unloved places in their home town and it contributed to creating a more connected community. Later, they offered support to every school in Todmorden to create their own little gardens and orchards, which are still growing today. Finally, they also created other projects all over the world, including the Incredible Farm. Even if this action's first goal was not to be an aid for people in need, growing food in the neighbourhood gave access to healthy food to a majority and also contributed to bringing people together.

Since the Middle Ages, charities have tried to deal with shame and stigma by changing their practices and appearance. It seems that aesthetics and practices through interaction may help people in need to regain their self esteem.

13. Brigid Francis-Devine, May 2024, *Food banks in the UK*, House of Commons Library

14. web site of clothingcollective.org

15. web site of be-enriched.org

16. web site of incredibleedible.org.uk

Above: The Food Bus by BeEnriched
Under: inside of the Food Bus by BeEnriched

Incredible Edible Network, head banner

Part 2

Looking for an aesthetic of giving

Fanzine, *Anarchy in the U.K.*, 1976,
photograph by Ray Stevenson, design by Jamie Reid,
images from *Punk: An Aesthetic* edited by Johan Kugelberg
and Jon Savage

The need to be proud

It seems that one of the main challenges of design applied to donation will be to help people keep their dignity and autonomy. Some charities are already trying to do this, through social grocery stores and solidarity supermarkets. These stores are reproducing the same aesthetics, schemes and amount of choice to fake regular stores and to make aid socially acceptable[17]. Therefore the aesthetic of a place or object seems to be one way to help people to keep their self esteem. But we still have to prove it. Aesthetic is borrowed from the Latin *aesthetica*, which means "science of beauty". This word was created from the Greek *aisthêtikos*, meaning "which has the faculty of feeling" and "perceptible, sensible"[18]. Then, aesthetic does not only refer to beauty, but also to the ability to be perceived. Moreover, as Donald Norman explains in his book *Emotional Design, why we love (or hate) everyday things*, we intellectualize objects: what image will this object convey of me? What does it stimulate in my imagination, my history, and my culture?[19] Then, could aesthetic (help to) empower people in need and change our perception on aid?

17. Benoît Bréville, May 2023, *La honte et la faim*, Le monde diplomatique

18. Dictionnaire historique et culturel d'Alain Rey

19. Donald A.Norman, 2012, *Design émotionnel, Pourquoi aimons-nous (ou détestons-nous) les objets qui nous entourent?*, Éd. Debeock, 248p.

To illustrate our point, we will take the example of Punk. Rooted in a profound questioning of norms and hierarchies, the punk movement established itself as a subculture with its own system of values, codes of representation and behaviour. Originating as a working-class movement in the 1970s, Punk challenged dominant social and aesthetic norms, asserting itself as an artistic, social and political counter-culture. Punk intentionally violates widely held aesthetic norms[20]. For example, you can find in punk aesthetic dyed hair, torn clothes, tattoos, and piercings. This rejection of conventional beauty creates an anti-aesthetic, where flaws become desirable, opposing the rules that comit a universal aesthetic. The raw, confrontational nature of punk acts as a filter, attracting those who feel marginalised and discouraging those who seek conformity[21]. By embracing this radical aesthetic, Punk allowed a segment of society to affirm their identity, exist on their own terms, and take pride in their difference. More than a musical genre, Punk is a social and cultural rebellion against consumerism and societal norms. Finally, the punk movement demonstrates that aesthetics is not just about beauty, but also about building a personal identity. In other words, Punk increased the individuals' sense of self-esteem and enabled them to take an active role in their own lives. However, Punk is not only a way of dressing, it is a whole and complex way of life, related to nihilism and anarchy. This movement also advocates violence, yet, this is obviously not what we wish for donation that's why we have taken a non-exhaustive look at it. Nevertheless, the fact remains that aesthetic choices can be a way to change people's perceptions and to asset values. Moreover, precarity should not be a reason to exclude choice in beauty and quality.

Donation, because it promotes an alternative way to over-consumption, more responsible and reasonable, can be assimilated to second-hand practices. In fact, in the USA like in the UK, there are a lot of charities that own "thrift shops" such as Goodwill or the Salvation army. The clothes resale market in the UK grew by "149% between 2016 and 2022. It is forecast to rise by 67,5% from 2022 to 2026."[22] That shows how "preloved fashion has moved from the fringes of society to become mainstream"[23]. Indeed, back in 2012, Macklemore's song *Trhift shop* was a huge hit[24], a sort of hymn to second-hand fashion and cheap clothes, which at the same time poked fun at the frenzy that these shops cause. In fact, because second-hand items are so cheap, people would have tend to buy a lot, even if they do not need it. Then, while

20. Jesse Prinz, 2014, *The Aesthetics of Punk Rock*, article in Philosophy Compass

21. Djemila zeneidi-Henry, 2005, *Les punks ou la comédie des genres: une analyse à l'épreuve des pratiques spatiales et corporelles*, In Géographie et cultures, OpenEdition Journals, pp. 85-102

22. Lauren Cochrane, 2023, *Cheap, cool and kind to nature: how second-hand became UK fashion's main attraction*, The Guardian

23. *Ibid*

24. Macklemore & Ryan Lewis, 2012, *Thrift shop*

second hand practices are increasing, consumer habits are still related to fast fashion, and are not changing, or are sometimes even worse.

Aesthetics can be a powerful tool for protest, identity formation, and self-esteem. Punk demonstrates how visual defiance can create a sense of belonging, while thrift culture redefines value through the reuse of objects. However, true change requires more than aesthetic transformation. It demands a shift in how we perceive consumption and dignity. Then, how could design encourage people to change their consumption habits through donation? Through which aesthetics? Through which rituals?

Above: photograph by Marcus Graham
©, 2021, Museum of Youth Culture
Under: Sex Pistol, Hyde Park, 1977
© Janette Beckman 2025

Thrift shop, song by Macklemore and Ryan Lewis, 2012

Goodwill thriftshop

Kula exchange currency, *soulava*, Trobriand islands, Papoua New Guinea
© Musée de Nouvelle-Calédonie

Different ways of giving

The act of giving has existed since the dawn of civilization and across cultures, playing a fundamental role in shaping human interactions. Nowadays, donation seems to be opposed to (our) commercial interactions, but this has not always been the case, and it has played a central role in certain so-called primitive or archaic societies. These societies were studied by Marcel Mauss, often regarded as the 'father of French anthropology'. In his *Essai sur le don*, published in 1925, he analysed gift-giving practices in traditional societies, establishing the fundamental concepts on which we will base our discussion. Moreover, the paradigm of the gift applied to design encourages us to take an interest in the uses, objects, forms and symbols in which Giving has been embodied in order to understand the role of aesthetics in gift-giving in both past and present societies.

One striking example of the connection between aesthetics and gift-giving is the Kula exchange system of the Trobriand Islands. In this ritualized form of donation, tribes exchange objects known as *vaygu'a*, which serve as a form of currency. These objects include *mwali*, finely carved and polished shell bracelets, and *soulava*, elaborate necklaces made from the iridescent red spondyle shell[25]. Then, the significance of these items extends beyond their material value. They are meticu-

25. Marcel Mauss, 1925, *Essais sur le don*, Éd. PBP, 252p.

lously crafted, and their beauty enhances their prestige. The effort invested in their creation adds symbolic weight to the act of giving. In other words, a gift of great aesthetic quality is not just an offering but a statement of respect and honour. However, the aesthetic value of the gift reinforces the obligation of reciprocity. To fail to reciprocate is to remain in perpetual debt, leading to a loss of social status. This explains why, even nowadays, receiving a gift can create discomfort, it establishes a relationship of dependence in which one must eventually give back. The study of gift and counter-gift practices highlighted by Marcel Mauss in these early societies enables us to show that, far from financial interests, yield and economic profit, they were able to put in place a complex system combining objects, symbols and rituals within gift practices that enabled them to organise society, but above all to create links between people. However, as we have seen, there is a paradox in giving, because although it is carried out freely and spontaneously, it seems far from being synonymous with total disinterest or pure generosity. It seems rather that with every donation, there is an underlying or unconscious desire to benefit from a counter-gift[26]. Indeed, we can find such practices in many other countries, in slightly different ways. For instance, Japan is well known for its giving etiquette. In fact, donation is not an occasional practice but a highly codified form of mutual obligation. In Japanese society, receiving a gift immediately necessitates offering a symbolic gift in return. As for the Kula, reciprocity is a crucial factor in the stability of social systems. It creates a network of interdependence, realized through a continuous exchange of favours and objects. Then, in Japan, gifts are selected with attention to the quality of materials. Indeed, unlike in Western societies, where the gift itself holds primary importance, in Japan, the way an object is wrapped conveys the giver's respect and gratitude[27]. In other words, a beautifully presented gift strengthens relationships, fosters harmony, and enhances the emotional depth of the exchange. Moreover, packing is also a form of art in Japan, called *tsutsumi*, which literally means package or gift. One of the most known ways of packing is the *Furoshiki*, which is a square piece of traditional Japanese fabric used to wrap gifts, carry meals or everyday objects. "Furoshiki was traditionally decorated with a variety of motifs, ranging from floral designs to more abstract or symbolic representations, with each motif having a specific meaning, adding an extra dimension to the act of giving"[28]. Then, packaging is an equally significant aspect of the gift. The wrapping, folding techniques, decorative patterns, and colour combinations of ribbons follow a highly structured aesthetic language. The aesthetics of giving highlight a fundamental truth: the way we give matters as much as what we give.

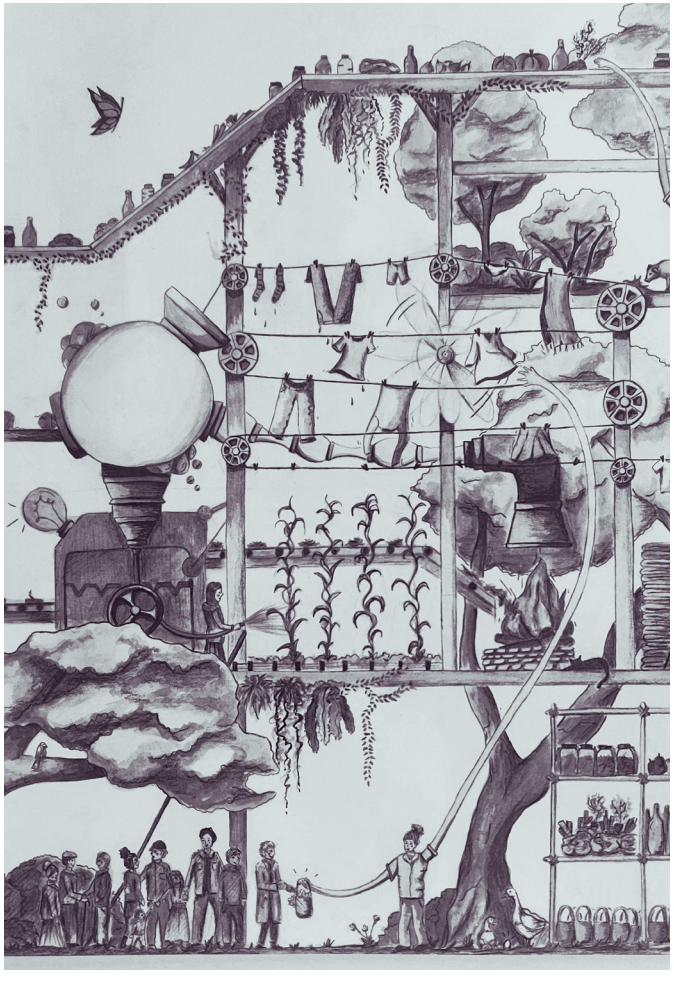
26. Lagane Jean, 2005, *Le langage des cadeaux au Japon: une médiation symbolique*, In: Communication et langages, N°146, pp. 115-127

27. *Ibid*

28. *Les Furoshiki et l'Art du Cadeau: Une Tradition Japonaise*, In Culture, publié sur le site evasionsrebelles.com

Furoshiki, Japanese fabrics wrapping
Photos taken by the «In-Bed» shop,
found on 2025 © Camino Sereno

Picture Book of *Kyoka Poems: Mountains upon Mountains*
by Katsushika Hokusai, 1804
© 2000–2024 The Metropolitan Museum of Art



Aux bras long la distribution!, drawing, 2025,
©Salomé Guesdon

Conclusion

Stuffed into a bin bag and thrown away, we give things that are worthless. Our bulky items then become those of the charities/organizations that are assigned the task of waste management. Some associations are forced to close down because they have so much trouble absorbing the flow of damaged donations. In addition to this onerous task, charities have adapted to social changes, addressing not just material needs but also the psychological impact of poverty. What is really at stake for the product designer is to make people realize that their donations go to human beings who deserve quality as well as self-esteem. From punk culture to thrift shops and cross-cultural gift-giving rituals, aesthetics could play a crucial role in redefining the experience of receiving aid.

Moreover, due to the impossibility of giving back, charities opt for anonymity to avoid shaming and stigmatizing people, and to free them from the burden of giving back. Through charity shops and social grocery stores, they also try to reproduce a model that causes overconsumption based on capitalism which advocates profit and individuality. In other words, because we try to make aid socially acceptable, we endorse a model that increases inequality. So design applied to giving should be able to challenge our consumption habits. Couldn't it also embrace an aesthetic that changes perceptions and makes aid a source of empowerment rather than a source of stigmatisation?

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Receiving charity, asking for help, appealing to charities, these are all situations that can make a person in need feel ashamed. Since the Middle Ages, charities have tried to deal with shame and stigma by changing their practices and appearance. It seems that aesthetics and practices through interaction may help people in need to regain their self esteem. The product designer, if he works on donation, must focus on people's well-being in order to avoid stigma and to help them build their self-esteem. To do this, the product designer can take inspiration from different cultures in which aesthetics can be a way to protest and to assert oneself. Moreover, design can also take inspiration from how other countries deal with donation and giving and how their culture, approaches to rituals and aesthetics influence their way of giving. Beautiful shapes are the only way to achieve kind gestures.