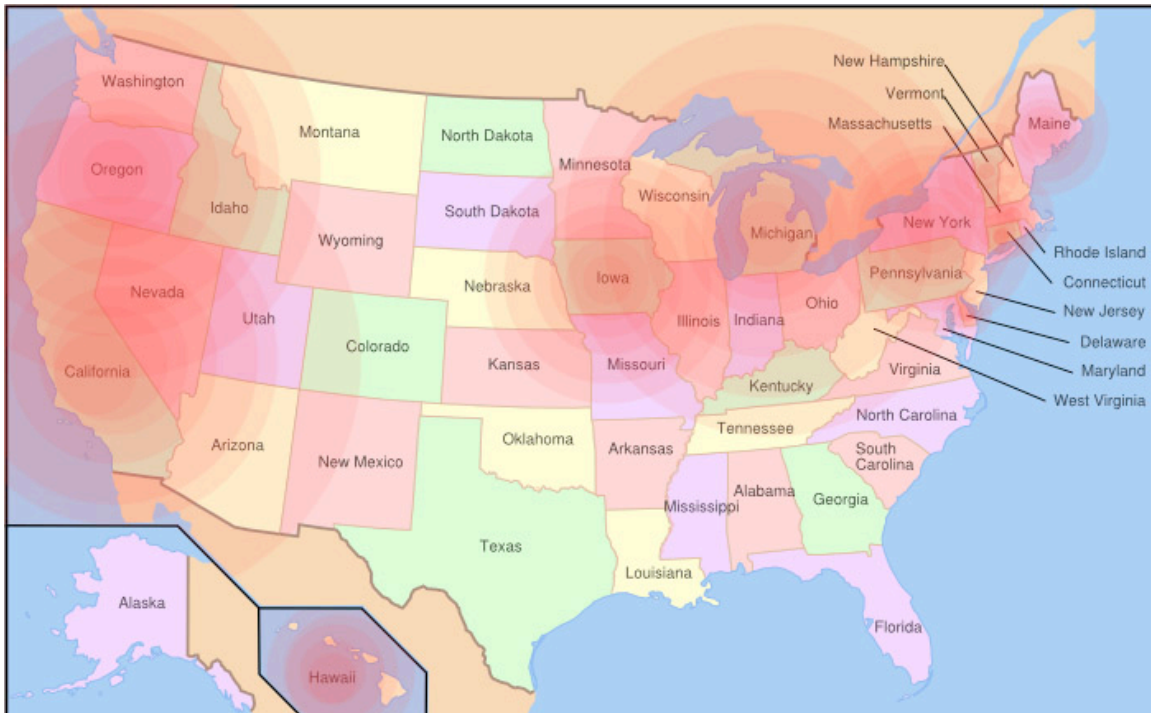


For those of us who have not seen the piece at Incident Report (myself included), let me walk you through it. Incident Report is composed of two small window displays on either side of a store in an eclectic town in upstate New York. When I visited Hudson, New York, to see the Henry store, the current IR project was by a painter named Mandolyn Wilson, who created a zigzag black and white line work covering the inside of the shop windows. The patterns came from her interest in dazzle painting, a technique used on the side of British battleships during the World War II, which created strange optical effects to confuse onlooking enemy ships. The Henry store and Incident Report are run by the artist Nancy Shaver who takes extreme care in picking out curious objects and ‘antiques’ to sell. Shaver takes equal consideration for IR’s projects, which deal in issues of context. Reviewing the other projects online, each reads like a local news headline, a message whose importance is subtle and tangible in the context of a small town when compared to a global perspective.

MS Found in a Bottle was created using what looks like black paint and stencils. The state abbreviations and price mimic those stamped in a variety of forms on alcohol and soft drink bottles. The phrase painted on the two storefront windows, ME – VT – CT – DE – NY – MA – IA – OR 5¢, appears both forward and in reverse, creating a spacial association to an empty bottle out of an otherwise empty storefront. Presumably, the paint was applied from the inside; my one criticism is that it would have been interesting if one of the panes was painted from the outside. I think that would’ve made the windows seem like ‘disposable glass,’ but this might ruin the intention of the piece, whose concern is not material. The work uses the empty space—making a glass storefront appear recyclable and fleeting, opening up the moment of time in a glass bottle’s identity as a product—as a metaphoric announcement to the town, addressing the identity of the store and its status as an art commission. We can also read this gesture in a metaphysical way: That Ryan and Lucy are observing the bottle’s multiple identities beyond its tool nature, or broken-tool nature, and looking at a container in a phenomenological sense.

The piece reminds me of the semantic differences between policies and projects. Not that this work is either/or, but that *MS Found in a Bottle* is a question of how to recognize a *thing* in relationship to its production. The abbreviations are at once information, symbol, and system (whose sensibility appears broken with this piece). I always assume a *project* is recognized at its beginning, before production. It speaks to a future that may or may not happen. A *policy* is *put in place*, but is never recognized until it is integrated. Maybe this is merely semantic, but *MS Found in a Bottle* references a symbolic order in a system created from the bottle bills, or container deposit laws, that for about 25 years have allowed the recycling of aluminum, glass, and plastic beverage containers to be deposited for 5 cents (10 cents in MI.) The systems formed around this initiative created an economy that has reconstituted the *being* of a bottle as a product with numerous identities—both material and notary—a liquid container and a marker of how ideas function and manifest.

The states participating in this bottle return policy created this initiative, which strategically avoids governmental stabilization of material costs. The deposit amount is incorporated into the price of the bottle when purchased, preventing government intervention and, in effect, precluding the material from taking on an auratic standard value, like gold. Which is to say, if the price of aluminum per-can-weight rose or dropped, the refund would remain a fixed, separate exchange. Only certain states joined this recycling plan, making the bottle’s assumed trajectory vulnerable to entrepreneurial detours.



This map shows the states that allow for refund of bottles with the aforementioned mark. The red rings on top of the map are a speculative drawing I made which indicate a radius of returned bottles from one state to another. Nevada stands out in this drawing; the overlapping circles from Oregon and California resound over this presumed hedonistic state whose economic attraction typically prides itself on lack of responsibility towards one's investments. I pursued this map reading further by researching empty bottles in the LA Times and was surprised to find numerous articles on recycling frauds documenting charges against entrepreneurs smuggling large amounts of empty bottles across state lines into California. These people are charged with defrauding state recycling programs, the bottle's stamp evidence of its true owner. Would these charges have been brought if the bottles were full, in their primary state as products that can more easily cross state lines? This confusion over the can's value and identity is further complicated by RVMs (reverse vending machines) which can be purchased by business owners and advertise "cash for cans" in most states. This large machine crushes the material notaries into a semi-original material, semi-manufactured hunks of glass, plastic, and aluminum. Once these materials are crushed using electricity and air pressure, the bulk material is available for purchase by scrap dealers or used beverage container collectors. The can chunk is permeable as a material identity and can enter into a material market. The hiccup is this 5 cent refund, which, depending on the current value, can either be higher or lower than its indexed value. The customer of the RVM typically expects 5 cents because its written on the bottle but the "cash for can" will vary based on its material value set by the vendor.

This is the true nature of Lucy's and Ryan's determined observation: The multiple identities of the legally bound bottle are reflections of policy over project, production of meaning over reason, unknown identity over experiential observation, by way of looking at the momentary nature of this symbol. To stop at the observation of a storefront window's

semblance to an empty bottle would be novel and witty enough, however the work allows one to pry deeper into phenomenological issues, such as the relationships between *use* and *being*, or *event* and *identity*.

If we want to see the piece's metaphysical tendency, it is essential to see how this Incident Report generalizes the bottle bill stamp as a symbol and why looking at the content from this specific view is important. What occurs is a paradigmatic shift from information into symbol. The deposit symbol is like an instructional crest that refers to its place of origin and status. The small wandering knight tumbling in the streets whose own meaning is determined by its encounters, the recognition of its destined reward and supposed origin. Lucy and Ryan take this symbolic order along with its outdated utility to ask: Do we still need initials and abbreviations for an efficient bureaucratic policy or does information travel fast enough so that it does not need these antiquated compressions? Also, what is there to be read from this outdated system? The abbreviation of states are appealing, much like the charm in having someone ask you to initial a document or check. Today, the abbreviation is a symbol, and the use of symbols in this way seem like a pre-renaissance invention or a 1950s sociological research experiment. This observation of the bottle in 2009 is a symbol rather than straight efficient information.

I imagine when Ryan and Lucy were asked to create a piece for Incident Report their subject mimicked their own distant and general perspective on the commission—the space is temporary and made of glass. Given these qualities, the symbol they chose reveals an old initiative that has effectively integrated into society, both through its success as legislation and through its dissemination into culture as a living definition that has spawned both legal and illegal economies. What remains is a symbol on the bottle, both a reference to instructions and a message of urgency spoken in what now seems a slow abbreviated language. With this concept of a symbol and its *thing*, the subject of the bottle recycling marker can be contemplated like a broken tool, a *thing* to be articulated beyond its past function to a presence of qualities. These qualities prompt us to the likenesses of the *thing's* use, its conception and design, and allows its contours to appear elsewhere, and its material nature to simply show up in a current and future identity.

A friend showed me a book documenting the highway beautification project created by Lady Bird Johnson in the 1970s. Johnson advocated legislation allotting a portion of all highway development budgets to the replanting of native wildflowers along the new highways. The success of this work did not occur in its inception or legislation but in its integration, documented 10 years later as the wildflowers along the highways and plots were repurposed for dedications to highway service employees who maintained the areas. Today, a beautification project sounds somewhat twee, and the backing of such an aesthetic based on Johnson's love of flowers, innocent, but after the colorful fields are integrated and highway plots dedicated, the aesthetic departs from individual principles and becomes a system and symbol, creating other meanings among people. Giving thought to this, Lucy and Ryan's piece, both at Incident Report and at C_M_L, investigates the transformation of an aesthetic and its functional design as a question that all forms pose when seen in the present tense.

Clifford Borress, 2009