
The House as Thing

Encountering Thresholds in Randi & Katrine's Architectural Installations

This essay examines Randi & Katrine's architectural installations *The House in Your Head* (2008), *Between Towers* (2015), and *The Village* (2014) in terms of seams and thresholds that suspend the boundaries between inside and outside, visibility and opacity, and invitation and exclusion. Drawing on French philosopher Gaston Bachelard's poetics of the house and American literary scholar Bill Brown's thing theory, the essay will show how Randi & Katrine's anthropomorphic architectures shift from functioning as "objects" to becoming "things" that resist being fully grasped. Their work destabilizes our cultural-historical and psychological experiences of electricity and disrupts our perception of the house, especially the window. A 17th century engraving of a house that warns against the dangers of the window to the soul demonstrates that anxieties surrounding the house as a human-like entity have a long cultural history, situating Randi & Katrine's work within a recurring architectural tradition. Ultimately, Randi & Katrine's architectural installations resist a contemporary cultural preference for transparency in the built environment by insisting on the value of opacity and suggesting that an encounter with a thing does not merely belong to the realm of children and fairy tales, but to a historically enduring means of making the world newly visible.

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H. C. Andersen's fairy tale "Det Gamle Huus" ("The Old House") portrays an aging Copenhagen home with a voice and presence of its own. Its bay windows watch, the walls and pots speak, and the creaky chairs complain while the neighborhood's sleek, modern buildings gossip about their old decrepit neighbor (Andersen, 1845). H. C. Andersen's tale models a world already full of value, which finds philosophical articulation in French philosopher Gaston Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space*. He views the house as "a 'psychic state'" that carries an emotional charge and "bespeaks intimacy" (Bachelard, 2014, p. 91). Partially inspired by Bachelard, Danish artist duo Randi & Katrine (Randi Jørgensen (b. 1974) and Katrine Malinovsky (b. 1976)) create large installations that merge architecture and sculpture, often in site-specific public works such as human-like houses, enchanting artificial gardens, a teapot pavilion, or a pinewood-forest playground.

Scholars have explored Randi & Katrine's oeuvre as anthropomorphic, uncanny follies that stage participatory events and offer a nostalgic sanctuary. Art historian Jeanne Rank Schelde argues that Randi & Katrine's projects curate the behavior of visitors. Drawing on Sigmund Freud's and Anthony Vidler's concept of the *Unheimlich*, she views Randi & Katrine's dwellings, such as *The House in Your Head* (2008), as places where the house is subjectified and the viewer is eerily constituted as both subject and object (Schelde, 2015, pp. 100-114). Artistic director Juliana Engberg links Randi & Katrine's houses to homesickness, fairy tales, and community, framing their installation *The Village* (2014) as a utopian ideal tinged with sweetness and exclusion (Engberg, 2015, pp. 126-142). Head of collection and research at The National Gallery of Denmark Camilla Jalving reads the installation *Between Towers* (2015) as an expression of yearning, through performativity and affect, arguing that museum engagement becomes a participatory event (Jalving, 2015, pp. 141-153; Jalving, 2017, pp. 115-131), while professor of art history Mikkel Bogh sees Randi & Katrine's practice as narrative architecture with openly artificial houseworlds that look back at us (Bogh, 2008, pp. 6-13). This essay's contribution frames Randi & Katrine's *The House in Your Head*, *Between Towers*, and *The Village* in terms of seams and thresholds that suspend the boundaries between inside and outside, visibility and opacity, invitation and exclusion, and safety and danger. Drawing on Bachelard's poetics of the house and American literary scholar Bill Brown's thing theory (Brown, 2001 and 2019), it will show how their human-like architectures shift from functioning as "objects" to becoming "things" that resist being fully grasped.

While several contemporary artists, such as Do Ho Suh, Rachel Whiteread, and Gregor Schneider, psychologize the house in their artistic practice, working with memory, absence and psychological skins, Randi & Katrine's structures often focus on exterior and expressive façades. Their art might be compared to Surrealism's quasi-objects, transitioning between the animate and inanimate, or Claes Oldenburg's playful Pop Art, toying with the scale of mundane objects, flora and fauna, such as their almost human-scale dandelion (*Dandelion*, 2010) and over-sized parrot (*Tims Parrot*, 2019) (Manly, 2015, p. 6).

Their installations share additional affinities with art as a social practice where social environments become playgrounds for children and adults. They merge playful relational engagement and psychological intimacy while always appealing to the imagination. If one were to pose the question, following iconologist W. J. T. Mitchell, what does Randi & Katrine's art want, the answer would be: It wants to be lived in and to re-enchant.

This essay begins with an account of Bill Brown's thing theory, followed by an analysis of Randi & Katrine's *The House in Your Head* and how it destabilizes perception around the concept of the window. It then explores how electricity figures as charged friction, especially in *Between Towers* where the transformer towers convert architectural structures from "objects" to "things." The essay then examines the early modern engraving that inspired Randi & Katrine's anthropomorphic houses, showing how Jesuit emblematic visuality casts the façade as a moralized face and the window as a hazardous seam between a vision corrupted or pious. Finally, I turn to their installation *The Village* to analyze the use of its walls as a threshold that links exclusion and sanctuary. Ultimately, Randi & Katrine's art shows how thresholds destabilize our relations to architecture and our human boundaries for communication.

Objects and Things

In a 2008 interview, Randi & Katrine lament contemporary architecture's constant reliance on windows to convey transparency. Interiors end up on display as a result, even when privacy would seem warranted in the curtain-less residential apartments of Copenhagen. The artists question what we forfeit in this pursuit of transparency? (Damsbo, 2008, p. 28). Where transparency conveys visibility, openness, and accessibility, opacity suggests exclusion and something that resists being fully known. The distinction approximates the relation between an "object" and a "thing" in Bill Brown's thing theory. Brown's interest is in "how objects grasp you: how they elicit your attention, interrupt your concentration, assault your sensorium" (Brown, 2019, pp. 23-24). He states that "we look *through* objects (to see what they disclose about us), but we only catch a glimpse of things." A "*thing*," he continues, "can hardly function as a window" (Brown, 2001, p. 4). Instead, a thing is irreducible. Where an "object" has meaning and can be looked both *through* and *at*, like a glass pane, a "thing" surpasses its practical function and materiality as object and presents a different relationship to the viewer, one that he describes as a "sensuous presence" (Brown, 2001, p. 5).

Brown's thing theory is grounded in German philosopher Martin Heidegger's *das Ding* presented in *Being and Time* (1927), *What is a Thing?* (1935-36), and "The Origin of the Work of Art" (1935-36). Heidegger conceives of a thing as something that brings together relations, meanings, and contexts that make up a lived world. The thing "gathers" a world, which is different from an object used as equipment. The word *Ding* originally referred to

a gathering or assembly, and Danish words like *folketinget* and *ting* still carry this meaning. Brown takes from Heidegger the idea that objects fade into the background when they are put to use as equipment but become noticeable as things when their use value stops. But where Heidegger's agenda is an ontological search for Being, Brown seeks out experiential and cultural encounters that question perception in our everyday (Brown, 2019, pp. 24-32). This shift toward experience is further developed through Brown's engagement with French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan's book 7 of the seminar (1959-60), *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*. Lacan ties the thing (*La Chose*) to desire located unreachably in the unconscious. The psychological obsession with lack and absence renders the thing highly charged as Lacan's concept of the Real, that part of experience not covered by language or the imaginary. Brown draws on Lacan's the Real to address the friction that a thing can cause and the sense that something remains irreducible to meaning (Brown, 2019, pp. 33-38).

Because Lacan's Real cannot be grasped as an object, it exposes the instability of the subject-object divide. In contrast, Brown maintains the subject-object binary between perceiver and perceived object, but he qualifies his point by noting that relations are typically messy, and the binary breaks down precisely when an object asserts itself and becomes a thing that is no longer there for you. At that point, the subject is disrupted and the thing feels active and animated, blurring the binary between subject and thing. Notably, Brown's thing theory reorients the ideas of Heidegger and Lacan toward art and everyday encounters, materializing the thing and situating it within cultural and historical frameworks. His theory helps us locate the experience of a thing in a cultural historical setting and capture the unexpected impact of Randi & Katrine's houses as they turn into things that confront and disrupt our subjectivity.

A Charged Presence: *The House in Your Head* and *Between Towers*

Randi & Katrine's first iteration of *The House in Your Head*, exhibited at the Copenhagen art center Gl. Strand in 2008, presented two buildings and a small transformer station, each varied in scale but larger than the human body and smaller than an actual house (Ill. 1-2). The façades allude to anthropomorphic features with doors as mouths, windows as eyes and ears, and low chimneys or center window as the nose. Mortar, wood, acrylic glass, wires, and ceramic insulators replicate actual construction materials, together with the addition of motors and compressors. *The House in Your Head* was adapted in 2009 for the Gallery Factory in Seoul, South Korea where the artists transformed the gallery's street façade into a face as well. Dormer windows became eyelids, blinds resembled teeth, and lights flickered so the house appeared to look left and right (Randi & Katrine, 2010). In the Gl. Strand version of the installation, the two houses face one another, establishing a relational arena for viewers moving between them and for the buildings themselves, as Schelde has pointed out (Schelde, 2015, p. 104).



ILL. 1+2 — Randi & Katrine: *The House in Your Head* 2008, wood, acrylic glass, wires, ceramic insulators, motor, compressor, and mortar, exhibited at Kunstforeningen Gl. Strand, Copenhagen. Photo: Courtesy of Anders Sune Berg.

The House in Your Head stages contrasting modes of perception, destabilizing our notions of transparency and opacity. The lighter house displays a short flight of steps ascending to a glowing doorway, a smaller interior-lit window, and two prominent façade windows. The lit window signals human activity inside. It is Bachelard's eye of the house: "[T]hrough its light alone, the house becomes human. It sees like a man. It is an eye open to the night" (Bachelard, 2014, pp. 54-55). In Old Norse, the window was called a "wind eye": *vindauga* (*vindr* and *auga*). It was an opening where light and wind entered the house, and from the Old Norse one understands that the house was imagined like a face with the window as its eye. Along the white house's left side, a ladder rests against the wall, reaching toward a window and inviting the imagination to enter the house through its opening. But a cast shadow referencing Duchamp's *Bicycle Wheel* (1913) appears on what one would expect to be the windowpane, turning it from a transparent opening to an impenetrable flat, pictorial surface. In the spirit of fifteenth-century humanist Leon Battista Alberti, the window now functions like a pictorial frame. Yet the cast shadow of the *Bicycle Wheel* is not a reference to a painting. Rather, it is an index to a three-dimensional object, so our eyes bounce off the surface and look elsewhere. In *The House in Your Head*, seeing is redirected and meaning deferred, unsettling our expectations for depth and surface, opening and closure.

Unlike the lit window, the darkened window appears ambiguous and unknown, a quality that transfers to the house. Opposite the white house, the grey house glimmers more faintly. Interior light seeps out through a small roundel in the door and through two upper windows fitted with motorized shutters that open and close as if blinking. Because the white house appears wide eyed and wide mouthed, it seems brighter, as if beaming with delight or astonishment, whereas the grey house's narrower entry, and therefore smaller mouth, transforms into a more reserved, taciturn expression. Similarly, the white house's rooftop antenna marks it as a receiver of radio waves and tuned into signals beyond its own walls. In contrast, the grey house, without an antenna, seems self-contained and closed to reception. Their opposition stages two modes of subjectivity: one porous, listening outward, and the other enclosed. The result is that invitation and exclusion reverberate as a theme throughout the installation.

Despite the work's negotiations around access and denial, electrical wires extend around both houses connecting house and gallery walls and implying a relational engagement with the space around them. An industrial transformer tower extends its wires across the gallery room, too, bridging the walls and suggesting a spatial and electric connectivity that might extend well beyond the gallery space. The transformer tower in *The House in Your Head* materializes an otherwise invisible system, and as a vertical marker of electrical transformation at high voltage, it is well known to be physically dangerous. As such, the transformer tower has easily come to symbolize the "mysterious and demonic" in culture (Nielsen, 2016, pp. 163 and n. 27). Randi & Katrine use this



ILL. 3 — Randi & Katrine: *Between Towers*, 2015, Village of 11 transformer towers, exhibited at Arken Museum of Contemporary Art. Photo: Courtesy of Alamy.

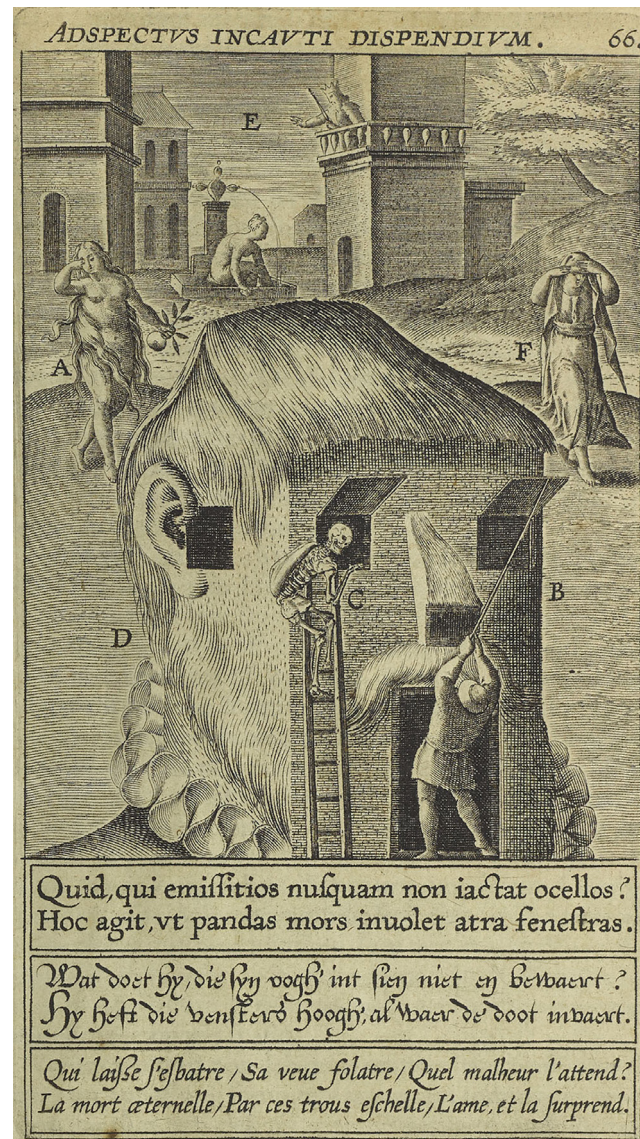
connotation to their advantage. In *Between Towers* (Ill. 3), exhibited at Arken Museum of Contemporary Art in 2015, they displayed a village of 11 transformer towers, varying in scale, carrying the sound of wires buzzing as one walks between them. The sound is suggestive of chatter or whispering, or maybe even alarmingly dangerous activity, like a Geiger-counter measuring levels of radiation with clicking sounds. The idea of the

charged presence of electricity aligns with Canadian media theorist Marshall McLuhan's concept of electricity as pure information, and, like James Joyce in *Ulysses*, he sees the house and city as primordially an extension of the human body (McLuhan, 1964, pp. 8-10, 138). In fact, electricity is the central nervous system of the global village, per McLuhan (McLuhan, 1964, p. 43), and from this human-centered viewpoint, *Between Towers* manifests an eerie village of humming synapses.

These power towers are not dead objects despite their obsolescence today. On the contrary, their sense of a past life is central to Randi & Katrine's work, as they evoke history and collective memory. As Bachelard states, a "tower is the creation of another century. Without a past it is nothing" (Bachelard, 2014, p. 46). Transformer towers are remnants of the twentieth century that appear like watchmen, imperious yet protective structures that claim sovereignty, draw boundaries, and linger as ruins in the Danish landscape. At the same time, as Brown argues, an object's abandonment can become its elevation: "Released from the bond of equipment, sustained outside the irreversibility of technological history, the object becomes something else" (Brown, 2001, p. 15). The transformer tower becomes a thing in Randi & Katrine's work, as it turns visible in its obsolescence and becomes symbolically charged, possibly referencing memories that hark back to childhood. Both *The House in Your Head* and *Between Towers* convert the infrastructures of modern transparency, electromagnetic waves and electric power into sensuous, opaque presences. The face-like features in *The House in Your Head* further render the work psychologically charged, evoking a much longer iconographic tradition of anthropomorphic architecture.

The Iconography of the Face-House

Randi & Katrine's visual inspiration for their animated houses derives from an early modern engraving by Theodor Galle, which will be discussed in detail below. Besides Galle's engraving, several examples of anthropomorphized houses or face-houses exist in the early modern European pictorial and sculptural tradition. In the 1590s, the Italian Mannerist artist Frederico Zuccari carved the door frame to the Palazzo Zuccari (1590s) in Rome in the style of the grotesque, resembling an open mouth that swallows whoever enters. He was likely inspired by Francesco Orsini's park of monstrous stone sculptures in *Bosco Sacro di Bomarzo*, created a few decades earlier north of Rome. Around the same time that Zuccari created his figurative door frame, the Italian Mannerist painter Giuseppe Arcimboldo created composite heads of depicted fruits, vegetables, ruins and architecture. One drawing often attributed to Arcimboldo, *An Allegory of Death* (1590s), shows a round tower whose open windows and door read as facial features, while a skeleton climbs a ladder toward one of the window eyes. The dilapidated tower symbolizes a *memento mori* on life's fragility. Arcimboldo's drawing was revisited a decade later by



ILL. 4 — Theodoor Galle: *Adspectus incauti dispedium* (The cost of careless looking) 1601, plate 66, engraving. Public domain.

Antwerp artist Theodoor Galle in his Mannerist engraving of an anthropomorphized house for the emblem book, *Veridicus Christianus* (1601) authored by the Flemish Jesuit Johannes David (*The Public Domain Review*, 2016). Randi & Katrine happened upon Galle's print without knowing its context but recognized the curious effect of houses resembling faces from the urban environment (Damsbo, 2008, p. 26).

Theodor Galle's engraving concerns the sense of vision, and it constructs vision as morally dangerous because seeing easily becomes covetous desire. *Veridicus Christianus'* two chapters dedicated to the senses include the image *Adspectus incauti dispedium* (The cost of careless looking) (Ill. 4). Below the image, the text in Latin, Dutch, and French

cautions the reader against letting one's eyes wander in vanity and uncontrolled lust (David, 1601, plate 66). Galle portrays a house as a man's head with the thatched roof as hair, the door as a mouth with a mustache above it, a protruding vent as a nose, and two windows on the façade as eyes. The head may even have a body, as suggested by the ruff and shoulder slope. The open windows permit unwanted things to enter and, indeed, a skeleton, symbolizing death, climbs into the house's right eye with an empty bag over its shoulder, thus clearly on a mission to rob the interior of the house. The person below has not noticed and is preoccupied with using a stick to lift the shutter on the house's left window, seemingly inviting more temptation. Behind the house, an additional three houses and a tower appear. The scenes around them depict Old Testament stories: Eve with her fruit on the left, King David in the tower secretly watching Bathsheba in her bath below, and Dinah on the right, soon to be seen, captured and violated by prince Shechem. Each scene links sight to transgression, showing how looking slides into possession, violation, or death, and pointing to the moral of maintaining a "governed" vision to prevent these transgressions from happening.

As sight was considered the most noble of the senses, it had to be guided properly, which is to say, disciplined by the Catholic Church toward virtuous practice (Clark, 2007, p. 27). The eyes permit a gateway to corruption, potentially filling the viewer with sights so horrific that they erode both conscience and sanity: "If the senses were windows on the soul they were also doors, allowing entrance to temptation, vice, and evil spirits. The human moral citadel was continually under assault," as historian Stuart Clark notes about the early modern church's concept of vision (Clark, 2007, p. 24). If we transpose the Jesuit lesson onto Randi & Katrine's *The House in Your Head*, seen as a warning to protect the purity of the house, then at least two interpretations emerge: Either we follow the emblem book's guidance, which suggests that we *are* the house and must guard our vision against corruption, or, alternatively, we are the real, immoral threat to the house's integrity. In the latter case, the house has become its own subject whose ladder is tempting us, as skeletons, to climb through his eye and plunder his soul. In this curious instability of subject and object, looking becomes an ethical act, locating the danger not just in the house's openings but in our evil desire to enter them. Eyes are the windows of our soul and a contact seam tempted by lust and curiosity, and Galle's engraving on the cost of careless looking attempts to discipline desires by exhibiting an early-modern diagram of subject-thing entanglement.

Emblem books often depict allegories as human-made environments, such as ruins forming a face, labyrinths, gardens, ships, or towers. Jesuits intended emblem books as guides for meditative practice, so that readers would dwell on an image-text until it yielded spiritual insight. Anthropomorphizing architecture allowed artists and emblem writers to show that human life and architecture are intertwined. It permitted viewers to grasp tangibly what would otherwise be abstract ideas and to do so with affect,

whether humor or fear. But architecture also mirrors the human body more generally. Since antiquity, people have made visual parallels between the verticality of buildings and bodies. Vitruvius, for example, compared architectural proportions to the human form (Vitruvius, 1914, Book III, Chap. 1). In Hindu architectural and ritual traditions, the house mirrors both body and cosmos (MacDougall, 2008, p. 84). The house maps our innermost selves, says Bachelard, holding the universe of our earliest experiences and gathering our entire past within its walls (Bachelard, 2014, pp. 20, 26-27, 36). *The House in Your Head* reconfigures this early modern anxiety over vision into a contemporary meditation on spectatorship, where the viewer takes part in the house's sentient exchange between seeing and being seen. Where Galle's house warns against the unruly vision and therefore sets out to govern it, Randi & Katrine steer viewers through their spaces, consistently shifting the line between what seems like mere whimsy and potential danger. Their installation *The Village*, explored below, revisits anxiety but on a scale beyond the personal. Here, the seam turns into the border of belonging where protection and exclusion coexist.

The Threshold and *The Village*

In 2014, Randi & Katrine exhibited an installation of several human-like houses, *The Village*, at the Sydney 19th Biennale, *You Imagine What You Desire*, on Cockatoo Island (Ill. 5). *The Village* consists of two gated towers with walls outlining five houses, all different in appearance and scale and made of wood, acrylic glass, lights, paint, sand, and iron, with many of the surfaces looking weathered. Smoke machines filled the chimneys so that the houses seemed to exhale plumes acting almost like smoke signals. The lit houses glowed from within, but the doors and windows were sealed. The five houses appeared like totems, villagers, or family members standing in a circle facing one another protected by the two gated towers, the "head of the family," as the artists describe them.¹ The installation was situated inside an enormous warehouse, a former shipyard and prison in the Sydney harbour. The size of the warehouse heightened the contrast with Randi & Katrine's scaled-down village, creating an intimate experience of the installation. Their focus on miniature, at least compared to the scale of the warehouse, immediately situated their work in the world of the imagination. For things that are small bring to mind toys and fairy tales that transport us to childhood (Bachelard, 2014, pp. 167-169). When rendered in miniature, values become intensified and concentrated, as seen also in *The Village*.

The curator of the Sydney Biennale Juliana Engberg encouraged Randi & Katrine to work with the political issue of asylum seekers and Australia's immigration policies for their Biennale contribution (Engberg, 2015, p. 136), and her catalogue entry on *The Village* reflects this angle:

The Village makes reference to the tribal and medieval origins of organised communities; people who staked their claim on open land and then cultivated, managed and secured it against others – outsiders, interlopers and invaders who – [sic] coveted their territory. For the modern viewer, the work represents a place of sanctuary and community, but also, if we permit ourselves to contemplate it, exclusion. This is particularly and unfortunately apt as we witness the perilous situation of those who seek asylum in this time of mass refugee movement, only to find the fortress secured and the gateway barred. (Engberg, 2014, p. 227)

The gated village mirrors both historical villages and the contemporary experience of asylum seekers, Engberg argues, and yet *The Village* is a welcoming “sanctuary,” too. Randi & Katrine’s installation orients the visitors toward the village entrance through the gate tower, as its gates are neither secured nor barred in the manner of state borders, contrary to what Engberg’s comparison implies. They are never closed, since the walls that protect the villagers from the outside do not extend the full length. Instead, they reach like curved arms from the towers, the “heads of the family,” embracing in a half circle the sanctity of the center. It is a protective and calming gesture that recalls the “grace of a curve” and how the curve, as a shape, “is an invitation to remain” (Bachelard, 2014, p. 165). The oval, half-open form also calls to mind Gian Lorenzo Bernini’s colonnades in St. Peter’s Square, which create an embrace in the “maternal arms of Mother Church,” in Bernini’s words. Bernini’s colonnades may delineate an amphitheater, a divine world stage, or the divine womb, the “womb of the world” (Napier, 1988). Whether *The Village*’s curved walls represent a fortress-like exclusion against outsiders or curved arms that hug a womb-like sanctuary, this dual interpretation stages the very conditions of exteriority and interiority that forms the emotional tension of a threshold.

To Bachelard, the threshold describes the pain of being between worlds. It is a site of inner tension where self and world are negotiated, not merely a physical line but a psychological transition point and an imaginary boundary. He speaks of a liminal deity at the seam. For example, the door is a recurrent motif that resonates with a fundamental human experience, so much so that Bachelard claims it organizes our thoughts and helps shape our world. He describes the door ajar as “an entire cosmos of the Half-open. In fact it is one of the primal images,” promising possibility and fostering the imagination. It is neither inside nor outside but a seam: “Incarnated in the door, there is a little threshold god” (Bachelard, 2014, p. 238). To him, the experience of space is an intimacy that cannot be contained or confined within walls, for it continually flows across the spaces that seem to divide it. If a border-line surface between an inside and outside exists, then this surface is “painful on both sides,” says Bachelard (Bachelard, 2014, pp. 233-235). Crossing the border means moving between psychological states. If one leaves *The Village*, one loses its safety and warmth, and if one enters it, one loses the freedom and vastness of



ILL. 5 — Randi & Katrine, *The Village*, 2014, wood, acrylic glass, lights, smoke, paint, sand, iron, and color filters. Exhibited at the 19th Sydney Biennale, Australia. Photo: Courtesy of Sebastian Kriete and Randi & Katrine.

the outside. But like the door ajar, the half-open walls of *The Village* do not proclaim to confine. Thus, when Schelde sees *The Village* as possessing a “nightmarish quality” (Schelde, 2015, pp. 102-104), it is clear that it shares with the early modern engraving, *The Cost of Careless Looking*, an anxiety over seams, a curiosity with the subject-thing entanglement, and a desire to exert control over one’s spatial movement. *The Village* playfully defies closure, and positions itself through juxtapositions between worlds that are both nightmarish and enchanting.

To Brown, things tend to “hover over the threshold between the nameable and un-nameable, the figurable and unfigurable, the identifiable and unidentifiable” (Brown, 2001, p. 5). One might view the moment that an object becomes a thing as a perceptual threshold. Rather than a place, it is an event, a disruption or breakdown where something causes a shift in our attention. Bachelard and Brown agree that objects have depth and are never neutral, and for Bachelard, the imagination is key, while for Brown, experience matters. Brown dedicates the coda of his book *Other Things* to Bachelard and American Minimalist artist Dan Flavin. He shifts Bachelard’s focus on subjective, imaginative experience toward networks and infrastructure in the world. He uses Flavin’s fluorescent light installations to connect electrical light – not just a flickering candle, as Bachelard

would have it – with a grid and broader relational system. His point is to ground his thing theory in a material and historical framework where “the thingness of an object cannot be abstracted from the field of culture” (Brown, 2019, p. 291). Where Bachelard highlights the intimate space of the imagination, Brown’s material-cultural interpretation extends into our everyday infrastructures, which resonates with Randi & Katrine’s use of conventional technologies and modes of communication.

Randi & Katrine’s installations draw together early modern vision and modern infrastructures and may perhaps foreshadow our changing relations to technology.² The antennas and voltage of transformer towers invoke both psychological affect and our cultural-historical reception of these structures today. Once transformer towers pass from use value into obsolescence, they hover at the threshold between object and thing, becoming culturally loaded presences that gather memory. In *The Village*, what emerges is not simply the return of enchantment but a recurring way of thinking about culture in terms of thresholds between safety and danger, or inside and outside. In these works, Randi & Katrine resist a contemporary cultural preference for transparency in the built environment by insisting on the value of opacity. Their work suggests that an encounter with a thing does not merely belong to the realm of children and fairy tales, like Hans Christian Andersen’s “The Old House,” but to a historically recurrent means of making the world newly visible. •

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