



Faculty of Art, Criticism & Curatorial Practice, Faculty of Liberal Arts & Sciences

2004

A brief investigation of buildings on stilts

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Suggested citation:

Donegan, Rosemary (2004) A brief investigation of buildings on stilts. *afterthedrillisgone*, 1 (1). Available at <http://openresearch.ocadu.ca/id/eprint/1843/>

The publication 'afterthedrillisgone' was inspired by the community project After the Drill Is Gone, which was initiated by Catherine Campbell in November 2003 as part of a special study through Criticism and Curatorial Practice (CRCP) at OCAD University (then the Ontario College of Art and Design).

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"The natural outcome of placing a building on stilts is to make it hover, that is if the objects on the posts has direction horizontal —outwards all around.

To put a box on edge (that is with greater height than breadth) on stilts is to contradict its verticality, this form should plunge into the ground like a spear. To place it on posts is against its direction.

Only forms like a slab on its side, a table top, or a lying book can be placed on posts and hover."

-James Stirling, Architect, 1950

Out of the Box:

Price Rossi Stirling & Matta-Clark

Canadian Centre for Architecture
(CCA), Montreal, Oct. 23, 2003 to
Sept. 6, 2004

"The MAPO building is named after Martin A. Pomerantz, the first true Antarctic astronomer. ...In 1979, he made the first serious solar observations from the Pole. The MAPO building was dedicated [to him] in the 1995 season.

The building is on stilts because buildings that are on the surface of the ice, like the dome, tend to trap the blowing snow and steadily get buried. However, buildings on stilts let the snow blow through them, so the snow doesn't accumulate. Remember also that the ice is moving, flowing at a rate of about 10 metres/year."

-Adapted from: "Virtual Tour-MAPO Building" Centre for Astrophysical Research in Antarctica

-<http://astro.uchicago.edu/crar/vtour/pole/darksector/mapo>

"The Info Box [on the Potsdamer Platz building site in Berlin] is a box that is 15 metres high, 62 metres long, 15 metres deep and rests on stilts eight metres above the ground. Two outdoor staircases at the sides lead to the viewing platform on the roof, which gives the best view of the building work [on the new Potsdamer Platz]. The steel framework is clad with bright red steel sheeting panels. But the box owes its characteristic appearance to the apparently arbitrary distribution of small and large glass surfaces which give a free view into the box - and provide an excellent view from the cafe on the ground floor." [The Info Box, or the Red Box as it was also known, was dismantled in 2002]

-Arnt Cobbers, Architecture in Berlin:
The 100 most Important Buildings and Urban Settings (Berlin: Jaron Verlag GmbH, 1999) p. 198

A Brief Investigation of Buildings on Stilts

by Rosemary Donegan

"A number of new visions for city plans are beginning to come out of the woodwork and I have been amazed to see that a 60s revival seems to be suggested. The architecture often has new features, but the overall plan is for the same old, big buildings up on stilts with large areas of space in between. Now it is sometimes said that my ideas are rather old fashioned, but I am delighted to say that looking at this type of plan they seem rather progressive!"

-Charles Windsor,
The Prince of Wales,
speaking at the Traditional Urbanism
in Contemporary Practice Conference,
London, Nov. 20, 2003.
[http://www.princeofwales.gov.uk/
speeches/architecture](http://www.princeofwales.gov.uk/speeches/architecture)

"Alsop likes buildings on stilts, that start a long way up in the air and allow landscape to flow beneath. He also likes buildings that suddenly shoot off at right angles to themselves, and which contain sundry mysterious organ-shaped pods."

-Hugh Pearman
"Will Alsop learns to read"
The (London) Sunday Times,
October 10, 1999 (originally published
as "Peckham Wry")

[Within modernism] "The building on stilts, or on pilotis, is a striking device which is intended to both produce the highest level of continuity in urban space, and to express metaphorically its freedom from a fabric of buildings. The building on stilts may also be interpreted as conveying a powerful ideology. It denies the existence of hierarchies, social differences, barriers, rituals and controls. It is the expression of transparency and

and openness in an open democratic society....

Whatever their merits in newly urbanized areas, the contamination of those basic design concepts [the building on stilts] with different, older, building types and urban spaces, and with social realities contradicting the ideal assumptions, will produce some fascinating results internally and in relation to the city environment."

-Daniel Bernstein, Professor, Research
Laboratory, LAIADE presented at
"Dangerous liaisons: Preserving post-war
modernism in city centers".
Conference, 15-17 February 2001,
Helsinki, Finland

"OCAD's table top is a belated example of the Memphis style, whether it was intended by the architect or not (most likely not)... the table top could be inserted among Memphis product examples and nobody would question its presence or its ethos. It screams Memphis."

-Richard Brault,
industrial designer, April, 2004

"...Gehry also indicated that playing to the AGO's south end, which overlooks the historic 1818 Grange House and its adjacent park, was determined by the nearby erection of Will Alsop's new, two-storey Ontario College of Art & Design building. It rises on metal stilts 30 metres above the ground along the eastern perimeter of Grange Park. OCAD set a datum. They established an approved datum for buildings in the neighbourhood. Therefore, what I was doing was well within that datum."

-James Adams
"Is Gehry getting a bad rap",
The Globe & Mail, March 24, 2004

Many cultures due to local conditions, flood plains, tidal rivers, weather extremes build houses on stilts over water. From Laos, Cambodia, India, Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia, Myanmar, Chile, Venezuela, and throughout the Amazon region in Brazil. In Spain and Portugal seed/grain houses are built on stilts to protect the seeds from animals and mildew. In the 18th century in Bear River, Nova Scotia, stores and warehouses were built on stilts over the tidal Bear River, due to a shortage of space in the village centre.

In conclusion, in a brief investigation of buildings on stilts, many buildings have been built over water, over clay soil, over parking lots and on ice. However, Will Alsop's design for OCAD appears to be one

of the only buildings on stilts built over an original building. Flamboyant, lofty, overwhelming, it has now taken on a life of its own....audacious as that may be!!!

