



# Writing at Wurster Ascension

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Project Type:  
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Course:  
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Instructor:  
Professor  
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Photograph by Marc Daja Elbasani

Having made my way through the corridor that was the separating point between master and servant buildings, I found myself standing in front of the main elevators, so efficiently coupled to Stair 1, as the plaque reads. Overhead, the tungsten lights were placed into the ceiling, much like track lighting, only buried behind the ceiling material so that they appeared to be golden discs overhead. I always liked this detail because when pushed to extremes, it illuminates the floor and those who traverse it without calling any visual attention to itself, so it appears that both building and occupants simply glow, a detail I feel is much underused in architecture. This lobby space in front of the elevator looked much like something out of architectural record, like "magazine architecture" that is stereotypically not functional or financially feasible. I didn't care to do an analysis though. Regardless of what the "truth" was behind the economics of it, the space was pleasant just the same. I looked over to see the outdoor green space before me, that strange vacant spot that feels like it should be an oppressive space, behind surrounded by cement walls that are very high. And yet, I knew that it would be a good outdoor space, although one would be scolded in a desk crit for having designed it.

As I stood before the two aluminum or steel doors (I couldn't believe they would use something as soft as 6061 aluminum for interior civic buildings.) I took note of the plywood wall, so brilliantly bright in its new condition. Was this the same plywood that has now aged since the 1960s to become this deep dark color? This would later be confirmed when I foolishly asked, as though I had forgotten the meaning of Wurster, "What color will it be when they finish it?" To which I was answered. "No finish. That's how it looks, as it is." And there was the philosophy of Wurster in a nutshell. Forgive me for letting it slip for a moment. But maybe therein lies the success of the design. It is always teaching us to be truthful, never letting up on our minds, especially young and unpolished ones such as mine.

I reached over to push the shiny metal button. I had noticed that the buttons used were the original ones, as the other elevator had buttons that were not flush with their retaining rings. Here, the aluminum buttons were convex with a white opaque dot in the center to glow when the button had been pressed, showing that the elevator was responding to the call. Here, they had retained the original equipment, and for that I was grateful.

My finger halted. I did not want to press the button because I was worried. It had then dawned on me; "Just how much love did they invest in this building. How much money? How much in the way of security? And then I had this horrible suspicion, somewhat paranoid, that all of the systems were monitored and alarmed. Call the elevator? And disturb the building? No, let it sleep and do all that is natural, no intervention to the building. And so I walked around to the stairwell 1. I placed my hand upon the door handle, that bronze colored piece against a glossy plane of formal black. As if concerned about noise sensors, I pressed down upon the lever slowly with two hands for added control of the movement. And with less noise than the buzzing of the lights, opened the door.

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And there were the stairs before me. They were painted a strange off-white color, upsetting because I knew what the beauty of the concrete was in the past. Although perhaps they could not remove all of the graffiti to make it seem like bare and true concrete. It was once the case that the stairwell of Wurster was encrusted in graffiti, as can be detected by the remaining graffiti on the floor, which has yet to be painted over. I suspect that said painting will most likely occur in the summer, so I had better photograph the remaining graffiti. Although I discourage graffiti today, there is value in the old works, particularly those that try not to be offensive, but tiny pieces of art. It should be considered whether or not the stairs should really ever be painted over at all, or the pieces of the building that retain these projekt scars should be kept as exhibits of the past. People believe that Wurster is an open building, where the architecture is admitted to and not hidden. Then perhaps this graffiti should not be forgotten? Moving on.

I made my way up the stairs and past the strange metal bands that were bolted onto the interior corners of the stairwell. They seemed to be very strong. But why were they there? They didn't seem to offer any seismic advantages. Moving on. As I reached the fourth floor, I came across the point of transition, where the hatchback stairwell rotates 90 degrees, a strange configuration that made for a place of seclusion beneath the stairwell. I looked in through the window of that fourth floor to see the familiar start of lobby spaces per studio floor, a fantastic piece of design, the formal entrances to the studios, the places of contemplation about where you are and where you belong.

But I did not budge the door. Rather, I proceeded to the floor above, where the studio 101 was to convene. I As I looked through the slim window firmly fixed in that door of typical formal black; I saw the ghostly image of a Mexican activist mural, a beautiful creation. Suddenly a flood of memory hit me. Since I had not been in this building since my freshman year, before I was officially enrolled in Berkeley. It was like dejavu. In retrospect, this whole experience had the feeling of dejavu, where one feels intimately familiar with a space they know they have never witnessed. It had been so long since I had been in this place that I could have told you I knew I had never frequented the building at all.

I carefully opened the door in that same manner in fear of the nonexistent sensors. I stood before the mural and felt so small. This one wall of Wurster overpowered me, much like the rest in this little trek. I had been so used to the servant building that I was impressed by it. But the tower, in contrast, is scaled such that I feel half my height as I did back in the servant. And I wondered what this building, what the tower would do to me when I am to work in it. Before returning to the stairwell, I looked to the header above the door that marked the entrance to the grand studio space. Written in blue on the plywood wall were the familiar words, "come my son.." and directly beneath line, as if in the gridlike order of a stately elevation was the following line "come to the machine." One of the plywood sheets had been removed. And had it remained, it would have been "Welcome my son. Welcome to the Machine." And I'm probably the only active student in Wurter who knows what that is in reference to. It isn't that old, really. A computer game called, "Ecco the Dolphin" has a final level at the very end, where your character, a dolphin, is cast into a realm of moving walls and corridors, that movement being a byproduct of the machines undeclared operations. This level is different from all other levels in all other games I had experienced because it demanded to the limitations of each individual human's capacity to form an extensive memory of space. The memory needed to actually win in the level is so great that I could never win. This was the level at which I am now to toil.