

# REFLECTION PAPER ON A CANCER CENTER PROJECT

*FANG BAI*

*STUDY NUMBER:4325915 EMAIL:F.BAI@STUDENT.TUDELFT.NL*

*THE ARCHITECTURE OF THE INTERIOR GRADUATION STUDIO:*

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## INTRODUCTION

This report summarizes the outcomes of the specific research and the design project. The research mainly focuses on the potential users of the public interior to be designed, as the studio's intended high quality of the public interior is largely determined by the satisfaction of the public. Therefore there is a direct relation between the design assignment and the research, especially in the initial and explorative stage of the design when research findings can motivate design decisions. As equally important as the main social, or user-oriented approach, the critical cultural-historic approach is also indispensable in judging the development and social impact of the building on the immediate surroundings and the urban context at large.

## RESEARCH AND DESIGN

My research was concentrating on catching the stress of cancer patients. To put it architecturally, it's about how to create stress releasing space for cancer patients and their families. For the studio's design assignment – the healthy environment, a cancer care center in Amsterdam North is to be developed through the concept of healing architecture, an architecture that can have a positive effect on the healing process of the cancer patients, as well as the physical and emotional experience of other people involved in the cancer process - families, specialists, visitors.

The center I'm doing functions as a supplement to the specialist cancer hospital in Amsterdam. It intends to provide a welcoming, soothing interior environment accommodating multiple programs, including counseling, social intercourse, education, living, physical and emotional recoveries, as well as some therapies that can be separated from a specialist cancer hospital, traditional ones like chemotherapy, alternative ones like art therapy. The programs involved are also outcomes of the research on users' needs. Therefore, from a program point of view, the cancer center could be seen as a new type based on the existing cancer centers and hospitals.

My basic intention is to explore an intimate relation with outside nature. I started the design conception from the urban studies and my intuition on the site. As an architect, I believe the relation of the building with its surroundings and, say, the value of permanence of a building is most important from certain points of view, since as time passes by, functions and users could change dramatically. A factory can adapt for a museum, a monastery can adapt for a hotel. In that sense, the social research and architectural design conflict a little bit, but there could be a delicate balance between them so that architecture can benefit from the research. I think a building should be respectful to its users but at the same time be transcendent in terms of its temporary program and users.

The site for the design task is Floraweg, intersected by Kamperfoelieweg, near the port in Amsterdam North. Generally, the location is at a point as the junction of different districts where contradictory context meets – new and old, industry and living, big and small, natural and artificial. Thus, there is very little coherence within nearby surroundings. The surrounding traffic and green spaces further isolate the location from the existing fabric and so the site is more connected to the industry area to the southwest. Therefore, the relation between the building and the surroundings would be more about how to cope with the nature than with the surrounding buildings.

There are very nice outdoor green spaces defined by trees and slight slopes in the northeast side. A bicycle passage passes the sloping topography, giving dynamic views. The green space to the north also provides open views. These green spaces are very touching to me, and I think the relation with the outdoor spaces could be a starting point of the design concept.

Simultaneously, the research also plays a guiding role in the initial conception. Since the program is a cancer center, the very urgent needs of people involved in cancer process are important. I did a lot of readings and also made several excursions to the existing care facilities. Several Maggie's' centers are studied to research on how to create soothing atmosphere for the public space design of the center. As a result, two ways are found important in creating stress-releasing spaces, the first is to make intimate relation with nature to stimulate positive distractions for people, and the second is to guarantee spaces of different privacy so that people can choose for retreat or intercourse.

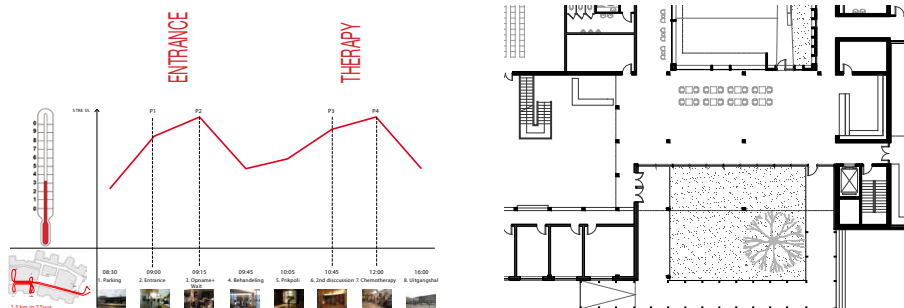
As the result of the early research and site studies, my initial conception is to start from a courtyard type and make combinations and adaptations to respond to the surroundings, then, to stretch the building volumes until they get close enough to the trees and slopes to make intimate interactions. The party center is demolished because it is a very introverted mental box without any connections to the outside in this nice natural environment. The office building itself has a very limited quality but is kept as a mediator between the industrial area and the nature within the site. By doing so, a buffer, or say, a transition between the urban environment and the intimate interior environment is created.

So throughout the design process, I was concentrating on how to connect the inside with the outside, as well as making spaces of different privacy. One example is the living area in the north side of the building. Outside of this space, the grass slope goes up, so inside the floor also stops and is interrupted by staircases. By doing so, it gives a feeling that the outside space is invited to the inside, and at the same time, it also gives an opportunity to make an interesting interior design, a double height

space that is adjacent to outside.



Another example of translating research results to architectural goals is the entrance design. Below is a diagram showing the stress level of patients in relation to the place in a cancer center, we learn during the entrance and therapy specs, people have highest level of stress. In my case, the image of entrance is intentionally hidden from the street, there is only a very modest and small entrance, so that people won't suddenly see a big and formal entrance, instead, first they enter a courtyard then slowly find the way into the building. And at the same time, the entrance is also implied by the entrance courtyard for the people from the street so it is not completely invisible. Two doors make different ways to enter and leave the building, for some people its very important, it gives a feeling of being transformed after therapy.



There must be inadequacies in the research and design process, but I'm quite happy with what I've done. I think the relation between the research and the design is successful from a whole aspect and I learnt a lot from the translation between them.

## PROJECT AND SOCIAL CONTEXT

The site is in Floraweg, Amsterdam North, a developing suburban area of the city. There are industrial buildings near Amsterdam port, old and new living areas in the rest part. However, there are few public buildings within nearby surroundings. One intention of this project is also to make it possible to accommodate public activities. The building tries to make some communal spaces that can also be shared by other people from the neighborhood. But this also problematic because cancer patients and families might not want to be disturbed, but I guess this can be negotiable.