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Reconciliation

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Reconciliation: a sensorial recovery centre for the visually impaired community

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Abstract

The majority of our actions are dependent on our sense of sight. We browse through social media, dress according to the latest fashion, watch productions at the theatre, gaze in awe at tourist attractions; but what if we suddenly lost our sense of sight? How would we cope in that situation? How would we adapt?

There are many schools for the visually impaired however, the majority cater for children only. Vision impairment is the most prevalent disability in South Africa, but only 3% of visually impaired people are employed - the rest are 100% dependent on others. If the majority are dependent on others, how can the built environment assist with this?

This research project aims to address the need for a centre, in a secure and comfortable environment, that can provide specialized care during the transition period of becoming an independent visually impaired person. Specialized care provided not only by people, but by the centre itself. The architecture will be designed as a catalyst to ignite the use of the other senses - sound, touch and smell. “Architecture is the art of reconciliation between ourselves and the world, this takes place through the senses” (Pallasmaa, 1996), a strong connection with the world on a deeper level enables one to form a meaningful relationship and in order to pursue that, one has to engage fully with the space by use of all the senses, not just sight.

Phenomenology is the study of being aware, being conscious of the surroundings and experiences but more important than that is the reaction to those surroundings and experiences. Can sensory phenomenology be implemented successfully into the built environment in order to assist with the visually impaired community? My aim to is to create a sensorial environment for the visually impaired to thrive in the other senses thus creating increased independence and confidence within themselves, allowing them to immerse themselves fully in the public realm.