

# CHAPTER

# 1

# INTRODUCTION

HILBROW

WELLNESS

01





Fig 3. Hillbrow street pavement ([www.2summer.net](http://www.2summer.net))



## CASE HILLBROW:

“Hillbrow, situated in the inner city area of Johannesburg, is historically the most dense high-rise residential settlement in South Africa. From its inception it fulfilled the role of reception area in the inner city. The early houses were replaced with high-rise blocks of flats after World War Two. In the sixties and seventies it was home to white urban flat dwellers.

From the mid-1970s there were significant changes as it became a ‘grey’ area (most whites having moved to newly established suburbs) with influx and ‘illegal’ renting by blacks wanting to escape the township violence and seeking access to housing and a better location in an area that was still ‘whites only’ but already in transition. During the eighties investors left the area and many formal landlords lost control of and even abandoned their properties. With little investment interest and falling property values, properties deteriorated and many became slums with increased crime, grime, disrepair of civil amenities and other associated problems of urban decay.

Private and public infrastructure was no longer repaired and was vandalised. In the middle and late 1990s, in response to a high market demand for accommodation, this began to change as private and government investment started to return with the development of well-run private for-profit and social housing rental developments next to decaying slums, the latter including many hijacked buildings.”  
(www.thehda.co.za)

Renewed efforts to restore Hillbrow to its former glory are currently pursued, albeit the meaning of this statement has different implications, and pertains to a different social, economic, political, and cultural context - as a result of the transformed population spectrum which has given the suburb a new identity. Although urban renewal and infrastructural development is important for the wellbeing of Hillbrow citizens, sustainable means to achieve this are even more important - if ever there is to be continuity and a genuine turn-around in the area.



Fig. 4 - Paradigm Shifts in Occupational Therapy

It is therefore imperative that underlying social discrepancies such as crime, violence, poverty, the HIV/ AIDS pandemic, and other diseases - are identified and addressed as a matter of priority and basis for all other development initiatives. These issues are a reflection of the ill state of the Hillbrow society. Illness is defined as the malfunction of life in all its physiological, psycho-social, and socio-economic dimensions. It is upon this foundational understanding that this research project is based.

From research findings which reveal the social needs in the community, a conceptual approach exploring the role of occupational therapy in the public health sector is undertaken and culminates in an architectural response that seeks to facilitate holistic wellness in Hillbrow. In line with the ideals of the Hillbrow Health Precinct, the proposed Occupational Therapy and Rehabilitation Centre seeks to breathe new life into Hillbrow through the comprehension of health as an all-encompassing subject which pertains to wellbeing in all aspects of life. ([www.breathingnewlifeintohillbrow.co.za](http://www.breathingnewlifeintohillbrow.co.za))

Hillbrow, Poems from: 'Stranger than a Sun'

The Pakistani doctor from Faisalabad practices on a busy street at Hillbrow. His surgery is full of people, white, black and coloureds. They all want to live. Like an overshadowing doom with scratches of light now and then he tries to pick and choose. Hillbrow is in his vein too. It runs in virulence, speeding in hopeless strides. His patients to change their gasps before moving on. I think of him. In days bloodied with endless motorcades and streets hanging on desperately to a fast moving train, he sometimes tries stretching himself to people he had left. The Nigerian mafia at times pushes an unwilling customer from the seventh floor. The train doesn't stop. There is a big hole in the sky here. The sun always forgets to pass by. I live a life somewhat closer to breathing somewhere close by. In evenings when a storm takes familiarity of a lost vengeance, I believe I am still alive. The heart throbs bridging living with those dying and the dying with those who have just survived. In our many lives, we always shared this beating heart, dying is the stream of light, a train running over a slumber unhinged to our other lives. We do wake up finding ourselves cornered by time's insistent pursuit. Living and loving at Old Delhi was not just an end to a despairingly belief. I still see them through window panes when evenings rush in colouring your whispers again. (Posted by Amitabh Mitra at Sunday, January 06, 2013)



py ([www.breathingnewlifeintohillbrow.co.za](http://www.breathingnewlifeintohillbrow.co.za))

