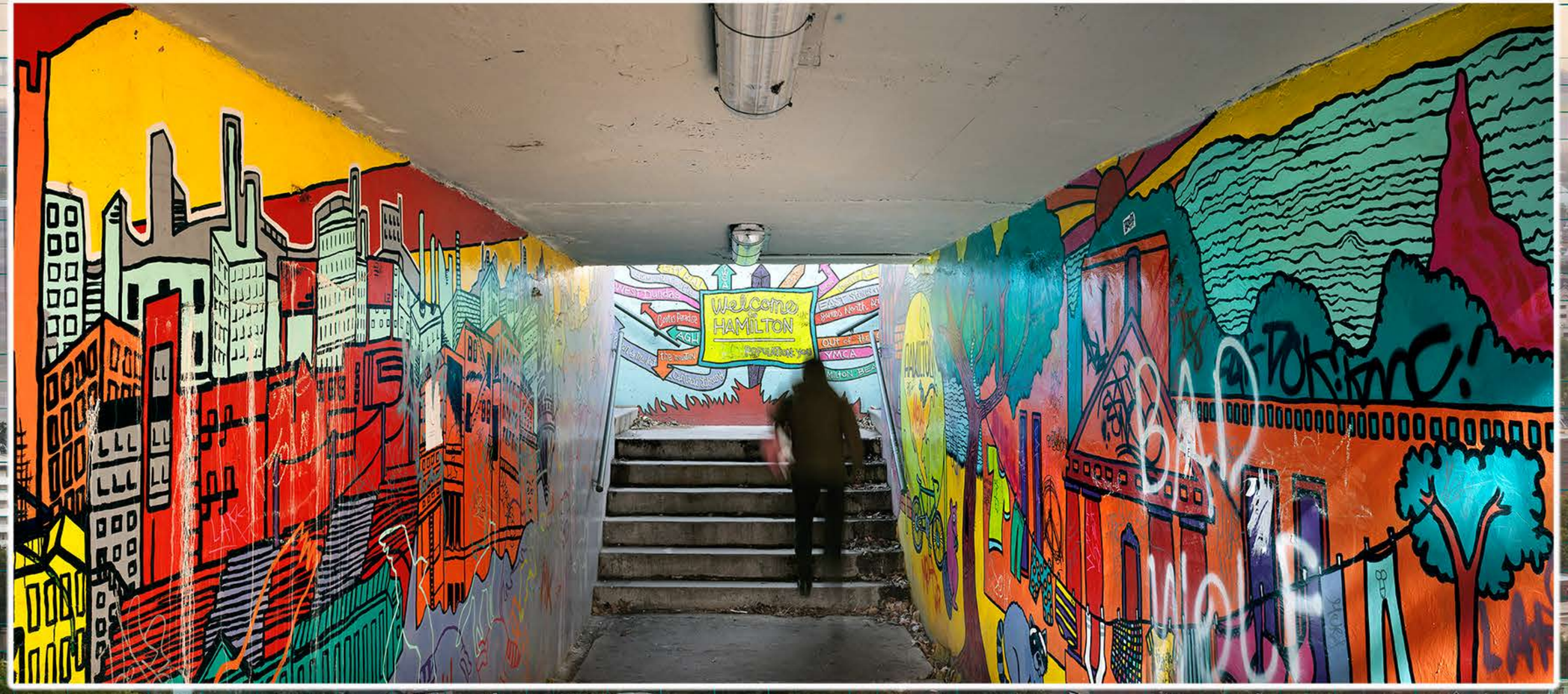
Intermission



Janusz Wrobel

About

Life without "progress" has consequences. Good and bad, and that depends how we define the means and terms of our progress. Advancing goals set by selective individuals, organizations, corporations or nations happens all the time. The outcome could be both positive and negative for individuals or the rest of us. What interested me is how our society can progress to benefit us all while minimizing the risk of the consequences.

Once I lived in a typical European city that grew over centuries, built with materials to endure, and layouts to preserve social structures. Traditions and cultures were ingrained in stones, city halls to endure a millennium rather than being built and demolished within a human lifespan. However, with no prospect of progress in the political system.

Living in the town of Dundas, engulfed by Hamilton city, I had my interest then in city "progress". Built by the capital flowing from what was once the colonial and industrial empire, by people escaping turmoil in many European countries, and on the land conquered by the same empire. New "land of opportunity" that before was a pristine nature paradise in the corner of Lake Ontario. What happened since then could be symptomatic of many locations on this continent. The trajectories of processes and their outcomes. The multitude of them unfolded now, finding us not well prepared to face them or to deal with incoming penalties.

Democracy is a system of governance based on our formal ability of collective choice making. Essentials are faculties of collective sensemaking, meaning identification, common abilities to exchange views and ideas. Democracy relies on our awareness of what's going on, what’s important, and how we find the best ways to progress forward. All of it is to be framed and supported by laws, education to prepare us for it, and the press to inform about it.

All depends on being ready for it. The evolution of cognition was long in small tribal groups or ecological niches. Then, many generations of economic servitude. Democracy, a few generations old, still blends servitude-based relationships with access to massive education and information systems. While capable of processing it, we are burdened with validating democracy's merit and credibility.

I have chosen the role of a chronicler, following a tradition of photographers' generations documenting realities of their lives. To gather evidence of the original fabric of the city, its past evolution, and mounting troubles. One mighty source of iron, cars, farm machinery, appliances, textiles, and the labour and social movements, the city evidently had been struggling for decades to find a new identity. A case study for anthropologists, sociologists, and city planners. A city like many others on the continent, inhabited by passive expectations and a self-absorbed population.









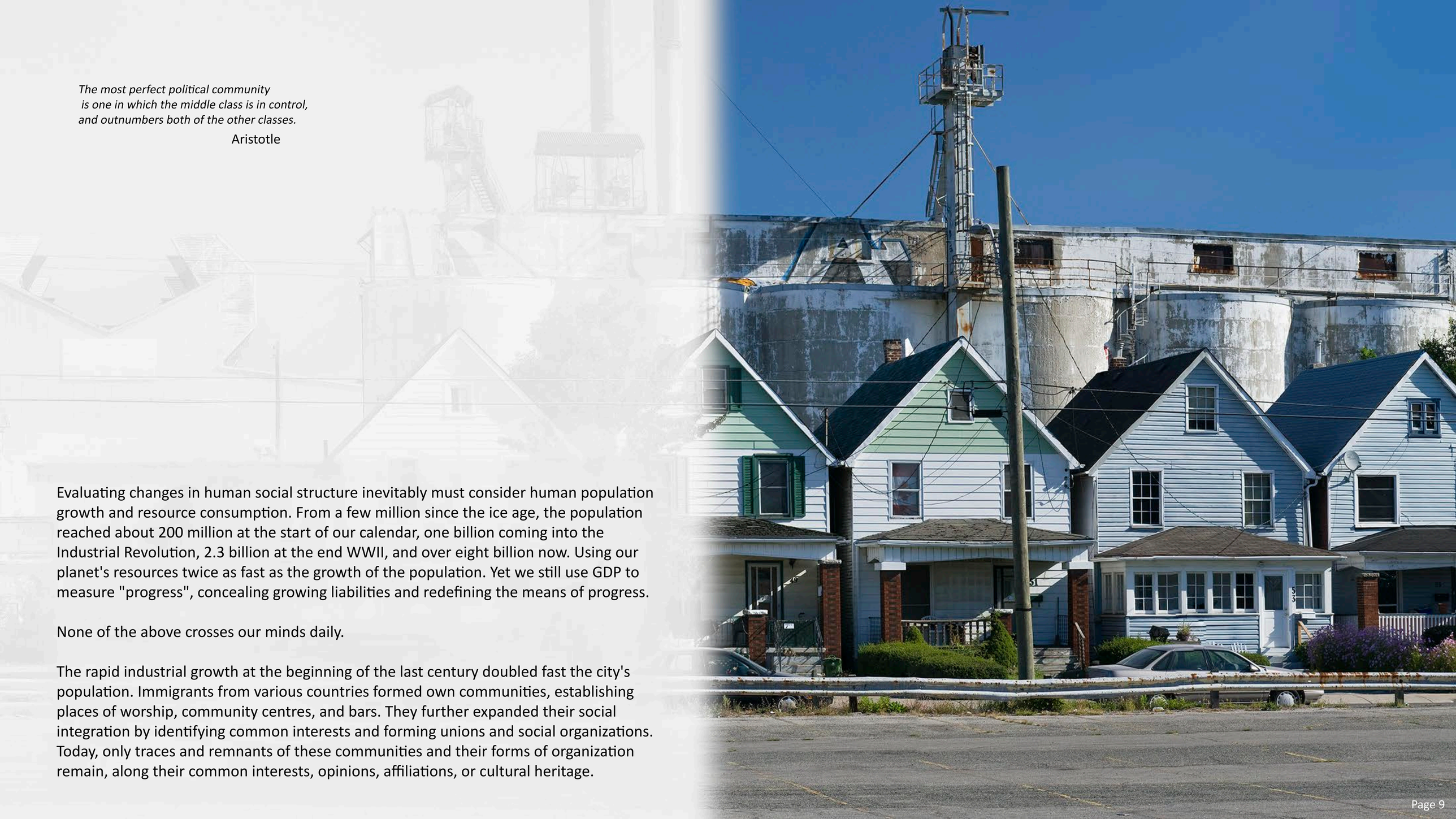

Tim Hortons
Tim Hortons
Tim Hortons
9
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go for more




ONTARIO
GOAL EH

The most perfect political community
is one in which the middle class is in control,
and outnumbers both of the other classes.

Aristotle



Evaluating changes in human social structure inevitably must consider human population growth and resource consumption. From a few million since the ice age, the population reached about 200 million at the start of our calendar, one billion coming into the Industrial Revolution, 2.3 billion at the end WWII, and over eight billion now. Using our planet's resources twice as fast as the growth of the population. Yet we still use GDP to measure "progress", concealing growing liabilities and redefining the means of progress.

None of the above crosses our minds daily.

The rapid industrial growth at the beginning of the last century doubled fast the city's population. Immigrants from various countries formed own communities, establishing places of worship, community centres, and bars. They further expanded their social integration by identifying common interests and forming unions and social organizations. Today, only traces and remnants of these communities and their forms of organization remain, along their common interests, opinions, affiliations, or cultural heritage.


1950
GAINSBORO
937
AVIS
FOR RENT
KEEP OUT


ABERDEEN
APARTMENTS

“We must learn to live together as brothers or perish together as fools."

Martin Luther King Jr.

I cherish old memories of daily life on my hometown street. The small private stores, independent from the state-controlled distribution network, with their storefronts showing the face value of what they offered. These values were confronted and debated on the streets in the face-to-face information exchange, debating values' merits, trust, and reliability of reputations daily. Along them, things that had been hidden between lines in the state-controlled media and TV news, or the latest church sermons. In store spaces, the trust of information exchange was supreme, away from the snooping ears and eyes of the ruling regime. The only advantage of aging now is having enough comparable materials to draw own conclusions. That is not a basis for an assumption that the maturity is age-related.

It was still easy to find signs of it after decades-long changes in Hamilton neighbourhoods, correlated with evolving strategies of the marketing industry. Or, in fact, with market economy policies. The dominant one appeared to be the concept of isolating consumers from the established smart street and pear validation processes. As a result, the concept of shopping malls has developed to overwhelm consumers with choices. More strategies follow to pave the path to a growth economy. With consumerism as a trap finding more fuel in the cheap labour elsewhere, more industry closures followed, further affecting the social fabric of the city. The sidewalks, once crowded with pedestrians and shoppers as seen in archived photographs, became later guides for commuters' traffic. But that was before they built the shopping mall the core of the city and took down the City Hall to make room for this mall expansion.

All the above had directed my interest to the consequences for the city's social fabric.




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"Art is never finished, only abandoned."
Leonardo da Vinci

"Art is the only way to run away without leaving home."
Twyla Tharp Appropriated by many on social media posts.

Any attempt to define what art is might carry a risk that is not worth taking. It is much safer to look at how art functions at the receiving end. Although that is still shrouded in ambiguity as it involves many art handling channels. To keep it simple, I attempt to evaluate it on the merit of its contribution to the state of our culture, yet another sphere of a broad range of interpretations. I used the Leonardo da Vinci quote above for its wisdom expressed not only in his artwork. In short, art maintains its staying power through the ideas sprouting in the minds of beholders. Attempting to connect us to, not facilitating escapes from, the realities of our living.

> *I used the attendance at New York trade shows decades ago as an excuse the spend evenings in Soho. Crowded galleries in the evenings, people sharing wine, being able to talk for hours about what any artwork could stir us to. The last time I was there was before COVID. Almost all galleries were replaced by fashion stores.*

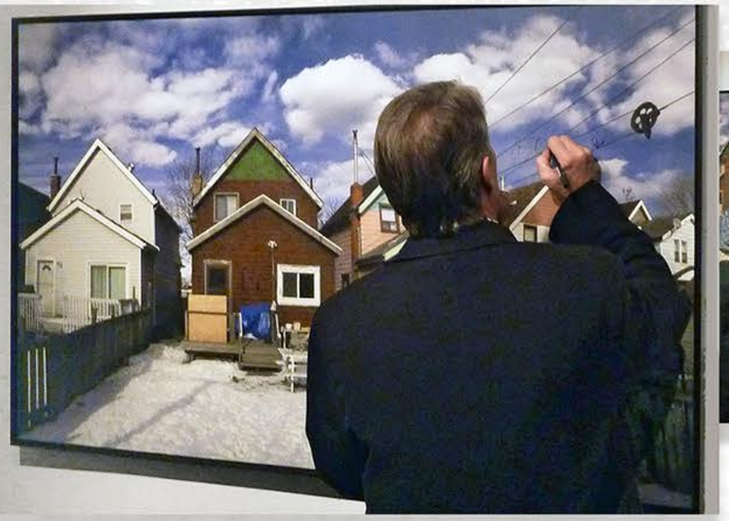
The Hamilton Art Craw on James Street North began in 2005, the year I moved to the city's area. Having been involved in the arts before, naturally, I had an interest in what was happening there. By the end of that decade, once a month, a sizable crowd of people was touring many private and public galleries, as well as many artists' studios on the street. Artists cheerfully serving free wine, getting disillusioned with every passing year. Thousands of voices, or rather the noise of individual emotions, each focused on itself, a testimony to the rapidly changing human culture. It was already clear how the social media extorted their fees, with all due consequences.

In the last few years, only two spaces supported by donors and one small private gallery survived on the "gentrified" street by now.


KING WILLIAM ART WALK
ART























The project sought to depict, in a single image, the previously showcased issue in Hamilton's traditional public media channels. Like locating a new football stadium while sacrificing some proposed neighbourhoods represented one issue. Or the proposals for LRT public transportation, the possibility of purchasing the NHL franchise for the city, and so on. After completing them to the high gallery standard, they were exhibited at the city's large public gatherings. In the project's displayed declaration, I portrayed myself as a newcomer asking for guidance on what was going on in the city I recently inhabited. In a short, printed statement, I challenged viewers to make their comments on my images with a selection of different permanent markers.

The last line of this manifesto was "Art is democracy; democracy is an Art."

Among all comments, the most constructive was from the city's mayor, who posted on "Neighbourhood," shown as the first image above. He drew a bicycle on the tightrope using a thin permanent marker. A simple statement about how he portrayed himself in his city's position. And as advice on abandoning hopes coming from my project. Indeed, I had no luck finding a place in the city to host my ready to hang "Intermission" exhibition. Neigher more places for extending the public interaction project. Yet there was something to learn from it. The mayor lost the election that followed. He approached the subsequent one with a simple electoral platform. Unlike all other candidates, he had only one sentence in it. He won that election, although only with a quarter of all the eligible votes.

It might be a case study of values associated with information and emotions. Or an illustration of Marshall McLuhan's theory, postulating that the form of a communication technology shapes society and human perception more than the specific content it carries.
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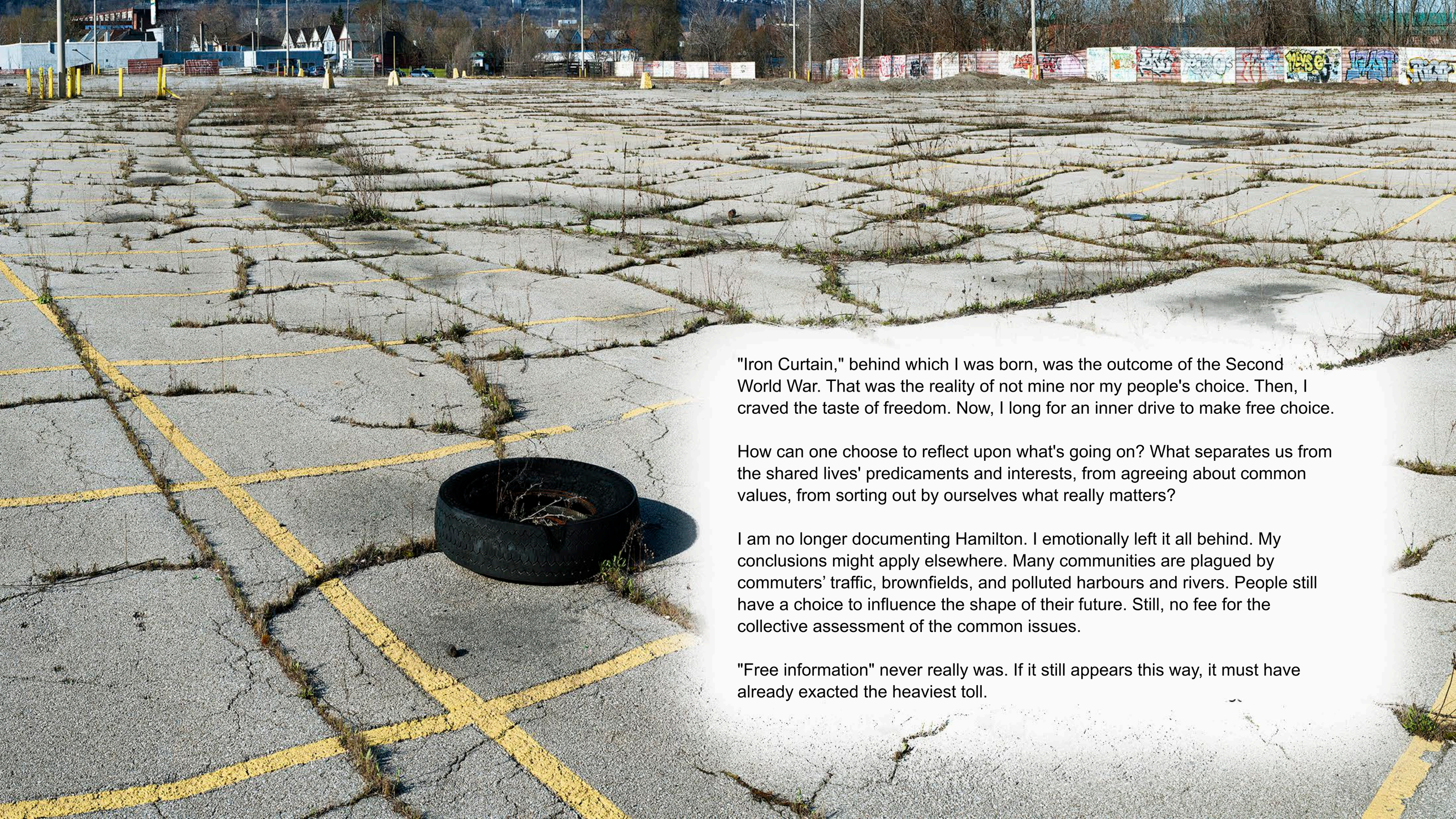

LIFE'S
TREASURES
WAY TO HIGH!
Love is the greatest thing you'll achieve.
Freedom
Duncan Hammond
HOCKEY
BASEBALL
FOOTBALL
Running to something.
Melissa + Melissa ROCK!!!
Andrea & Billie... in the wall
THE WOLVES NEED FEEDING
A WINDOW TO OPPORTUNITY
I'm so lost, and I live just around the corner!
-the arkells.
PIPE DREAM
Drainage
Green Power
WE ARE
Up Cycle!
Stay Safe!
my diary is in here ♥ keep safe.
I love him...
Marina + Jamie
FOER tha POLICE
♡ Community ♡
Enjoy life
All you need
La! La!
Find your Abstinence shocking
HELLO!!
Do I have to pay?
Critical mass ride. Bikes! Last Sunday of the month
Final cut
I ♡ RENO REBAMONTAN
PARKING TICKET.
June loves Jamie
FREE
Holly
I DO BELIEVE...
ART ROCKS
Amen Brotha.
No smoking
Big Love !!!
Margarete Donato
once a wild cat, always a wild cat.
♡ westmount. CA.
Watch out!
TRUE GRIT
CLOSED
sorry
323½
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GUTTERBALL
another opens...
IN BETWEEN DOORS
9 3/4
"Here comes the Bride"
shame is cool
WPE
"Marys" ♡xo.


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"Iron Curtain," behind which I was born, was the outcome of the Second World War. That was the reality of not mine nor my people's choice. Then, I craved the taste of freedom. Now, I long for an inner drive to make free choice.

How can one choose to reflect upon what's going on? What separates us from the shared lives' predicaments and interests, from agreeing about common values, from sorting out by ourselves what really matters?

I am no longer documenting Hamilton. I emotionally left it all behind. My conclusions might apply elsewhere. Many communities are plagued by commuters’ traffic, brownfields, and polluted harbours and rivers. People still have a choice to influence the shape of their future. Still, no fee for the collective assessment of the common issues.

"Free information" never really was. If it still appears this way, it must have already exacted the heaviest toll.






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"The best argument against democracy
is a five-minute conversation with
the average voter."
Winston Churchill.
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