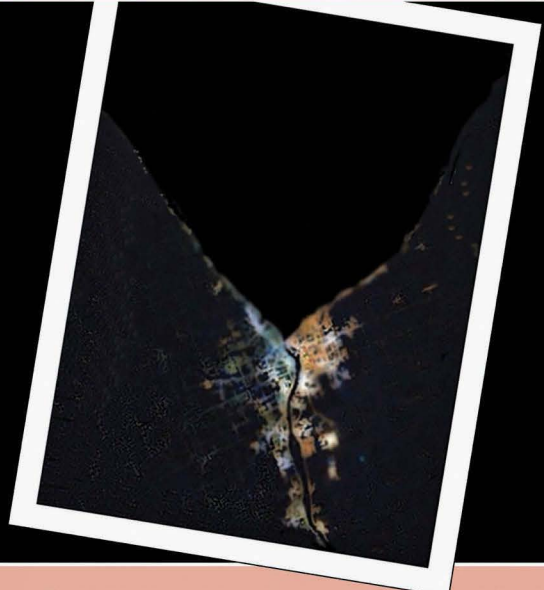


PICTURE THIS: IN FEBRUARY 2013, DURING ONE OF HIS THREE SPACE MISSIONS, CANADIAN ASTRONAUT CHRIS HADFIELD TWEETED ABOARD THE INTERNATIONAL SPACE STATION, ENCOURAGING THE RESIDENTS OF SARNIA TO LIGHT UP THE SKY. HIS GOAL WAS TO CAPTURE A DRAMATIC PHOTOGRAPH OF HIS HOMETOWN AS HE AND THE OTHER CREW MEMBERS SAILED PAST.

THE REGION'S PETROCHEMICAL PLANTS CONTRIBUTED TO HADFIELD'S SNAPSHOT BY MAKING UP THE SOLID BLOCKS OF LIGHT THAT BEGIN AT THE SOUTH END OF TOWN AND CONTINUE FOR SEVERAL KILOMETRES.



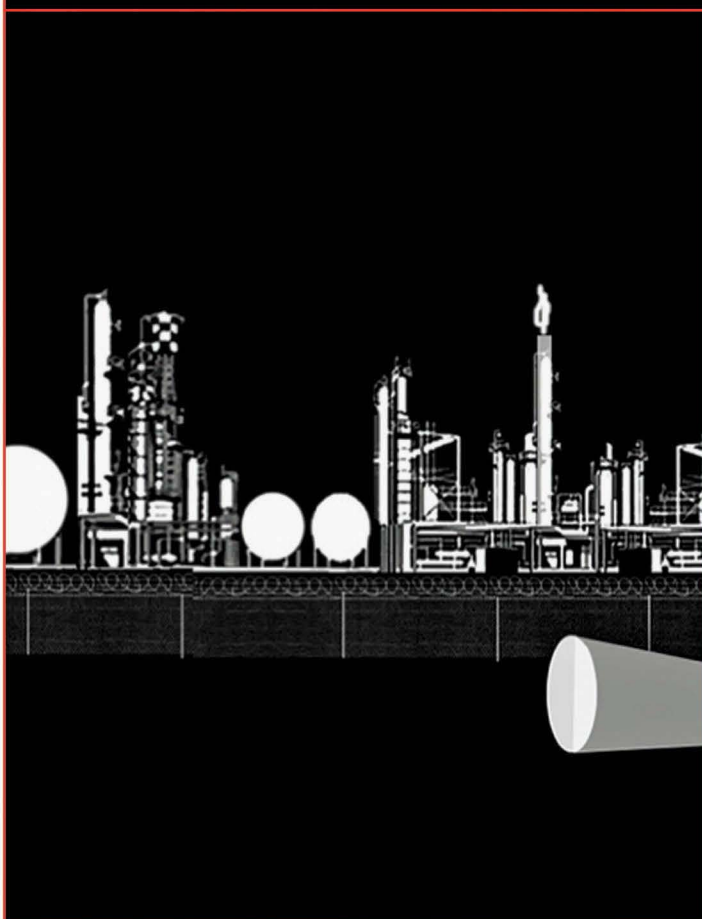
WHILE THIS EXTRATERRESTRIAL SNAPSHOT OF CHEMICAL VALLEY AT NIGHT LOOKS RATHER BEAUTIFUL, THE VIEW FROM THE GROUND IS MUCH DIFFERENT.



IT WAS DURING THE NIGHT MANY YEARS AGO THAT I FIRST ENCOUNTERED SARNIA AND ITS CHEMICAL PLANTS. SOMETIME IN THE LATE 1980S MY FRIEND LYN AND I WERE DRIVING NORTH FROM DETROIT ON THE WAY TO MY MOM'S HOUSE.

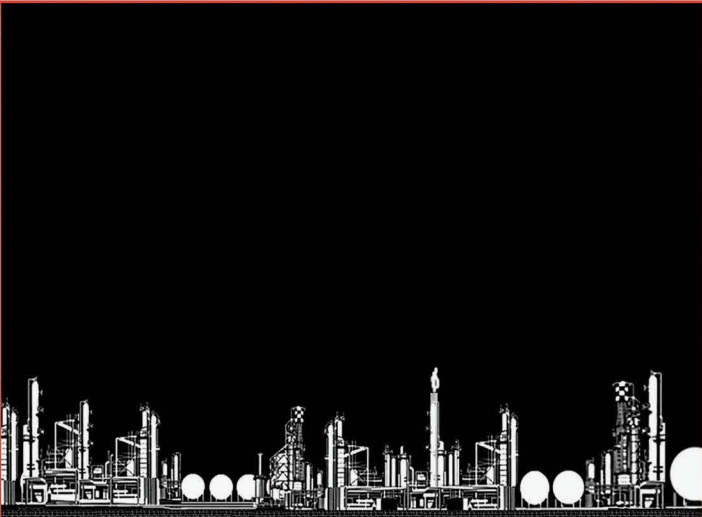


I REMEMBER DRIVING ALONG A MOSTLY PITCH-DARK HIGHWAY, THE RIVER PARKWAY, FEELING SOMEWHAT LOST AND EXHAUSTED. WE HAD JUST EXITED THE SMALL TOWN OF CORRUNA AND ENTERED THE SOUTHERN CORRIDOR OF CHEMICAL VALLEY.



"THIS IS ROBOCOP!"
ONE OF US SHOUTED.
"THIS IS ABSOLUTELY
ROBOCOP!"





BEFORE US WAS THE BRUTAL SETTING USED IN SCIENCE FICTION FILMS TO REPRESENT INDUSTRIAL CAPITALISM GONE AWRY: A HYPERBOLIC TECHNOSCAPE OF SILVER PIPING, GIANT HOLDING TANKS, POWER GENERATING STATIONS, FACTORY BUILDINGS, SECURITY GATES, PARKING LOTS, AND ROWS OF SMOKE STACKS AND VENTING TOWERS.

ALL THESE DIFFERENT PARTS OF THE PLANTS WERE ILLUMINATED WITH TWINKLING LIGHTS AND A MIXTURE OF STEAM AND BLACK EXHAUST HUGGED THE BUILDINGS; FLAMES BURNED BRIGHT BLUE, GREEN, AND ORANGE. I ALSO REMEMBER THE RUMBLE AND THE STINK OF SULPHUR.

THIS REFLECTION DOES NOT QUITE CAPTURE THE MOMENT BUT IT IS THE CLOSEST I CAN COME TO IN EXPRESSING HOW SARNIA BORDERS ON THE TECHNOLOGICAL SUBLIME.

