Multiple and competing origin stories of oil are central to our contemporary energy-intensive societies. Since the early 20th century, debates surrounding oil exploration focused on uncovering the genesis of hydrocarbons, specifically with a view to facilitating the location of new petroreserves across the globe. Were hydrocarbons biotic in origin – that is, the product of decomposing organic matter on our planet? Or were they abiotic – the product of physical processes either deep in Earth’s core, or within other extraterrestrial bodies? This talk examines the important exchange that occurred between Canadian, American and Soviet scientists over the course of the 20th century, and the scientific as well as speculative ways in which they addressed the relationship between organic life and hydrocarbons through discussions on the Alberta Tar Sands and other “strange oils.” How have the hydrocarbon origin debates actually shaped our ability to conceive of climate change, the finite nature of resources, and our planetary future?

Dr. Sabrina Perić
Associate Professor, Department of Anthropology and Archaeology, University of Calgary

Thursday, March 21, 2019
2:30 – 4:30 p.m.
A720 Loeb Building

Reception to follow
This lecture is part of the Department of Sociology and Anthropology Colloquium Series. It is co-sponsored by Climate Commons.

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