

# Topographies Seminar Series Presents:

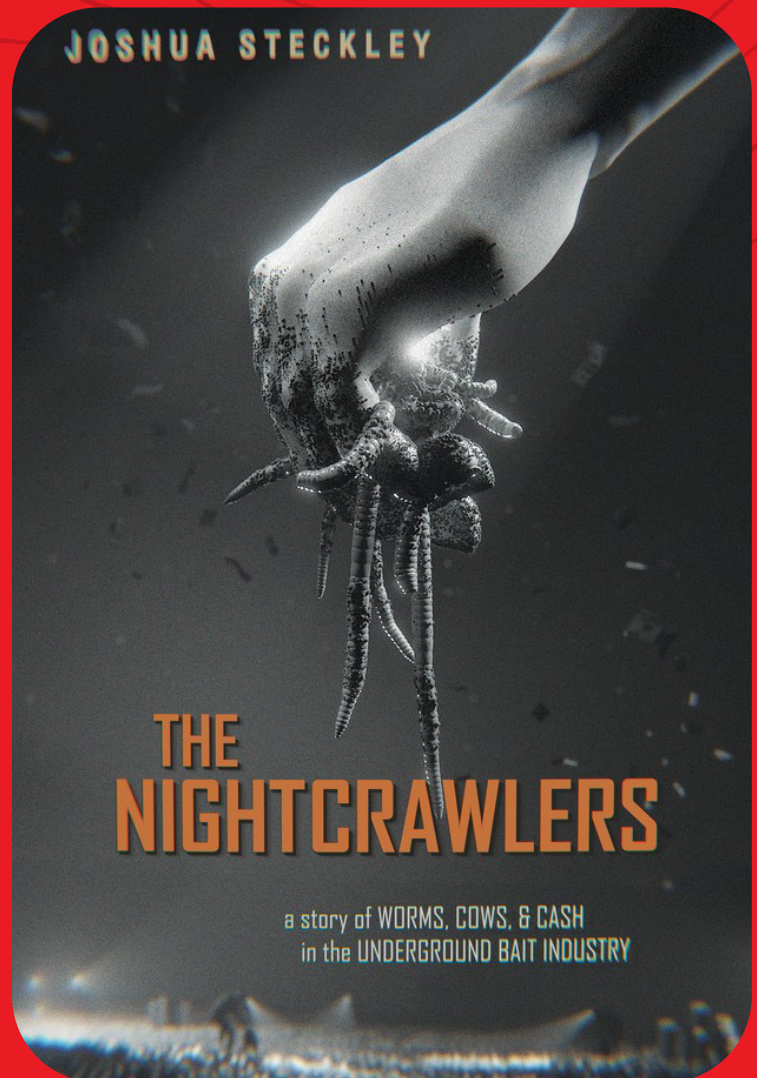
## "Nightcrawler Commodities: Rethinking Capital–Nature Relations through the Underground Bait Worm Market"

**Abstract:** How does a banal earthworm become a valuable commodity? The ‘Canadian nightcrawler’ is the most popular live bait used by recreational anglers throughout the world.

Each year, as many as 700 million worms are handpicked from Ontario farmland for the bait market, earning the region the undisputed title of ‘worm capital of the world.’ The

*Nightcrawlers* goes deep into the empirical underground to see how capital confronts a diverse cast of human and nonhuman characters: stubborn worms, wealthy dairy farmers, immigrant pickers labouring at night, and worm wholesalers who undercut each other through tax fraud and money laundering.

This eccentric tale of worms, cows, and cash reveals the inherent contradictions in capitalism's attempts to commodify the living world— including the soil organisms that are inches beneath our feet.



**Biography:** Joshua Steckley is a Banting Postdoctoral Fellow at Carleton University and the 2025 SSHRC Talent Award winner. His research sits at the intersection of agrarian political economy, biotechnology, and human–environment relations.

His book, *The Nightcrawlers: A Story of Worms, Cows, and Cash in the Underground Bait Industry* (University of California Press), examines the political ecology of the lucrative bait worm industry and how southwestern Ontario became the “worm capital of the world.” Prior to academia, he spent five years in Haiti collaborating with community environmental organizations and producing documentaries, community radio, and television campaigns promoting local food systems. He continues to publish on Haitian rural food systems. His current research examines the socio-ecological contradictions of commodifying bovine genetics in the North American dairy industry.

Wednesday, February 4th, 2026

2:30 – 4:00

In-Person, Loeb A220

All Welcome



**Carleton  
University**

Department of  
Geography and  
Environmental Studies

The Geography and Environmental Studies Departmental Seminar Series is committed to accessibility for persons with disabilities. Please send requests for accommodation to [Nika.Linseman@Carleton.ca](mailto:Nika.Linseman@Carleton.ca)