CHAPTER 6

Alligators in the Living Room: Terror and Horror in the Capitalocene

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Introduction

About one third into *Crawl* (2019), an enormous alligator grabs hold of Haley Keller—white, middle-class, Florida University varsity swimmer—and drags her through the crawlspace underneath her parents' old house. Outside, the Category 5 hurricane that has brought the alligators into such close proximity to the house is raging, and the crawlspace is filling with water, threatening to drown her father who is helplessly watching his daughter getting mauled. This horrible, visceral, and bloody sequence is one of *Crawl's* many altercations between primeval reptiles and human beings brought on by a storm energized by the climate crisis. As I will argue in this chapter, this subterranean space and the jaws of the alligator effectively strip Haley of all her white and human privileges and violently insert her into an ecology made weird and terrible by the climate crisis. By

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collapsing the notion that humanity can exist outside ecology and the pervasive idea that economic privilege can protect against climate change, *Crawl* constitutes an opportunity to discuss the potential of *Gothic* and *horror* to re-imagine the impact of the climate crisis on privileged communities in the Global North.

To draw attention to the pervading inequality between how affluent and poor communities across the world experience the climate crisis, the chapter eschews the popular and widely used concept *Anthropocene* in favor of *Capitalocene*. This denominator has been proposed by Jason W. Moore (2015) and Andreas Malm (2016) in order to highlight the fact that the climate crisis has not been produced by all humans equally, and that not all humans experience it in the same way. Moore and Malm argue that the engine of the climate crisis is not humanity or even industrialization as such, but capitalism supported by the network of epistemologies that legitimizes its constant pursuit of cheap resources and labor. This way of understanding what has produced the climate crisis is important for many reasons, and in this chapter I use it to enable an understanding of *Crawl* as a film about how a very particular demographics—the white middle class—experiences the climate crisis. The turn toward the Capitalocene as the framework for understanding the climate crisis also makes it possible to discuss how *Crawl* imagines the material history of the crisis, and the future of capitalism in a world transformed by climate.

This eco-socialist framework is useful when trying to understand the function and importance of different types of affect in *Crawl* and in the Gothic horror climate change narrative widely, but also when considering the dispersed global impact of the climate emergency. Since the posthumous publication of Ann Radcliffe's "On the Supernatural in Poetry" in 1826, Gothic studies has separated the affect of terror from that of horror. In *Gothic* (1996), Fred Botting theorizes these two terms in the following way: "If terror leads to an imaginative expansion of one's sense of self, horror describes the movement of contraction and recoil. Like the dilation of the pupil in moments of excitement and fear, terror marks the uplifting thrill where horror distinguishes a contraction at the imminence and unavoidability of the threat" (10). In other words, the thrill of terror accompanies the realization that something is disturbingly and inescapably wrong (the house is haunted), while the visceral experience of horror is triggered by direct and often violent confrontation with this wrongness (what haunts the house appears before the subject with a bloody chainsaw in hand).

The point here is that this description of two types of affect is useful not only for understanding how fear is generated in fiction, it can also be used for thinking about how the climate emergency is experienced in different parts of the world. It can be argued, I suggest, that the climate crisis is experienced mostly as a *haunting terror* among affluent populations in the Global North. In affluent communities, the climate crisis exists as the experience that something is precisely disturbingly and inescapably wrong, but in most cases, the violence that this crisis is producing has not affected these communities. By contrast, poor communities across the globe are increasingly encountering the climate crisis as an *imminent and unavoidable horror*.

(Representing) Capitalocene Violence in the Global North and South

As Rob Nixon importantly observes in *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (2011), the effect that the climate emergency is having on ecology, and on the human beings that are inextricably a part of ecology, is dispersed and uneven. In the Global South, global warming, fallout from nuclear testing, poorly regulated extraction, and refinement of natural resources are making entire areas hostile to (human) life. As Elizabeth DeLoughrey has observed, "catastrophic ruptures to social and ecological systems have already been experienced [in postcolonial worlds] through the violent processes of empire" so that "the apocalypse has already happened" in these spaces (7). In the more uniformly affluent Global North, the suffering is less widespread, but the lack of global environmental justice does transcend the North-South divide to erodes lives also in affluent nations. As Dorceta Taylor's *Toxic Communities: Environmental Racism, Industrial Pollution, and Residental Mobility* (2014) and Ingrid R. G. Waldron's *There's Something In The Water: Environmental Racism in Indigenous & Black Communities* (2018) reveale, the climate emergency is experienced very differently also within the Global North, where poor and often black and indigenous people are the most exposed to pollution and climate violence. In other words, the climate emergency is thus already an imminent horror to many of the world's poor communities. However, in affluent sections of the world, the detrimental effects of the climate crisis are only rarely experienced as horrific disaster. Instead, it looms much like a Gothic prophecy of coming disaster. In this way, the climate crisis can be said to be experienced as a haunting terror.

Because the lived experiences of the climate crisis are so different, the narratives and the scholarship that they produce are similarly different. In *Slow Violence*, Rob Nixon discusses in some detail the horrors that oil extraction in the Niger Delta has entailed for the local Ogoni people. The violence that this industry creates is both slow and fast. Oil extraction in the Delta causes a constant slow damage to the environment and thus to local agriculture and to the people who rely on this for their sustenance. When there are accidents such as an explosion in the oil fields, people who live in the area experience a horrifically accelerated violence, encountering

> an ocean of crude oil moving swiftly like a great river in flood, successfully swallowing up anything that comes its way. Cassava farms, yams, palms, streams, and animals for miles on end. There is no pipeborne water and yet the streams, the only source of drinking water are coated with oil. You cannot collect a bucket of rain water for the roofs, trees and grass are all covered with oil. […] Men and women forced by hunger have to dive deep in oil to uproot already rotten yams and cassava. (Sam Bakilo Bako, quoted by Nixon, 108)

This is an image of acute precarity produced by the global oil industry in the Global South. As lived experience, this is an encounter with sheer, imminent, and unavoidable horror.

To turn the attention away from the Global South to the Global North, Timothy Morton's *Dark Ecology: For a Logic of Future Coexistence* (2016) describes a very different relationship to, and experience of, the climate crisis and the fossil fuel economy. In an often cited passage of this book, Morton describes how middle-class citizens of the Global North turn the ignition key of their car, realizing that they are not, in that moment, simply individuals starting a vehicle, but active participants in the same fossil fuel economy as the one described in Nixon's book. When the driver turns the ignition key and drives off, they do so burdened by guilt that comes from the realization that they are contributing to the "Sixth Mass Extinction Event in the four-and-a-half billion-year history of life on this planet" (8). This realization may cause considerable discomfort and anxiety, but it remains, from a material perspective, a strikingly different experience from the one described by Bakilo Bako in Nixon's book. Even as Morton's drivers are haunted by the realization that they are "criminals" (9) causing irreversible damage to the ecosystem, they remain couched in the relative safety and comfort of the car, still mobile, structurally capable

of escape if it comes to that. In other words, Morton does not ask his readers to imagine the sheer horror of being forced to dive through an oil spill to retrieve rotting cassava to fend off hunger, or what it is like to be stuck in a crawlspace with alligators for that matter. His request is merely that his readers recognize themselves as troubled by the understanding that they are part of a species that is causing environmental havoc. In this and other writing rooted in the lived experience of affluent communities in the Global North, the climate emergency exists not as a sheer horror, but as a haunting; a Gothic prophesy about how the sins of the fathers might finally consume us, but not a story about what it is actually like to be eaten.

The representational discrepancy that separates Nixon from Morton is noticeable and important. It shows clearly how differently the climate emergency is experienced in various parts of the world and among various demographics, and it also suggests how these differences limit the way that the crisis can be represented and understood. Some people clearly lack the resources to protect themselves from climate violence, to relocate, or to repair homes, habitats, and bodies eroded by the climate crisis. Others are still mostly shielded from the detrimental effects of the crisis.

However, as the temperature on this planet continues to rise and resources become more scarce, this situation may change. Vandana Shiva argues in *Soil Not Oil: Environmental Justice in a Time of Climate Crisis* (2008) that in "the short term, we can continue to extend the profits and consumerism of the privileged by further dispossessing the poor. But tomorrow even the rich and the powerful will not be immune from Gaia's revenge and the revenge of the billions of dispossessed" (7–8). Dipesh Chakrabarty proposes in "The Climate of History: Four Theses" (2009) that "the logic of inequality that runs through the rule of capital" is likely to be further accentuated as the climate crisis worsen. Like Shiva, he acknowledges that "some people will no doubt gain temporarily at the expense of others" (221) but adds, again like Shiva, that "the whole crisis cannot be reduced to a story of capitalism. Unlike in the crises of capitalism, there are no lifeboats here for the rich and the privileged" (221). In other words, when the ice caps melt and the storms and flooding increase, capitalism itself will collapse. At that stage, there will be no lifeboats and no refuge for anyone. Those who are rich and privileged in this present moment will drown and starve with everyone else.

While this may seem to be a logical assumption, Chakrabarty's understanding of how the climate crisis will affect privileged communities has not been universally embraced. In a widely cited essay named "The

Geology of Mankind? A Critique of the Anthropocene Narrative," Andreas Malm and Alf Hornborg (2014) disagree with Chakrabarty's claim that "scientists" have "discovered" that human beings are the "geological agents" that have produced the current crisis (Chakrabarty 218). They also strongly object to the notion that those privileged by capitalism will eventually find themselves without refuge, and instead argue that for "the foreseeable future – indeed, as long as there are human societies on Earth – there will be lifeboats for the rich and privileged. If climate change represents a form of apocalypse, it is not universal, but uneven and combined" (66).[1] It is due to this unevenness that Malm and Hornborg find the concept of the Anthropocene problematic. Arguing that the concept falsely lays the blame of the climate crisis on all human beings, they argue that it "cannot serve as a basis for challenging the vested interest of business-as-usual" (67). In this way, the Anthropocene is "inimical to action" (67). In other words, the attempt to halt and undo the climate crisis must rest on a proper understanding, and a correct naming, of the engine that has produced it and is driving it. Thus, Malm and Hornborg, as well as Moore (2014), turn to the concept "Capitalocene".

However, the notion that the privileges engendered by capitalism will constitute protection from the slow violence of the climate crisis "as long as there are human societies on earth" may also dissuade from action. If what the world's privileged communities need to worry about is not the horror of being swept away by extensive flooding, but the prospect of fretting about the climate crisis from within their climate controlled cars as they relocate to a gated community further away from environmental havoc, what is their incentive for altering the business-as-usual? In this way, Malm and Hornborg's observation that the privileged may always have a way out evinces a certain lack of imagination that may in itself be inimical to action. It cannot be taken for granted that audiences in the Global North will be goaded into action by imaginaries that place them in situations where climate disasters actually rob them of life and limb, but the possibility should not be dismissed either.

The debate that Chakrabarty and Malm and Hornborg have triggered suggests that it is important to consider how the dispersed and uneven crisis that the climate emergency is provoking is most effectively narrated in the Global North. As Nixon points out in *Slow Violence*, to confront slow violence, it is necessary to:

> plot and give figurative shape to formless threats whose fatal repercussions are dispersed across space and time. The representational challenges are acute, requiring creative ways of drawing public attention to catastrophic acts that are low in instant spectacle but high in long-term effects. To intervene representationally entails devising iconic symbols that embody amorphous calamities as well as narrative forms that infuse those symbols with dramatic urgency. (10)

There is a diverse cultural apparatus at work that attempts to precisely intervene representationally, as Nixon puts it. A central component of this apparatus is what has been termed climate fiction or climate change fiction.[2] Indeed, if *Slow Violence* is partially a call to engage in the representation of the climate crisis as dispersed and uneven, yet of universal importance, climate fiction provides part of the response. Horror and Gothic inform this fiction in crucial ways via the specific types of affect at their disposal. Thus, as I will argue, they are unusually well suited to address the prevalence of slow violence and the disagreement on the futures that capitalism and its privileged communities may be moving toward.

Gothic and Horror in the Capitalocene: *Crawl*

To imagine how the climate crisis will impact global society, it may be necessary for authors to move beyond the realist novel. Indeed, as a number of critics, including Adam Trexler in *Anthropocene Fictions: The Novel in a Time of Climate Change* (2015) and Amitav Ghosh in the *Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable* (2016), have argued, the realist paradigm does not easily lend itself to telling stories about catastrophic climate change. Ghosh argues that the same Enlightenment epistemologies that structured European history also produced a certain type of fiction. The realist novel, he argues, was born "through the banishing of the improbable and the insertion of the everyday" (23). Now that the world is becoming weird and improbable, the realist register does not suffice. It has become necessary to make use of genres and modes more capable of representing the type of uncanny catastrophe that climate change is already creating in the Global South.

The genres and modes that are suitable to address the climate crisis, Ghosh argues, are unconventional. Once "known by names such as 'the Gothic,' 'the romance,' or 'the melodrama,'" they are now referred to as

"'fantasy,' 'horror,' and 'science fiction'" (24). Often lumped together as speculative fiction today, these genres can, and very frequently do, imagine future worlds where climate violence has become endemic also among privileged communities in the Global North. In particular, science fiction appears to be well adapted to imagine such futures. By definition, science fiction takes place during a different time and envisions how things may have changed as time has passed.

A problem with science fiction, however, is that it defers the transformation it describes. Like Shiva, Chakrabarty, Malm, and Hornborg, it speculates about a future that is not yet here. Gothic horror is different in this respect. If the many mash-ups that mix genres and modes are disregarded for the moment, it is fair to say that whereas science fiction is primarily interested in the relationship between the present and the future, Gothic and horror explore the relationship between the past and the present. Because of this, and as the analysis of *Crawl* will illustrate, Gothic and horror are able to imagine ways in which affluent populations in the Global North encounter climate violence not in a deferred future, but in the present. This is an aspect that the screenwriters of *Crawl*, Michael and Shawn Rasmussen, have stressed in interviews: "This [*Crawl*] could have been a sci-fi movie, but we wanted it to have real characters battling a real adversary." Thus, they argue, the film portrays "a real scenario that could happen tomorrow" (Swinson 2019).

Crawl was directed by Alexandre Aja and premiered in 2019 to mostly positive reviews. Aja is no stranger to (remaking) horror films.[3] His breakthrough was the bloody *Haut Tension* (2003), often used as an example of the violent New French Extremity movement. Aja's first English-language film was the dark cannibal horror *The Hills Have Eyes* (2006). This remake follows Wes Craven's original movie but relocates the action of the movie from Nevada to New Mexico and the area where the first nuclear bomb was exploded. In geological scholarship, this event has been perceived as a "golden spike": verifiable geological evidence that the planet has entered what these researchers term the Anthropocene.[4] The horrors that take place in Aja's *The Hills Have Eyes* are thus directly related to the enormous ecological damage caused by atomic weapons. Consequently, the cannibals of the movie are not the inbred social rejects that haunt the Nevada desert in the original, but humans mutated by radiation released by nuclear weapons testing.

Crawl is set in Florida rather than in the New Mexico desert, but this is also an area that has seen its share of ecological disasters. As observed by

Miles Surrey (2019), the film relies on the combination of a series of conditions and tropes that are strongly tied to this state. As partly a tropical territory surrounded by sea, it is especially vulnerable to what has been termed hurricanes supercharged by climate change.[5] Because of its warm climate, it is also home to several species of dangerous wildlife, including poisonous snakes, spiders, and, as in the film, alligators, allowing for an especially vivid and visceral confrontation between privileged humanity and an ecology out of joint. Florida is furthermore a socially and politically liminal state. As one of the most important swing states, it helped Obama to victory in 2008 and 2012, but brought Trump to office in 2016. Like many southern states, it houses inordinately wealthy and mostly white communities, but is also inhabited by significantly more impoverished, and mostly Hispanic or Black groups, including an estimated 675,000 undocumented immigrants. Of its 21 million inhabitants, almost 3 million live in poverty.[6]

Crawl is not, however and importantly, primarily a film about those who are structurally unable to escape the violence of the climate crisis. In the opening shot we see Haley Keller getting ready for the final lap in a swim relay. Her face is tense and focused, and her swim cap reads "Gators," the name that the University of Florida uses for many of their athletic teams. As we learn from flashbacks that accompany Haley's failed attempt to win the relay, her father has always encouraged her swimming, instilling in her the notion that she is an "apex predator." Right after the race, Haley gets a phone call from her sister who, toddler on her hip, asks her if she has heard from their father Dave. A category 5 hurricane is approaching Florida, and Dave lives in the area that is being evacuated. The sisters do not seem hostile toward each other, but there is palpable tension between them: a tension that, the audience eventually understands, is rooted in their parent's divorce. Against her sister's advice, Haley gets into the car to check on her father.

From this introduction, we understand that Haley is quite firmly couched in middle-class life. She attends a highly ranked university, possibly on a sports scholarship; she drives a reasonably new and competent car; her father, the audience gleans from a vehicle that appears in the film, runs his own construction company; and their mother is in Paris with the "prince charming" that has taken their father's place after the divorce. Haley may not be rich, but she does belong to the stratum of Florida residents that has the means of transportation, health, job, and property insurance, as well as the know-how to skirt even a level 5 hurricane. In this

way, Haley and her father do belong to the privileged that Malm and Hornborg supply with lifeboats. Thus, this is not a story about the poor who cannot escape either slow or fast climate violence. It is, when focusing on Haley and her father, very much a depiction of how the privileged suffer the violence of capitalogenic climate change.[7]

When Haley gets out on the freeway, the rain and the wind are already making streets difficult to navigate. Haley drives past a sign advertising an alligator farm, foreshadowing the horror she is soon to encounter. Also, the camera lingers for a few seconds on a shark figurine on Haley's dashboard (Fig. 6.1).

This clearly references an infamous scene from the film *Sharknado* where the male protagonist is swallowed by a shark thrown from an absurdly supercharged tornado. Indeed, the film frequently references a number of classic animal horror movies and can be considered as part of the distinct subgenre Alligator or Crocodile Horror and that includes notable films such as *Alligator* (1980), *Lake Placid* (1999), *Black Water* (2007), and *Rogue* (2007). In recent years, crocodiles and alligators have been featured also in Brad Payton's game-based film *Rampage* (2018) and Alex Garland's New Weird *Annihilation* (2018), which is based on the first installment of Jeff VanderMeer's Southern Reach trilogy. Many of these films also connect relentless violence performed by reptilian predators on human beings to the climate crisis and to capitalist agendas.

When Haley reaches her father's apartment (a run-down flat that signals his inability to move on after the divorce rather than his financial status), she finds only the abandoned family dog around. She guesses that her

Fig. 6.1 Dashboard

father may have gone to board up the old for-sale family house before the coming storm. Accompanied by the dog, she drives further into the storm, through the rain and the rising water. Her tenacity is rewarded when she finds her father's pickup truck parked outside the family home.

Haley's arrival and entry into the family house initiates the first and notably Gothic segment of the movie. In the wind, rain, and darkness of the storm, the old family home is strongly reminiscent of a long tradition of haunted houses encountered in American Gothic, from the collapsing manor in Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher" (1839) to the Harrisville farmhouse of *The Conjuring* (2013) (Fig. 6.2).

When Haley enters the eerily quiet house, the sense that it is haunted only increases. She explores empty hallways, gray walls, and abandoned living rooms without encountering her father. Reluctantly, prompted by the family dog, she realizes that she must explore the house's underground section: an unlit, already wet, low-ceilinged crawlspace that can be entered through two doors that open like a maw into the underworld.

This crawlspace is doubly symbolic and doubly haunted in the film. According to Gaston Bachelard's model of the oneiric house, the cellar is where the subconscious hides, and to venture into this space is to encounter the agonizing memories and mental detritus that have been suppressed into this part of the mind.[8] It is not surprising that this is where Haley encounters her father and where she must begin to confront a family history warped by her parent's divorce. At the same time, the cellar is also the

Fig. 6.2 The family home

part of the house that is literally in touch with the earth and thus with nature. Rats scurry across a floor that is half concrete and half soil and leaves. Because the ceiling is very low, Haley cannot stand upright and must walk on all fours like an animal to navigate the cramped space. In this way, what haunts this liminal section is also the realization that the human-nature divide is illusory. The crawlspace as territory forces Haley not only to touch the earth of which she is, despite all her privileges, a part; she must also become like an animal (Fig. 6.3).

Crawling through the cellar in this way, Haley finds her father, unconscious and seriously injured in a section barred by pipes. She begins her rescue effort by dragging him toward the stairs and is only a couple of meters away from them when the first alligator of the movie suddenly rushes at her, in the process demolishing the stairs and the easy escape to safety. The athletic Haley manages to retreat with her wounded father.

The alligators are not merely predatory reptiles in the film, but a way for the narrative to accelerate and amplify the violence of the storm. As Nixon has proposed, climate violence is often "slow" in the sense that it is "a violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all" (2). Slow violence is thus difficult to represent, which is one reason why the realist novel struggles to depict it. Gothic and horror are able to accelerate this violence. The alligator that the storm brings in its wake functions as a metonymy for climate violence, making it visible and visceral to the audience. Just like the storm,

Fig. 6.3 The crawlspace

the alligators are relentless and voracious and appear to have been supercharged. When Haley ventures out to retrieve her dropped phone and call for help, one of them clamps down on her calf and drags her away.

It is at this moment that the film shifts its affective focus away from Gothic terror to straightforward horror. Haley is no longer haunted by the climate crisis. She is not in her car fretting about the impact that turning the key might have on the environment or even worrying about what creatures might be hiding underneath the house. She is clamped in the jaws of a prehistoric predator let loose by the storm and energized by the climate crisis. The threat that climate violence constitutes has become imminent and unavoidable. Haley is fortunate enough to find a screwdriver on the muddy ground and survives by sticking it into the eye of the alligator. She flees into another section of the crawlspace that the alligators cannot reach, but she has become separated from her father and has lost the phone with which she hoped to engineer their rescue. Then, through a small opening in the crawlspace wall, she can spot three people who are in the process of looting the gas station across the street. These three people are white and clearly marked as working class by their dilapidated boat, their dialects, their haircuts, dress, and, indeed, by their need to loot the gas station of its ATM machine, cheap sunglasses, and lukewarm hot dogs. Haley gestures desperately to get their attention only to see them attacked, torn to pieces, and consumed by another pack of alligators in the film's most deadly and violent section.

This sequence serves not only to increase tension and release another jolt of abject horror, it also cements the notion that the storm, and therefore the violence that the alligators perform, is not natural but rather an event brought on by fossil fuel capitalism. The name of the gas station, "Bannon's," is pregnant with meaning in this respect (Fig. 6.4).

As there is no gas station franchise in the United States called "Bannon's," it is difficult not to read the name as a direct reference to former White House strategist Steve Bannon. As the most famous Bannon alive, chief advisor of Donald Trump's 2016 election effort, co-founder of the populist and Trump-supportive *Breitbart News*, and board member of Cambridge Analytica, Bannon was instrumental in getting Trump elected and also in the US departure from the Paris Climate Agreement.[9] By placing the most violent sequence of the plot at the gas station, the film clearly identifies fossil fuel capitalism as an important reason why the alligator-infested storm is upon the community. In this way, the film furtively agrees with Malm and other scholars' understanding of the climate crisis as

Fig. 6.4 Bannon's gas station

produced by (fossil fuel) capitalism rather than by humanity as such. By naming the gas station Bannon's, the film links climate violence to the Trump administration's reinvestment in fossil fuel energy such as coal and oil, and it's destructive dismantling of national and global initiatives to slow global warming. There is an irony at work here too, since white working-class and middle-class voters in swing-state Florida were instrumental in bringing Trump to power. As representatives of these groups, rather than as individuals, Haley, her father, and the three white looters are reaping what they sowed.

In the crawlspace, the water keeps rising and Haley and her father must get out to survive. With the help of a shovel and a gun taken from a dead body found in another portion of the crawlspace, they kill the two alligators that keep them trapped. Exiting the crawl space and entering the street outside, they spot the boat on which the looters arrived. This is their best hope of escaping the storm and the alligators: a Malmian lifeboat of sorts. Haley jumps into the water and somehow manages to outswim the reptiles that pursue her. She returns to her father and they get ready to leave the street when sirens cut through the wind and the rain. The levies that keep the ocean from flooding the area during storms have broken. An enormous wave crashes over the gas station; grips debris, alligators, and the boat with Haley and her father in it; and throws everything into the family house via a first story window (Fig. 6.5).

In the first segment of the movie, nature and the violence of the climate crisis only had access to the liminal crawlspace underneath the actual living quarters of the house, but here all of the house has become a part of

Fig. 6.5 Nature has entered the living room

earth's disturbed ecology. The human-nature divide established by enlightenment thinking and debunked by recent ecocriticism thus collapses. The water and the alligators now have access to the living room and to all other sections of what used to be an exclusive human space. The presence of the enormous reptiles in the family kitchen, in the living room, on the stairs, and in the bathroom is supremely uncanny. These familiar domestic spaces have become the hunting grounds of reptiles that date back to the Miocene period. Deprived of the lifeboat that could have brought them back to safety, Haley and her father must again confront the violence of the climate crisis, a crisis that has now let itself into their old home. They climb higher and higher in the house as the water and the alligators it contains keep rising. Haley's father loses half an arm to an alligator and Haley is mauled by another that crashes through the window of her old second-story bedroom. It is a miracle that they reach the roof of the building. It is on the roof that the film ends. Suddenly, and against all odds, a helicopter appears and Haley turns smiling to her father, with a road flare in hand. But we never see the couple airlifted to safety.

Conclusion

Crawl is not a film that takes itself too seriously. Aja clearly wants his audience to both shudder and laugh, and he bends logic and nature to suit his purposes. The scenario that plays out is not, despite the assurances of the screenwriters, very likely since alligators, unlike crocodiles, rarely attack humans. Even so, and partly because of its speculative nature, the film is

able to critically explore both the notion that humanity somehow exists outside of ecology, and the assumption that some categories of humanity need not fear the climate crisis as there will always be lifeboats available for those who are white, English-speaking, and reasonably well-off. The storm, the rising water, and the voracious and relentless alligators that invade first the flooded streets and backyards, then the crawlspaces underneath houses, and finally gas stations and actual homes, make the notion that any segment of humanity can exist outside or apart from ecology impossible to uphold.

When the borders that keep nature and the house apart collapse, the traditional oneiric model also collapses. In the first stage of the film, the crawlspace is where Haley must confront the suppressed notion that the human is also an animal and as such always and forever a part of ecology. In the film's finale, what has been suppressed to the liminal space that separates the house from the earth rises into the entire structure, invading all the mundane, orderly human spaces it contains, even the small attic. The ecology that enters the house has furthermore been made destructive by a fossil fuel capitalism of which Haley and her father is a part. To escape its immediate detrimental consequences, Haley and her father must climb higher and higher until they find themselves sitting on the very roof of the structure; utterly exposed to the elements. Of course, the notion that houses isolate humans from ecology was always a fantasy. Ecology is always and forever folded into the bodies of humans, in the form of the oxygen we breathe, the food and water we consume, and the trillion of microbes that inhabit our skin and our guts and that turn humans into discrete ecosystems in their own right. Nominally human spaces are thus always conditional, their maintenance contingent on humanity not collapsing the balance of the ecosystem. Because this balance has been upset by a capitalism rooted, as argued by Moore, in early colonialism and then energized by widespread use of fossil fuel energy, houses struggle to keep up the pretence of shielding humans from ecology. Alligators will swim through the living room.

The arrival of the helicopter at the very end of the film appears to sabotage this particular reading. Haley and her father are deprived of their first lifeboat, but then provided with a second when the helicopter appears to spot them on the roof of the house, lowering a cradle that may be their salvation. Thus, even as the film narrates the horror of the Capitalocene, it appears to lend its sympathies to the Anthropos. If the couple fly to safety, the film reforms into another story that pits humanity *against* nature and

allows the human to escape the clutches of ecology. However, because we never see the couple actually climbing into the cradle, the ending remains ambiguous. Aja has interestingly stated that in a never-filmed ending, an alligator jumps out of the water to grab the father and daughter as they are pulled from the roof by the helicopter.[10] This is the moment that lurks after the final scene of the movie: not a triumphant return to fossil fuel civilization, but a final merger with an ecology made incredibly violent by the climate crisis.

With this dark ending in place, the film is not about humanity *against* nature, but about humanity *in* a damaged and vengeful natural world. From this perspective, the film tells a story about how capitalist modernity is powerless to wrest humanity out of the grip of the climate crisis. Even the white and privileged citizens of the Global North will eventually be deprived of lifeboats. This, obviously, does not change the drastically uneven reality that Nixon outlines in *Slow Violence*, nor does it resolve the question on which Chakrabarty and Malm and Hornborg disagree. Most of those privileged in the Global North easily escape drowning and attacks from alligators, and *Crawl* is a Hollywood horror film rather than a proper historical and sociological inquiry into the climate crisis. Even so, the film does provide imaginative and representational tools that make it possible to consider both presents and futures where the privileged experience global warming not simply as an anxiety arising from the realization that they contribute to global warming by turning their car keys.

The fact that this violence is accelerated and made absurdly imminent and visceral through the use of Gothic and horror does not detract from its usefulness as a narrative about the climate crisis in the Global North. It is precisely the use of the speculative register, and of Gothic and horror in particular, that enables the movie to locate unthinkable violence to the present moment rather than to a haunting future that is forever on its way. In *Crawl*, the collapse of ecology and of (local) capitalist modernity is not a haunting prophecy; it is a violent confrontation taking place in the present moment. *Crawl* even identifies some of the reasons why this violence occurs via its inclusion of alligator farms and the "Bannon's" gas station looted by the white working class. In this way, Gothic and horror are central affective modes that help conjure an understanding of the Capitalocene as ultimately affecting all social strata and of the human as located, always and forever, in nature. Such understanding may or may not be a platform that enables climate crisis action, but it is similarly unlikely to prevent it.

Notes

1. Interestingly, Malm and Hornberg here indirectly subscribe to the same model that Timothy Morton introduces in *Dark Ecology*: Human environmental scientist and scholars (in the fossil fuel reliant Global North) are like detectives that discover that they are also the culprits of the crime they are investigating, but they are not conceived of as also the potential victims of the crime they have committed and investigated. For a similar discussion of the tension that exists between Chakrabarty and Malm and Hornborg, see Höglund (2020).
2. For a useful discussion of these two concepts, see Andersen (2019).
3. Aja has also remade Korean horror film *Into the Mirror* (2003) as *Mirrors* (2008) and the American *Piranha* (1978) as *Piranha 3D* (2010).
4. In the widely cited article, "When did the Anthropocene begin? A mid-twentieth century boundary level is stratigraphically optimal" (2015), Zalasiewicz et al. influentially suggest that the Anthropocene "be defined to begin historically at the moment of detonation of the Trinity A-bomb at Alamogordo, New Mexico" (200). While Jason W. Moore locates the beginning of the Capitalocene to the early colonial era, rather than to the detonation of the first atomic bomb, this does not take away from the understanding of Aja's *The Hills Have Eyes* as a film that uses horror to talk about the climate crisis.
5. See, for instance, Trenberth et al. (2018).
6. See American Immigration Council (2020) and Unites States Census Bureau (Undated).
7. In an interview done after the script to *Crawl* had found a producer in Sam Raimi, screenwriters Michael and Shawn Rasmussen describe protagonist Haley as "a grad student" and other "people" as "working class." See Swinson (2019).
8. See Bachelard (1964).
9. See Mehling and Vihma for a discussion of Bannon's influence before the election and on the decision to leave the Paris Climate Agreement.
10. See Bibbiani (2019) for a discussion of this scripted but never-filmed ending.

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