INTRODUCTION

SPECULATIVE AFFECTS

Miami Vice was a network television sensation that captivated US audiences throughout the 1980s. I was hardly immune to the trend, and I vividly remember watching the program with my father, hoping that someday I would wear a sharp pastel suit and jet about in a speedboat or Ferrari, fighting crime just like Detectives Crockett and Tubbs (played by Don Johnson and Philip Michael Thomas). I was too young to understand the Cold War geopolitics underlying that television show and certainly had no idea what the Mariel boatlift was, but it was not difficult to glean from this sleek, alluring, but ominous televised introduction to Latin Americans and Latinos in Miami that the world south of the United States was dangerous and rife with criminal activity. On *Miami Vice*, Latin Americans—particularly Cubans and Colombians—were wrapped up in homicides and drug trafficking, among other offenses, and were in general the "bad guys." Certainly there were exceptions to the rule, like the brooding Lieutenant Castillo, played by Edward James Olmos, whose subdued demeanor never cast any doubt as to his legal and moral authority. Yet, broadly, *Miami Vice* drew a facile parallel between Hispanic culture in southern Florida and lawlessness, a generalized threat that emanated from beyond the United States' southern border.[1]

Of course, within the United States the threat of Latin America, and otherness more broadly, had existed long before *Miami Vice*'s onscreen depictions.[2] Indeed, the obstacle of the "other" had vexed colonial settlers prior to US nationhood and well before US imperial expansion in the hemisphere.[3] Yet, soon after the signing of the US Declaration of Independence, the menace of Latin Americanness—Black Latin Americanness—reared its head in the form of the Haitian Revolution (1791–1804), the specter of which threatened repercussions in the slave-holding southern states of the new union and for which the liberationist movement was kept at arm's length by Thomas Jefferson at the dawn of the nineteenth century.[4] That apprehension about dealing with hemispheric others continued in two crucial moments in the nineteenth-century United States: the war with Mexico (1846–1848) and the war against Spain (1898). The former event was a violent land-grab propelled by rampant racism toward Mexicans, and it expanded slavery and would contribute to the Civil War (1861–1865). The latter was also a blatant imperial maneuver, one that furthered US political and economic hegemony in the hemisphere.[5] US gunboat diplomacy and interventions in the Dominican Republic and Nicaragua, among other places, throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries purported to promote just government and "civilizing" measures but betrayed a sense of anxiety toward otherness that President Franklin D. Roosevelt's Good Neighbor Policy (1933) could not assuage.[6] That trepidation with regard to the idea of life beyond the southern border would become all the more menacing in the aftermath of the Cuban Revolution.[7] The fear of communist insurrection played a crucial role in shaping hemispheric politics after 1959; that fear led to brutal political repression throughout the Americas in the latter half of the twentieth century, particularly until the dismantling of the Berlin Wall in 1989 signaled the imminent collapse of Soviet control behind the Iron Curtain.[8] The specters of Che Guevara and Fidel Castro haunted US politics and were quickly associated with any left-leaning political views both at home and abroad, which was an especially thorny issue given the historical south-to-north migration across the Rio Grande. Indeed, in the late twentieth-century US imaginary, the latent danger embedded in the Hispanic immigrant presented the dual risk of contamination

by volatile politics and trafficking in illegal substances, which needed to be contained at the southern border to protect US growth in the incipient era of neoliberalism that was rapidly changing worldwide finance.[9]

As a consequence of neoliberal expansion and an ever more globalized economy consolidated in the hemispheric north, immigrants from Latin America and the world more broadly have continued to attempt to reach the United States in search of the so-called "American Dream" of economic opportunity while facing increasingly daunting odds.[10] Expansions in immigration regulation and border security, especially in light of the events of September 11, 2001, may not have stemmed migratory flows entirely but certainly have further increased a generalized fear of otherness across the United States.[11] Add to this socially volatile migratory issue high levels of drug consumption in the United States, as well as Latin America's geographic position in the international drug trade, and one has a particularly dangerous recipe for envisioning Latin Americans and Latin American immigrants in the US imaginary. As is the case with *Miami Vice*, drug-laced terror continues to shape many popular images of Latin America and its immigrants, from those in Brian De Palma's film *Scarface* (1983) to television's *Breaking Bad* (2008–2013) and beyond.

The stakes for such apprehensive, negative imagining of Latin Americanness—both in the region and through its immigrant populations—are perhaps even more elevated in the early twenty-first century, with politics having taken a hard right turn across the globe, especially in the United States. Consider, for instance, the political rhetoric that dominated the campaign trail in the lead-up to the 2016 US presidential election. On June 16, 2015, Donald Trump, in announcing his candidacy, stated with characteristic inarticulateness, "When Mexico sends its people, they're not sending their best. They're not sending you. They're not sending you. They're sending people that have lots of problems, and they're bringing those problems with us. They're bringing drugs. They're bringing crime. They're rapists. And some, I assume, are good people. But I speak to border guards and they tell us what we're getting. And it only makes common sense. . . . They're sending us not the right people. It's coming from more than Mexico. It's coming from all over South and Latin America, and it's

coming probably—probably—from the Middle East." It may not come as a surprise that a far-right presidential candidate would make such egregious affirmations, painting all Mexicans as vile criminals and tacitly associating Latin Americans with Middle Eastern terrorism. Indeed, given the United States' historical interventions into and relations with Mexico and Latin America noted above, perhaps such assertions were to be expected. As Greg Grandin notes in *The End of the Myth* (2019), Trumpism stands as evidence of the nativism that has historically propelled the rhetoric on defending the border from foreign invaders (166). Moreover, Erika Lee observes in *America for Americans* (2019) that "xenophobia has been a constant and defining feature of American life. . . . It thrives best in certain contexts, such as periods of rapid economic and demographic change, but it has also been actively promoted by special interests in the pursuit of political power," an affirmation that in part would explain Trump's boorish claims (7). Nevertheless, although this defensive border outlook is central to US nationalist thinking, what was disheartening for many was that Trump's vitriol would actually resonate with a large enough swath of the US citizenry to help usher him into the presidency. How could such demonstrably false race-baiting hit home with so many US citizens? Do people actually believe these racist claims to be true? How could they arrive at such biased conclusions?

Yet perhaps such questions may be taken as naïve given Latin America's historically conditioned character in the US imaginary as a land of dictators, magical realities, sensual *señoritas*, drug lords, exotic dances, and untamed violence. Alterity is the bedrock of imagining Latin America for a depressingly large segment of the United States, so much so that the mere mention of a Latin American nation may conjure ideas of violence and social chaos. Without negating the actual presence of contemporary and historically adverse social factors in the Latin American landscape—they exist in all corners of the globe, especially in the United States, as was evident in the racial reckoning of the 2020 protests sparked by the police killing of George Floyd and in Trump supporters' attack on the Capitol on January 6, 2021—it is worth noting that such polarizing elements of Latin America's communal fabric are those that are commonly represented in works of popular culture related to the region and selected for consumption by

global audiences. For proof of this affirmation we need look no further than those books, films, and television programs that we take up on a daily basis in both popular and academic circles.

Take, for instance, the popularity of Netflix's series *Narcos* and the subsequent *Narcos: Mexico* (2015–2021), which I analyze in chapter 3, or Mel Gibson's film *Apocalypto* (2006), or Mariana Enriquez's short story collection *Las cosas que perdimos en el fuego* (2016), almost immediately released in English as *Things We Lost in the Fire* (2017). Among these seemingly disparate works some striking and unsettling commonalities begin to materialize. The initial seasons of *Narcos* dramatize the rise of Pablo Escobar and the international drug trade while reveling in the sex, violence, and political corruption of 1980s Colombia and Latin America (leaving largely absent any examination of US drug consumption or other social issues, save for the Cold War search for militant communists). *Apocalypto*'s historically inaccurate tale presents a Mayan hero saving his wife from human sacrifice prescribed by doomsaying shamans and cold-blooded warriors, only to witness impending conquest in the arrival of Spanish galleons. Enriquez's stories blend gothic horror with contemporary Argentine social references, often presenting images of urban decay and murdered children. Beyond their individual successes, we could say that these different works in themselves have little in common with regard to the stories they tell. Yet in their popularity in the global aesthetic marketplace, and specifically in their warm reception among US audiences, they do coincide in combining two common elements: a broad concept of Latin America and the representation of violence. This commonality among *Narcos*, *Apocalypto*, and *Things We Lost in the Fire* should not be taken as a wholesale rebuke of their value; these works have much that is worthy of analysis, especially with regard to the ways that differing forms of geopolitics and violence shape their respective tales in the historical contexts they represent. Moreover, the ways in which these works dialogue with broader genres of adventure and gothic narrative make them attractive, geographically exotic fictions framed within recognizable and easily consumable formats. However, taken more abstractly, these works also offer us a glimpse into what types of narratives about Latin America gain traction within a global market, principally in the United States' culture industry, which is a central concern of this volume.

Other Americans: The Art of Latin America in the US Imaginary offers a meditation on the means by which Latin America is currently represented in art forms—primarily literature, film, and streaming television series—whether produced in the region itself or in the United States. In my analyses of Roberto Bolaño's novel *2666* (2004); the films *La teta asustada* (2009), by Claudia Llosa, and *Roma* (2018), by Alfonso Cuarón; Netflix's streaming series *Narcos* and *Narcos: Mexico*, as well as *El marginal* (2016–2022); the films *No Country for Old Men* (2007), by Joel and Ethan Coen, and *Casa de mi padre* (2012), by Matt Piedmont; and the writings of Daniel Alarcón, I contend that it is precisely these works' portrayal of the exoticness of Latin America that proves attractive to audiences in the US cultural marketplace. What I seek to demonstrate is the form in which US audiences, through their consumption of a particular set of aesthetic productions on Latin America, uphold a negatively affected mode of perceiving the region and indeed may become unable to conceive of Latin American subjects as capable of anything other than histrionic, nonintellectual activity. For US audiences, the featured Latin American characters may become attractive principally for their very otherness and/or violent proclivities.[12] This becomes all the more complicated when we recognize that the highly successful Latin American cultural producers analyzed in this volume also compose Latin American stories that offer visions of alterity and perhaps indulge in autoexotic tendencies.[13] However, beyond a statically Orientalizing perception of these issues, I argue that even in the othering construction of affectivity, a potential for better affective comprehension of Latin America becomes possible. Negative affects, framed in melodrama, may paradoxically offer audiences better understandings of Latin America by making them feel their way through the ideological conflicts that they stage.

To examine the polarizing representation of Latin American otherness in the works assessed in this volume, my analyses engage contemporary interpretations of melodrama as an aesthetic mode. As I argued in *Pragmatic Passions* (2014), melodrama, in its performative affectivity, is commonly used as a structuring device for Latin American narratives that provide attempts at social analysis. I assert that this is an exceptionally persuasive approach to presenting social discourse precisely because it emotively draws upon popular

understandings of historical processes across Latin America; those same historical trends fomented stark social and economic divisions and widely diverging perspectives on the most adequate paths to national social progress. Melodramatic narratives make sense of these abstract sociohistorical processes, affectively pitting good against evil and evidencing suffering in given sectors of national populations, all of which is problematized by the cultural complexity that characterizes the region.[14]

In *Other Americans*, while examining the melodramatic structures of the works under analysis, I am equally concerned with the way in which melodrama within the aesthetic object produces processes of affective communication that inescapably fuel hemispheric understandings of Latin American social realities. Though clearly proposed as works of fiction, the melodramas examined in this study engage social realities of the region, and thus simulations of the "real" offer unacquainted audiences visions of Latin American societies that confound fiction and anthropology, as well as problematize concepts of aesthetics and reportage. Given that these narratives focus on deeply conflictive Latin American social issues, such melodramatic comprehension of the region via its aesthetic production may foment an us/them or north/south binary in the reception of Latin America's globalized art, thus generating a skewed presentation of Latin American alterity. Indeed, when I refer to the "art of Latin America" in the subtitle of this volume, I do so by playing upon the double meaning encoded in the phrase: both art that is produced in and about Latin America and art as an aesthetic process of imagining or articulating Latin America (e.g., the art of living, the art of understanding, etc.). As such, I am underlining a concern for the means by which Latin America is rendered to publics with potentially limited actual knowledge of the region.

With regard to the hemispheric north/south antagonisms that *Other Americans* critiques, melodramatic binaries problematize the contemplation of Latin America as an object of both affection and contempt from a US gaze. In this sense, I follow John Patrick Leary's study of US/Latin American relations in *A Cultural History of Underdevelopment* (2016), in which Latin America, via its aesthetic production, is regarded as a genial but prohibitive other whose internal

divisions and heterogeneity mirror similar unresolved tensions in the United States, thereby threatening its collective self-perception as a truly developed, egalitarian society (2–4). Accordingly, I read the representation of and fascination with Latin American exoticism and violence as a means of US audiences' legitimation of their own culture. The consumption of affectively othering narratives on Latin America furthers a self-serving understanding of cultures beyond the United States' southern border as being more conflictive than everyday life in the United States, where social strife—both represented and actual—abounds. Put simply, the negatively affected allure of Latin American alterity feeds a narcissistic drive in US audiences, constituting, perhaps counterintuitively, a way to reflect upon themselves by looking at the eccentricity of others.

Throughout this study I argue that the melodramatic polarities inscribed in these works are perceptible only because of their capacity to affect their audiences. Accordingly, and as I develop below, affect theory is central to my analysis, particularly in the examination of negative affects such as shame, disgust, fear, distress, and anxiety. I understand affects to be essential, inherent components of melodrama, as well as the exceptional forces, embedded in narrative, that emanate from melodramatic structure and that may influence publics into modes of understanding the social content of an aesthetic object.[15] In this sense, I am interested in exploring the Spinozan/Deleuzian paradigm of affect theory in which affects are understood as following rhizomatic flows, affecting bodies as they come into contact.[16] Yet I also dialogue with affect theorists like Silvan Tomkins and Eve Sedgwick, whose analyses examine affectivity in its link to emotion and the production of feelings.[17] In bridging these two approaches, the writings of Sara Ahmed, Lauren Berlant, and Ann Cvetkovich prove useful, as do works of Latin Americanist affect studies by the likes of Jon Beasley-Murray, Ana Peluffo, and Dierdra Reber, especially in the ways in which these critics conceptualize the political potentialities of affect and emotion.[18] Across my analyses I illustrate the ways in which affects drive melodramatic narrative and, more specifically, the means by which a series of negative affects reaffirms boundaries separating north and south in an interconnected world in which social order is increasingly opaque.

Tumultuous social situations have commonly proven to be fodder for melodramatic narrative, and as Peter Brooks argued in *The Melodramatic Imagination*, first published in 1976, melodramatic aesthetics were born of unrest in the French Revolution, when the link between divinity and state governance was definitively ruptured, ushering in a postsacred, modern world constructed atop a void of social authority.[19] In this abyss, melodrama appears as a mode, as opposed to a set structure or genre, offering a "theatrical substratum" to "a certain fictional system for making sense of experience, as a semantic field of force" (Brooks xiii, xvii).[20] In classical stage melodrama, that system is populated by mustachioed villains bent on revenge and angelic victims who suffer the injustices of a world that is out to get them, framed in Manichaean logic that indulges in coincidence, mistaken identities, and nick-of-time rescues to further its tales, all of which is conveyed in an emotionally heightened register. Such highly legible features have been interpreted as contributing to melodramatic narrative's popularity among mass audiences, as it plays upon the general public's conceptions of right and wrong, which can be adapted to fit a wide gamut of social circumstances.[21]

Latin American cultural criticism on melodrama has largely focused on this popular aspect of the mode, recognizing in its mass appeal the potentiality for subaltern political recognition.[22] Such criticism views melodrama as a space of resistance against the homogenizing forces of neoliberal modernity in which popular sectors may find acknowledgment of their own social condition, thus fostering a sense of community. That communitarian desire expressed through melodrama also has been central to Latin American interpretations of the mode from its earliest incarnations onward, injecting the aesthetic structure with quasi-religious moral authority and visions of sacrifice for the betterment of the community as a whole.[23] Yet the heterogeneity inherent to Latin American societies makes the sought-after communal unity of melodrama more complicated than in its classic European counterparts.[24] Latin American melodrama problematizes the mode's desired harmony, as the manifold nature of postcolonial Latin American societies throws concepts of a singular project of modernity—a pillar of melodramatic structure in Brooks's widely acknowledged conception of the mode—into question.[25] As such, the

unicity of melodramatic logic in its attempt to cement visions of communal coherence in Latin America falls under scrutiny, which is in step with emerging perceptions of melodrama on the global stage.

The malleability of melodrama has attracted much critical attention in recent years with regard to the ways in which it has been employed to represent differing social situations.[26] In this context Elisabeth Anker in *Orgies of Feeling* (2014) has examined the means by which melodrama was utilized in the United States in the aftermath of September 11, 2001, to play upon patriotic impulses that fostered political consensus for the so-called "War on Terror."[27] Social approaches to melodrama like Anker's increasingly place melodramatic aesthetics on a global stage, forcing critical analysis of the mode to consider its permutations beyond the realm of domesticity, where it commonly has been located in theoretical debate. Such is the aim of Carla Marcantonio in *Global Melodrama* (2015), in which the critic examines several works of international film to demonstrate melodrama as an aesthetic of growing social disjuncture and in which the mode's most commonly invoked locus—the home—is reshaped by globalized flows of information and commerce. Marcantonio argues that in this context melodrama undergoes a transformation in which "the trope of recognition has become an essential narrative and moral measure, yet one that by necessity operates beyond the Manichaean demarcation of virtue and villainy" (*Global Melodrama* 13).[28] In Marcantonio's line of analysis, global aperture would usher in a slackening of melodramatic narrative constraints and a broader integration into a worldwide aesthetic sphere. In visualizing the opening of melodramatic structure, we could borrow an image from Marx and Engels in their critique of globalist bourgeois impulses to constantly revolutionize their instruments of production: "All that is solid melts into air," an affirmation that they would ultimately connect to global flows of communication and, tellingly, world literature (Tucker 476). Global melodrama, like other aesthetic goods consumed in an expanding international market, would ostensibly be left open to transformations that would break down the rigidity of its traditional conception, broadening its appeal beyond local circumstances of its production and making it available for consumption in markets worldwide. It is perhaps not a coincidence that a trend similar to Marcantonio's globalized reading of melodrama has shaped recent Latin American cultural critique.

Latin American literary and cultural criticism have also examined the impact of global influences and markets within the Latin American cultural sphere through engaging discussions surrounding the field of world literature. In dialogue with David Damrosch's *What Is World Literature?* (2003) and Pascale Casanova's *The World Republic of Letters* (2004; first published in French in 1999), critics like Mariano Siskind and Héctor Hoyos have provided valuable insight into Latin American literature in its consideration of globalized aesthetics, as well as its place within the field of world literature.[29] In *Cosmopolitan Desires* (2014), Siskind offers a revision of the idea of cosmopolitanism in Latin America, vindicating the concept not as elitist refusal of national cultures, as it was portrayed by Ángel Rama in *Transculturación narrativa en América Latina* (first published in 1982). Rather, Siskind presents cosmopolitanism as a desire to participate in a world culture in which Latin America has always maintained a peripheral status, frequently with a consciousness that the entrance to that cosmopolitan sphere is fraught if not entirely blocked. In this way, cosmopolitanism does not manifest a rejection of the national but an intent to inject the national into a "worldly" cultural debate, thus giving evidence of Latin American desires and anxieties regarding the region's position in a global aesthetic sphere.[30] For his part, Hoyos in *Beyond Bolaño* (2015) approaches the field of world literature not as a body of works expressly excluding Latin America but as a potential partner. Hoyos offers that the larger field of globalization studies, framed in aesthetics, could benefit from the inclusion of a consideration of Latin America given that it is not only a zone of radical heterogeneity in its particular national contexts but also a site of dialogue with larger global traditions. This is particularly true in the context of the post-1989 world no longer dominated by Cold War politics, leaving a void to be filled by neoliberal economics and social structures. Hoyos argues that in such a context the individual is set adrift in a globalized milieu, thus opening the possibility of considering Latin American aesthetics together with other global traditions, which would coincide, in a more limited geographic scope, with the concerns of the field of hemispheric studies.

Hemispheric studies, and that field's recasting as inter-American studies and transdisciplinary American studies, has sought to under-

stand the cultural politics of the Americas and the unequal distribution of power and cultural influence across the hemisphere, which, in turn, shapes reflexive examinations of hemispheric studies itself as an academic practice.[31] Mary Louise Pratt's influential conceptualization of "contact zones" as a space of uneven dialogue in the colonial Andes may be seen as a foundational moment for hemispheric theory, though it has been largely within American studies programs where the field of hemispheric studies has gained a great deal of traction. Proponents of hemispheric studies have trumpeted the possibilities that such a field offers for the consideration of dialogue across hemispheric borders, the inclusion of artistic practices such as performance (Taylor 277), and previously veiled literary intertextualities in historical contexts (Brickhouse 8).[32] Moreover, practitioners of hemispheric studies note that the field provides the possibility of defamiliarizing and revaluating cultural practice (Giles 652), as well as an ethical, as opposed to ontological, mode of study (McClennen 182), a means of questioning race and national affiliation (Levander and Levine 5–7), and an innovation within the US comparative studies paradigm (Gillman 330).[33] Other academics, while working in a hemispheric modality, have noted the complications inherent to the field, from the very idea of a western hemisphere (Mignolo, "Coloniality" 31) to the cultural competencies necessary to perform truly hemispheric criticism not dominated by a perspective originating from the US academy (Kutzinski 229–31). Some of the strongest approaches to variably pan-American, hemispheric, or inter-American studies have noted that the field itself is one riddled by cultural conflict that has shaped literary (Saldívar, *Dialectics* 4) and cultural theory (Park 3–5), as well as historical (Langley, *Americas in the Modern Age* 7) and scientific discourse (Salvatore 5). Without smoothing over the conflicts that inevitably crop up in any hemispheric analysis, these latter perspectives honestly address a shared hemispheric space and the cultural discontinuities that impede any singular identity.

These globalizing tendencies in reading melodrama and Latin American aesthetics, as well as the hemispheric turn, are the most recent and significant developments in their respective critical fields, evincing a timely concern for worldwide interconnectedness and the ensuing modification of aesthetic and social forms. Mass technologies

have made borders ever more porous, and global commerce and habits of consumption that drive cultural assemblages continue to reach far beyond local and national boundaries. It would be a futile exercise to attempt to refute such globalizing drives or their effects in dismantling aesthetic and cultural hierarchies, and there is, of course, much to be praised in the loosening of such constraints. Nevertheless, physical and cognitive boundaries persist even within our contemporary globalized world when it comes to considering cultural and political equality in its fully globalized dimensions.[34] I make this observation not as a pessimistic critique of hopes for a better future on a global scale but as a sober and somber recognition of the contemporary limits of imagining equitable global community.

Even as globally influential political movements such as the 15M (or Indignados) in Spain, the Arab Spring across the Middle East, or the Occupy Wall Street or Black Lives Matter protests in the United States illustrate (with varying degrees of success), the potentialities of spontaneous political activity in the mold of the multitudinous politics, prophesied by the likes of Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, have not yet fully materialized.[35] Global connectivity continues to invent technologies that may facilitate future change and that certainly influence a broad range of aesthetic formats, but the forces of conservative constraint moderating social alteration show little disposition toward relinquishing authority, making institutional political dialogue and acute attention to the portrayal of alterity an ongoing necessity.[36] For instance, conservative cultural authority is what dominates the debate on immigration in the United States, informing social perceptions of immigrant populations and determining the often subordinate role of those individuals in the broader US population.[37] Indeed, the Trump-era imagery of immigrant children being separated from their parents and locked in cages offers little doubt as to the ongoing authority of conservative politics in the United States or to the centrality of state policy with regard to border control. Accordingly, even in spite of globalizing aesthetic tendencies and the potential rise of Hardt and Negri's conceptual "global multitude" displayed in some acts of contemporary political resistance, nationalistic boundaries and limits on imagining otherness continue to function without impediment both in the realm of politics and in works representing cultural contact. So

much becomes evident when we observe the ways that cultural and social barriers are continually fortified, specifically along north/south boundaries, in the affective reception of melodramatized otherness in artistic works throughout the Western Hemisphere.

In the distinct examples of Latin American alterity analyzed in this volume, affect is employed in a way that equally provokes fascination and rejection, potentially reinforcing conceptualizations of hemispheric cultural difference. Yet my interpretation of discordant affectivity developed in this study may be read as diverging from much of the connective work being done in contemporary affect theory, a great deal of which is influenced by the writings of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. As is well known, Deleuze and Guattari's conceptions of affect are directly informed by the writings of Baruch Spinoza and his positing of immanence—or what Deleuze and Guattari would relate to a constant state of becoming in their own writings—as the central issue of modern philosophy. That immanence is a self-reflexive and self-actualizing process of experiential being, conceptualized as "a plane traversed by movements of the infinite, filled with intensive ordinates" (Deleuze and Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?* 48). Immanence is thus tied to affect in Spinoza's writings, as well as Deleuze and Guattari's, in that it is through such movements that bodies come into contact and exert forces upon one another.[38] In *What Is Philosophy?* (1991), one of Deleuze and Guattari's most illuminating meditations on affect, they extend this affective capacity to the realm of aesthetics, in which art serves as a nodal point of sensation (the formless power encoded in artistic work, producing the sense of a painting, a novel, etc.), percept (a sensorial intensity that allows for recognition of aesthetic form), and affect (that force of becoming that emanates from the work, affecting all with which it comes into contact) (173–76). For Deleuze and Guattari, the aesthetic experience is one of affective convergence, a movement of fluctuating intensities that conjure an immanent and ever-expanding becoming event.[39] Affect thus functions as a mode of connectivity that stirs sensation, which in other branches of affect theory has been considered in the light of feeling and emotion.

The writings of the psychologist Silvan Tomkins in his four-volume *Affect, Imagery, Consciousness* (published between 1962 and 1992) have had a large impact on the interpretation of affect in its relation

to emotion, though much of this landmark work is dedicated to differentiating Freudian drives from affects.[40] In Tomkins's formulation, affect appears as a set of responses, of recognizable cognitive states with accompanying physical gestures that are the result of reactions to external stimuli. Tomkins proposed eight—sometimes nine—such states: interest-excitement, enjoyment-joy, surprise-startle, distress-anguish, shame-humiliation, contempt-disgust, (dissmell), anger-rage, fear-terror.[41] Significantly, only the first two of these affects (interest and enjoyment) are noted as positive, while the surprise affect is neutral and the remaining affects are negative in Tomkins's formulation. These affects, while not directly acting as feelings per se, later may be observed in the outward manifestation of emotional reaction.[42] Such emotions produced through affect do not exist within a vacuum, and as Sara Ahmed argues in *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (2004), "emotions create the very effect of the surfaces and boundaries that allow us to distinguish an inside and an outside in the first place. So emotions are not simply something 'I' or 'we' have. Rather, it is through emotions, or how we respond to objects and others, that surfaces or boundaries are made: the 'I' and the 'we' are shaped by, and even take the shape of, contact with others" (10). This sociality of emotion, as well as its impact on the self and others, allows Ahmed to consider the entirety of the affective process in economic terms, positing the concept of "affective economies" in which "emotions work as a form of capital: affect does not reside positively in the sign or commodity, but is produced as an effect of its circulation" (45).

Similar to Tomkins, in much of Ahmed's formulation it is negative affect that circulates in such an economy to form socio-emotional boundaries. Yet Ahmed's economic argument may be read as differing somewhat from Tomkins's formulations in that the latter does differentiate *a priori* between positive and negative affects, thus recognizing a charged predisposition inherent in given affects. Nevertheless, what both theorists' proposals reflect is a relationality ingrained in affects, a sociality through which emotions and feelings may be produced as bodies come into contact. In this, the intersection of such affectively emotional and affectively immanent proposals becomes apparent, as each affective approach relies upon the encounter of different bodies in order to exact and register affect or, in other

words, to affect and to be affected. Affects work in and through bodies, and they continue a rhizomatic movement to produce sensations on and between subsequent bodies. This relational character of affect lays bare its intimately communal nature and its potential to shape perceptions through the ineffable *feel* of a given situation or aesthetic representation.

The central concern of this volume is to question what happens when emotive affects become tied to the negative perceptions elicited through aesthetic objects, expressed through melodrama. I ask what role melodramatic affect plays in producing worlds, as well as how it influences our comprehension of the larger social body beyond texts and in which texts are anchored. Most specifically, my purpose here is to examine those negative affects inscribed in melodrama that forge north/south hemispheric boundaries, which are ultimately dependent upon affect's capacity to influence an intellectual understanding of a represented social context. Accordingly, I understand affect not in opposition to reason but as a means of reason, engaging a process of thought-emotion and making legible a particular "distribution of the sensible," to use Jacques Rancière's terminology. For Rancière, the distribution of the sensible is a self-evident and self-sustaining mode of perception based on the accepted patterns of what can be thought, said, and done in a given social arrangement. This distribution, then, "simultaneously discloses the existence of something in common and the delimitations that define the respective parts and positions within it" (Rancière 12). The distribution of the sensible allows for one not only to feel that they are a part of something larger but also to comprehend a fixed set of circumstances in which one might have an impact. Thus, in this distribution of the sensible, an affective rationality is at work—feeling and thinking at the same time—which is inscribed in the very terminology itself.[43] Indeed, the concept of the "sensible," as Rancière employs it here, implies reason or at the very least rationale, and yet the very term "sensible" cannot but allude to sensibility (i.e., emotion and/or feeling) or to sensation itself—that process through which affect may be perceived. This experience of the sensible as a distribution of order then must engage the logical and the affective in order to comprehend a given set of social circumstances. In such an arrangement, reason and emotion cannot act independently of one

another, as the experience of the distribution of the sensible calls upon the necessity of affective intelligibility to grasp the experience of the social.

Antonio Damasio examined such a connection between affect and rationality in *Descartes' Error* (1994), specifically with regard to the brain in its "high" and "low" regions, thus showing that high reasoning is unable to be divorced from low emotions (xiii) and that a "passion for reason" connects rationality with (emotional) desire for it (245). Moreover, in *Coming to Our Senses* (2016) Dierdra Reber posits affect as a contemporary episteme, in a Foucauldian mold, and as the dominant mode of logic following the end of the Cold War. Reber comments that "if we take stock of the diversity of [the] interventions by affect as a vehicle for the construction of knowledge—the exercise of thinking of and through affect—then we begin to appreciate the extent to which affect has had the effect of creating a field of inquiry unified in this respect across disciplines and ideologies. With particular intensity over the past two decades, affect (understood as both topic and optic) has been forging an epistemological immanence of inquiry—not at the micro level of specific content, but at the macro level of the constitution of a transformative discourse that is pushing toward the radical redefinition of fields and their foundational theoretical assumptions and tools" (17). Reber's presentation of affect as episteme is useful to my consideration of the aesthetic formulation of melodrama in which primarily negative affects come to shape hemispheric cultural politics, delimiting a distribution of the sensible and informing ideological perspectives.

Tomkins specifically analyzed affects and their connections to ideology, positing the concept of "ideo-affective resonance." For Tomkins, ideo-affective resonance is a product of the combination of ideo-affective postures, which are "any *loosely organized* set of feelings and *ideas about feelings*," and of ideological postures, referring to "any *highly organized* and articulate set of *ideas about anything*" (Tomkins and Demos 111, original emphasis). Ideo-affective resonance thus implies "the engagement of the loosely organized beliefs and feelings (of ideo-affective postures) by ideology . . . , when ideo-affective postures are sufficiently similar to the ideological posture, so that they reinforce and strengthen each other. Ideo-affective resonance to ideology

is a love affair of a loosely organized set of feelings and ideas about feelings with a highly organized and articulate set of ideas about anything" (111).[44] In Tomkins's formulation, affect and ideology work hand in hand in the structuring of an encompassing subjectivity, connecting feeling and thought in the construction of a determined worldview. Far from the supposedly coolly rational perception of ideology, the ideological is moved by feeling and indeed interpellated by affect, to borrow from Louis Althusser's formulation in his epochal essay "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses" (1970).

In his well-known argument, Althusser offers a critique of Marx's base/superstructure model, determining it to be overly static in that it does not contemplate the ways in which the forms of production are reproduced in the same model. It is from that point that Althusser proposes the modulating forces of repressive state apparatuses (RSAs) and ideological state apparatuses (ISAs), in which the former are bodies (police, government, military, etc.) that pose a repressive physical force as state agents and the latter (family, church, education, the arts, etc.) are institutional bodies that ideologically sustain the state. Throughout Althusser's formulation, ideology is understood in Freudian terms of the "unconscious," ever pervasive and without history, which does not mean that it is immaterial, as it is through social practices that ideology is manifested; actions carried out by individuals give ideology materiality, and in fact, ideologies come to constitute subjects and function as "a 'representation' of the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence" (256). Accordingly, in Althusser's model, ideology interpellates individuals within a system that was always already there, and thus individuals are inherently subjects of ideology, even before birth.[45] However, this pre-existence of ideology resuscitates a problem that Althusser diagnoses in his reading of Marx: whereas Althusser questions how Marx's base/superstructure model sustains itself, we may also question the precise nature of the tools of ideology that sustain its reproduction within ISAs. That is, within Althusser's formulation, ISAs are recognized as reproducing an ideological framework necessary for the maintenance of superstructure, but the actual conduits through which superstructure is reinforced by ISAs remain opaque. For instance, family, the educational system, and other ISAs may

indeed further ideological paradigms, but they are actors that must employ props to maintain a social illusion, to create an effect, and to affect other subjects. It is precisely ISAs' capacity to affect and to shape the worldview of individuals within a given social structure that merits closer attention.

To more closely examine the mechanisms of the reproduction of ideology through ISAs, we can return to the central proposition of Tomkins's conceptualization of ideo-affective resonance: ideology is furthered and sustained in its connection with a set of feelings about a given regimented structure of ideas. Read in combination with Althusser's model, it becomes evident that ISAs can perform their functional maintenance of superstructure only by affecting the social bodies to which they pertain. ISAs thus rely on a process of what I call *affective interpellation* through which ideas, tied to feelings and communicated through affect, impact individuals and inform their ideas about a given social environment.[46] Affect is what makes ideology work, moving individuals to continued (unconscious) participation in ISAs, making them each a feeling member of the social corpus.[47] Indeed, as Massumi argues in *Politics of Affect* (2015), "The notion of ideology does not simply dismiss notions of affect. Rather, it mobilizes them in a particular way. . . . Power hooks into the individual through feeling, and then pulls the strings that lead the individual into deluded acquiescence to its assigned role" (85–86). Accordingly, I propose affective interpellation as that which would function in Ahmed's affective economy, circulating both to connect individuals within a social situation and also to establish boundaries marking cultural difference. In this, I am conscious of the potential critique within affect studies of the rigidity of ideology in ostensibly favoring rationality over emotion, as well as reason over affect; indeed, it was on these grounds that Deleuze and Guattari provocatively claimed that "there is no ideology and never has been" (*Thousand Plateaus* 5) in a call to consider society as a relational (affective) process as opposed to an ideological structure. My route is somewhat different in that I propose to demonstrate not an opposition of affect and reason but a confluence of the two in keeping with Reber's conceptualization of affect as an epistemological mode. In this sense, the process of affective interpellation to which I refer is also that which makes aesthetic

objects function as the body comes into contact with them, creating ideological thought-feelings about the artistic event.[48]

As discussed above, Deleuze and Guattari interpret the aesthetic object's affective capacity by its connection of sensation, percept, and affect. This is the same work that is carried out via the affective processes of melodrama: through demonstrative gesturing, extreme narrative situations and characterization, and the sounding of emotionally heightened narrative registers, melodrama affects its publics in a performative process of reception.[49] Yet, it is equally important to emphasize that melodrama is also deeply involved in the process of conveying ideology.[50] In considering Deleuze and Guattari's appreciation of the affective capacities of aesthetics together with Tomkins's understanding of the ideological functions of affect, via Althusser, we come to appreciate the ideo-affective interpellations of aesthetics in general, and of melodrama more specifically. Melodramatic affect interpellates its public in order to conjure a particular vision of social order in which delineations of good and evil, virtue and villainy are made clear. Melodrama makes patent the affective economy to which Ahmed refers, positing characters of particular social affiliations as actors on a stage that will be shaped by the ideologically charged emotional content of the artistic work. Melodrama thus establishes affective boundaries through which what is perceived to be unjust is marginalized, being necessarily cordoned off for the risks of contamination that it proposes. The formulation of such melodramatic borders is of crucial importance for the works analyzed in this volume. Such works interrogate hemispheric visions of Latin Americanness, potentially reaffirming othering archnarratives that have plagued conceptions of the region from the colonial period up to the present.

Much of the contemporary US perception of Latin America is rooted in the issues signaled at the beginning of this introduction. From the Haitian Revolution to the Cuban Revolution, and spanning the legacy of US aggressions and occupations of hemispheric nations in defense of political and economic interests, within the US imaginary Latin America has become a world associated with radical politics and violence that hits too close to home for US democratic hegemony. The scourge of drugs and the fear of otherness implicitly—and often explicitly—emanate from present-day discussions of immigration pol-

icy. However, the figures of lawlessness and alterity more often than not prove to be very successful ingredients for those narratives that convey stories about the region, especially when they are presented to foreign publics who may not have firsthand knowledge of everyday Latin American realities. The contemporary imaginings of Latin American otherness examined throughout this study offer new forms of representing cultural difference, but those forms often mesh with previous modes of portraying Latin America. After all, the success of Latin American authors during the Boom era, as well as the magical realities with which that body of literature hegemonically came to be defined, provided global audiences with an exotic view of Latin Americanness that has proven hard to shake. Yet today, especially for US audiences, narratives of Latin American alterity provide ample opportunities for (guilty) pleasure.

That narratives representing Latin America may find large audiences and also stoke concepts of otherness and social disaster is perhaps to be expected.[51] Maybe owing to a Freudian "death drive," titillating violence and danger are common components of popular or mass culture around the globe, especially in modern Hollywood films, in which melodrama abounds.[52] Nevertheless, while such fear-driven violence may also be common to the US film industry when presenting stories anchored in the United States, that same industry produces a multitude of other narratives—romance, drama, biography, and so on—in which fear and disaster play little or no part. Conversely, narratives on Latin America that resonate with a broader hemispheric audience commonly engage in catastrophic theatrics. In other words, prohibitive otherness seems almost a necessary ingredient for US publics to consume narratives on Latin America, thus demonstrating an inability to understand the region in terms other than volatile histrionics.[53] Echoing Brooks's conception of melodrama, in which "characters represent extremes, and they undergo extremes, passing from heights to depths, or the reverse, almost instantaneously" and where "the middle ground and the middle condition are excluded" (36), Latin American stories that circulate in the United States almost universally portray socially liminal situations. Indeed, contrary to commonplace cultural imaginings of the middle class in the US mass-mediatized narrative, a humdrum drama of a Latin American

middle-class family—if not the Latin American middle class entirely—is almost unimaginable in the US cultural sphere. A potential hazard is inscribed in US consumption of such narratives in that those representations of drastic alterity continue to buttress a geopolitical, cultural inequality and a generalized negative imaginary of the region that condemns the cultures of Latin America to a precarious otherness that must be kept at bay.

It is the representation of this menacing difference driven by negative melodramatic affect that is the foremost concern of this study, and an intriguing and paradoxical aspect of these negatively affected melodramatic depictions is that their format is sometimes employed by artists of the region in their aesthetic expressions that reach a global public. That is, similar to some US-produced works about Latin America here examined, the works of Latin American–born art analyzed in this volume may be seen as relating tales in which the region is depicted by means of a salient alterity, calling into question the extent to which autoexoticism figures into such narratives. A cynical, simplistic diagnosis of this situation would conclude that artists rendering Latin America in such negatively affected ways do so simply to gain renown, with creators of art and media being very conscious of the fact that violence and disaster sell. The market, of course, is an inescapable paradigm, and artists must consider the viability of their projects in economic terms if indeed they propose to work with the most widely distributed editorial houses, cinematographic production companies, and television/streaming content conglomerates. Yet at the same time, it can quite reasonably be stated that Latin American cultural producers have chosen to represent violence within their narratives because it is a formative and far-reaching experience within Latin American societies. The representation of social conflict and/or what may be perceived by international audiences as exoticism in this case is simply a lived quotidian experience, not a hackneyed marketing ploy. Indeed, these same works representing the Latin American social plight may in fact be conceived as aesthetic acts of denunciation and resistance against the silencing of the social actors portrayed in the work itself.

Yet beyond the agency or intent of the cultural producers analyzed throughout this study, of primary importance is the consideration

of the extent to which audiences, specifically US audiences within the scope of this analysis, may understand Latin American works to be a form of aesthetic protest, a perspective that is largely absent from popular appraisals of the works here examined. It is not my contention, however, that *all* art from Latin America that circulates in the global marketplace is intrinsically negatively affected. There are plenty of examples to the contrary, especially in popular music by the likes of the Puerto Rican rapper Bad Bunny or the Colombian singer J Balvin, whose songs, even when performed in Spanish, are embraced by mainstream US radio. To be sure, the influence of Latin American and Latino cultural producers is clear in the Salma Hayek–produced US version of *Ugly Betty* (2006–2010), Lin-Manuel Miranda's critically acclaimed musicals *In the Heights* (2005) and *Hamilton* (2015), and Arturo Castro's reflexive comedy *Alternatino with Arturo Castro* (2019–); these are all works that do not engage in grim imaginings of Latin American social realities. To name but one example in Latin American film, the excellent *Whisky* (2004), directed by Pablo Stoll and Juan Pablo Rebella, is an understated tragicomedy from Uruguay that was well received internationally, earning several awards at prestigious film festivals.[54] Nevertheless, with regard to Latin American films and their international audience, *Whisky* is less widely known than Alfonso Cuarón's *Roma*, analyzed in chapter 2, which offers visions of exotic otherness and arouses feelings of pity for its beleaguered Indigenous protagonist.

Accordingly, I posit that those narratives that most stoke the US imagination of Latin America and that prove to be the most impactful within a hemispheric imaginary of the region are those that represent alterity. However inadvertently, that alterity contributes to a negatively charged discourse on Latin America that fortifies melodramatically construed conceptions of virtue and villainy. This is not to say that cultural producers are entirely responsible for the ideologically charged reaction that audiences north of the border may have to a given work; instead, I suggest that divisive imaginings of Latin America travel well and feed understandings of the region in the hemispheric north. In this, my analysis obliquely engages debates on Latin Americanism within US academia, but I am traveling a somewhat different route. Whereas Neil Larsen's *Reading North by South* (1995), Román

de la Campa's *Latin Americanism* (1999), Doris Sommer's *Proceed with Caution* (1999), Alberto Moreiras's *The Exhaustion of Difference* (2001), and John Beverley's *Latinamericanism after 9/11* (2011) and *The Failure of Latin America* (2019) all eloquently question from a range of theoretical perspectives the aims and horizons of Latin Americanist political intervention via literary and cultural studies in the US academy, my own analyses seek to examine what type of imaginary is formed both in and beyond academic debates about the region itself. In other words, I am less concerned with encountering a theoretical framework through which a Latin Americanist political discourse could be framed than with questioning what Latin America signifies—affectively and ideologically—beyond the confines of the region, largely to those with little or no contact with Latin America itself. As such, my investigation falls more in line with that of John Patrick Leary, as well as that of the Brazilian political scientist João Feres Júnior in *The Concept of Latin America in the United States* (2010), both of whom examine the cultural images that produce a popularized concept of Latin America within the United States.

While studies of political policy between the United States and Latin America abound, comparably less work has been done on this issue of creating a cultural imaginary of Latin America in the United States. One analysis of note is John J. Johnson's *Latin America in Caricature* (1980), a study of newsprint comics depicting interactions between the United States and Latin America. Feres Júnior's study noted above takes up a similar issue in the examination of imagery common to textbooks used to teach university classes on Latin America, observing that John Chasteen's widely used text *Born in Blood and Fire* (2001) denotes a striking contradiction:

> If being born of blood and fires is specific of Latin America, it must be because other places were not born the same way. That is, this way of "putting things" suggests a hidden comparison [with] other places. The most obvious comparison, of course, is with the United States. That is, the reader is [led] to infer that the United States was not born in the same conditions. Nonetheless, given the fact that the "birth" of the United States involved a long war of liberation, the bloodiest fratricidal war in

> the history of the continent, large scale Indian genocide, and the continued reliance [of] the national economy on slave labor, one can hardly claim that this country was not born in blood and fire, in conquest and slavery. (182)

Feres Júnior observes that such violent categorizations of the United States are commonly hushed, while the "blood and fire" of Latin America further establish it as a cultural other.

One other highly valuable study is that of Sylvia Molloy in "Latin America in the U.S. Imaginary" (2005), in which the critic dissects the postcolonial debate on Latin America in the US academy via magical realist aesthetics. Molloy notes, "That perception of Latin American literatures should be primarily confined to an essentialized magic realism is unfortunate; that, by extension, magic realism should be seen as the expression of a homogenized postcoloniality exclusively representative of 'Latin America' is additionally regrettable. Post-colonial studies should afford a way of teasing apart differences instead of erasing them, of unpacking preconceived notions instead of pre-packaging cultural commodities. Unfortunately, they seldom do" (196). I am traveling a path similar to Molloy's but doing so outside of the exoticism tied to magical realism and instead examining how socially conflictive exoticism often molds a similarly homogenizing representation of Latin Americanness framed by negative affectivity.

Yet, accounting for affects or trying to measure what they do, how they impact people, continues to be a difficult proposition. Indeed, there is certainly a speculative component to my investigation as it would be an impossible task to account for all possible reactions to the works I am analyzing, exactly who consumed them on which side of the border, and how such audiences felt about the narratives and the cultural imagery they present. For this reason, I base my analyses in part on interpretations of popular, informed critical readings—from reviews in the *New York Times* and the *Hollywood Reporter*, among others, to articles from a host of online periodicals—to gauge a broad view of US consumption of the works under analysis. Accordingly, throughout this study I deploy a reader-centered theoretical approach as opposed to an ethnographically grounded reception model.[55] In this way I am able to propose a conceptual framework for reading

melodramatic negative affects in their attempts to structure a social imaginary, which is borne out in critical perceptions—both popular and academic—of the works under analysis.[56]

This approach offers evidence of broadly understood conceptions of social comprehension among what Stanley Fish defined as "interpretive communities." Such communities of thinkers share common strategies for reading and writing contained within the horizon of possibilities and beliefs that may be expressed within a given social setting (Fish 13–15).[57] Somewhat akin to Fish's community of readers and directly in line with the construction of negative affect as examined in this study is Lauren Berlant's concept of an "intimate public." In Berlant's view, this intimate public allows participants to "*feel* as though it expresses what is common among them, a subjective likeness that seems to emanate from their history and their ongoing attachments and actions. Their participation seems to confirm the sense that even before there was a market addressed to them, there existed a world of strangers who would be emotionally literate in each other's experience of power, intimacy, desire, and discontent" (*Female Complaint* 5, original emphasis). It is a shared negative feeling that is addressed in this study, one that is culled by US audiences from divisive imaginings of Latin America that stoke, sometimes inadvertently, received notions on cultural and racialized stereotypes that may exist before such consumers come into contact with works representing Latin America.[58]

To be sure, while this study clearly dialogues with broader themes in the field of hemispheric and/or inter-American studies signaled above, as a Latin Americanist I do not propose to offer a substantive theorization on the state of that field, conscious as I am of what Rodrigo Lazo has called the "impossible epistemology" (753) of the hemisphere, a speculative cultural geography in itself.[59] Nevertheless, by reading affectivity through melodramatic structure and aesthetics, I am attempting here, if only fleetingly, to locate those ineffable feelings that are produced and shared across a variety of works depicting conflictive visions of Latin Americanness, as well as to gauge how they may shape ideological and social perceptions. It is for this reason that I work across a host of media to broadly address aesthetic and cultural concerns, while still being cognizant of the particular formats of the works under analysis and of the publics that consume them.

Thus, my initial task is to diagnose the framing of melodramatically affected negativity in aesthetically representing Latin America, but it is equally important to interrogate the possibilities for finding a way out of the pessimism of this mode of representation or, at a minimum, a way of making that negativity somehow productive. In all reality, it is not feasible for audiences to change the content of these works or the fact that they are popular among a broad set of consumers. Yet, from a pedagogical standpoint, one can strive to promote awareness of the modes of expression and the material and cultural conditions under which these texts are produced, as well as consciousness of the role that affect plays in the reception of these works and in the perception of Latin American and Latino realities. Affects, read through melodrama, can bring about rational social consciousness and disposition toward comprehension in audiences whose first symptom may indeed be depression.

As Ann Cvetkovich argues in *Depression: A Public Feeling* (2012), affectively depressed states can ultimately be productive. Via a personal memoir on the experience of academia, Cvetkovich discusses depression as an impasse, which does not indicate an end but a blockage that might permit alternative modes of thinking and creativeness. Such a depressive state can be made productive in that it allows a reflexive form of experiencing the everyday and contemplating the current state of interacting as social beings in globalized society. Lauren Berlant expresses a similar sentiment in *Cruel Optimism* (2011), observing that contemporary concepts of happiness via social and emotional well-being, as well as material acquisition, are now in crisis and that the enduring impulse to pursue such standards can only result in diminishing returns and depression. Optimism thus becomes cruel when it seeks a material standard that is no longer attainable. Berlant's study offers a constant focus on the impasse of the present, which, as in Cvetkovich's study, does not denote an endpoint but a modification of the expectation and experience of the present. Similar to Cvetkovich's conception of impasse, the experience of cruel optimism may be productively converted into a new mode of experience. Following such formulations of depression and impasse, in my analyses in this volume I question how melodrama may perform this task of reorientation through the negative affects it puts into

play. In other words, I want to examine the potentially contradictory means by which melodrama represents impasse and depression in its negatively affected representations of Latin America, while at the same time positively proposing aesthetic access to the region that US publics may not otherwise be granted. While allowing mediated approaches to Latin American social environs, these narratives, on the one hand, offer hemispheric publics entrance to Latin American terrains and yet, on the other, cannot think beyond melodramatically established horizons and ethos. Melodramatic affectivity may place us at an impasse of current hemispheric relations but may also grant us a broader understanding of how ideo-affective borders are forged and how we might feel and think our way around and through them.

Other Americans presents a series of case studies that illustrate the conflictive representation of Latin America in the US cultural imaginary. The analyses are balanced between works composed beyond the United States' national borders but that have gained acceptance and popularity among US audiences, as well as those that are produced within the United States but are representing Latin America for a domestic audience. Readers may note that while feminine protagonists and cultural producers are considered in this study, many of the works here analyzed are stereotypically masculine in their outsize dramatic action, thus evincing a gendered disparity in the US consumption of works representing Latin America. Yet each of the chapters offers a broad analysis of how different genres function among US audiences, grounding that larger picture in the analysis of particular works. This turn to close reading in the broader context of hemispheric othering processes provides an approach to understanding the micro against the macro, that is, how the basic texts to which audiences turn may come to reinforce an expansive formulation of hemispheric otherness. It is here that one finds a series of negative affects that will intersect with one another over the course of this study, sometimes providing similar sensations among the works here considered. Of course, it would be impossible to encompass all representations of Latin America for US audiences, but my aim is that the analysis of these highly successful works will provide a framework through which a host of other works beyond the scope of the current study may be considered.

My first step in navigating these precarious hemispheric represen-

tations looks at a story situated directly on the border between Mexico and the United States. In chapter 1, "Staging Shame Just across the Border: Reading Bolaño in the United States," I examine Roberto Bolaño's novel *2666*, posthumously published in 2004 and nothing short of a smashing literary success. What is indeed striking is that the Chilean author's monumental novel, which is at times ferociously violent, has been so warmly received by the English-speaking public, thus positioning Bolaño as the *en vogue* Latin American author of the early twenty-first century. In first sketching a map of Bolaño's success in the United States and then specifically reading the third and most critically neglected section of Bolaño's novel, "La parte de Fate," which deals with the US/Mexican border, I examine how negatively affected shame is melodramatically employed at once to forge difference and to recognize a global, neoliberal violence in which all are complicit. Such a tale presents the US reader with a stark, good-versus-evil vision of Mexico, devastated by violence, and thus affects the reader by conjuring concepts of poverty, inequality, and machismo, which problematically confirm received notions on Mexico and its relationship with the United States. However, I explore how US readers may experience shame in uncovering their implicit role in the global neoliberal dynamic that makes possible the nightmarish conditions at the border in "La parte de Fate," especially through melodramatic identification with the story's African American protagonist. Ultimately, I question what the novel's visions of alterity provide the US readerly public, what Bolaño represents as a cipher of Latin American literature for that same audience, and how the author's harshly violent view of the border may be productively understood in its flat melodramatic affect as a critique of contemporary hemispheric capitalism.

In chapter 2, "From Disgust to Pity: Viewing Domestic Labor in the Films of Claudia Llosa and Alfonso Cuarón," I analyze *La teta asustada* (2009) by Llosa, from Peru, and *Roma* (2018) by Cuarón, from Mexico. Both Llosa and Cuarón are directors who, like Bolaño, are internationally acclaimed Latin American cultural producers. For its part, Llosa's film has generated both praise and criticism for its representation of Andean migrants to Peru's capital and the cultural dynamics staged in the film's presentation of domestic labor. Similarly, Cuarón's film is a celebrated work that purports to offer a

glimpse of Indigenous domestic work in Mexico, but it also has been critiqued for romanticizing a view of that labor arrangement. What I offer in this chapter is an interpretation of how disgust functions as a negative affect for US audiences, generating pity for the beleaguered Indigenous laborers who suffer injustices throughout Llosa and Cuarón's Oscar-recognized films. This reading of *La teta asustada* and *Roma* examines the ways in which melodramatic suffering evokes sensations of disgust in US audiences based in the domestic labor arrangement, one that appears to such viewers as a foreign practice that reproduces anachronistic social and ethnic asymmetry. Disgust may also function perniciously for US audiences as a marker of insurmountable Indigenous otherness in these films but one that is made palatable in the structuring of melodramatic conflict and resolved in each film's happy ending. Ultimately, I argue that melodramatized suffering in Llosa's and Cuarón's films enables a sense of pity for US spectators, allowing them to feel good about feeling bad for the films' Indigenous protagonists, an affective salve that is elicited through melodrama.

In chapter 3, "[indistinct chatter in Spanish]: The Fear of Latin America on Netflix," I analyze the success of the streaming series *Narcos* and *Narcos: Mexico* (2015–2021) and *El marginal* (2016–2022), both Netflix originals, in light of their negatively affected sensationalism. In each of these series, melodramatic framing renders visible Latin American criminality in a recent technological medium, which proposes new dimensions for considering fear in the constructed visions of the region. The internet streaming television series medium has drastically changed practices of spectatorship in recent years, challenging audiences to negotiate the ideological content of the programs they consume at an ever-increasing pace as streaming series manufacture more and more sensationalized content in order to maintain their viewing publics. As such, an important aspect of my analysis is to interrogate the Netflix viewing platform, as it offers sensationalist representations of Latin America in an age of instantaneity. The *Narcos* franchise feeds this sensationalist drive by melodramatically pitting the immoral drug trafficking practices of narco kingpins like Pablo Escobar against visions of justice held by US police forces. Such stories are enacted by a pan–Latin Amer-

ican/Latino cast, facilitating anxiety about Hispanic contamination across borders. *El marginal* employs melodramatic sensationalism by narrating the inner workings of the Argentine prison system and the corruption and violence therein. By offering a gritty crime drama as an authorized version of quality TV from the hemispheric south, Netflix's ideological underpinnings are called into question, as the platform upholds an othering vision of Latin America. In these cases, melodrama's affective, rhizomatic flows narrate contemporary Latin American social conflicts for a global public, affirming alterity while offering the thrills and dangers of life south of the border.

Chapter 4, "A Hit and a Miss: Hollywood's Distressed Take on the Border," returns to the US/Mexican border, a region that has commonly been portrayed as a perilous space in Hollywood films, from classic westerns like Sam Peckinpah's *The Wild Bunch* (1969) to more recent films like Steven Soderbergh's *Traffic* (2000). After first taking a broad look at Hollywood's contemporary representations of Latin America, this chapter then specifically examines two distinct representations of that border space and their respective presentations of the dangers of cultural, violent, and legal contamination in the post-9/11 US landscape: Ethan and Joel Coen's adaptation of Cormac McCarthy's novel *No Country for Old Men* (2007) and Matt Piedmont's slapstick parody *Casa de mi padre* (2012). The Coen brothers' film recounts the tale of a drug deal gone wrong in the borderland in which Mexico is ever present, yet hardly mentioned, making the United States' southern neighbor the film's absent center. Mexico and Mexicans in the film, as well as in McCarthy's novel, are tacitly accepted as a reality of lawlessness and violence that need not be named but in and through which evil is present and must be limited. This dichotomic framing is indicative of a melodramatic logic and the distressed, paranoid affect of *No Country for Old Men*, which is playfully questioned in *Casa de mi padre*. This latter film, scripted in Spanish and set on the Mexican side of the border, plays upon all the melodramatic conventions of narco thrillers while poking fun at the machismo and violent adventure there encoded. Yet even with a cast of international stars, including Will Ferrell, Gael García Bernal, Diego Luna, and Genesis Rodriguez, the film underperformed at the box office. By reading these two films via Hermann Herlinghaus's

conception of the "war on affect," I contend in this chapter that US audiences feel more at ease recognizing Mexican alterity at the border, as reflected in the Oscar-winning *No Country for Old Men*, than in questioning the possible falsity of such polarizing characterizations, as is carried out in the ostensibly harmless comedy of *Casa de mi padre*. In this way, I propose a comparison that examines *No Country for Old Men*'s nonreflexive exoticizing violence and *Casa de mi padre*'s consciously parodied autoexoticism, which contests a black-and-white view of US/Mexican interactions and shows the complexity of that relationship.

In chapter 5, "Daniel Alarcón and the Anxious Poetics of Cultural Translation," I examine the writings of the Peruvian-American author Daniel Alarcón—primarily *Lost City Radio* (2007) and *At Night We Walk in Circles* (2013), as well as the graphic novel *Ciudad de payasos* (2010) and its English edition, *City of Clowns* (2015)—to assess the ways in which exotically affective elements shape his depiction of Latin American environs. While sometimes writing straightforwardly about Peru and other times about a quasi–Latin American landscape, Alarcón employs in his works a melodramatic sentimentality and visuality while confounding fictional and actual referents, invoking on occasion ferocious visions of the global south in Alarcón's primary audience: the English-speaking literary public. A central concern of this chapter is to examine how melodramatically framed negative affectivity, in the shape of anxiety, informs the possible readings of an English-speaking audience, which may be unfamiliar with contemporary Latin American social realities, and how that reading might differ from Alarcón's works in Spanish, geared more specifically to a Peruvian audience. By placing Alarcón's writings in dialogue with the work of the performance artist Elizabeth Lino-Cornejo, performing as La Última Reyna de Cerro de Pasco, and also with Peruvian painters Ángel Valdez and Alfredo Márquez, this chapter examines how melodrama reaches an impasse by aesthetically presenting the region through a depressive, dichotomic lens, making visible social issues of great import while conjuring negative affect in hemispheric audiences.

Across my analyses, I am looking for affective evidence that would move beyond a facile categorization of otherness, and I seek not to

say that these works merely reiterate a beleaguered view of Latin America as a global subaltern. Rather, by reading through a lens of melodramatic affectivity, I strive to understand how these works may make US audiences feel about Latin Americanness and how they ultimately may offer a productive impasse in their negatively charged approaches to representing alterity. While such negative affects expressed through melodrama do further a dichotomic north/south view of hemispheric relations, when perceived for what they are—cultural imaginings that represent conflictive aspects of Latin American reality—they also may predispose US audiences to new ways of thinking and feeling about borders. These works thus present US audiences with provocative modes of considering social strife throughout Latin America, but they also engage readers and spectators by making them feel their way around and, potentially, through hemispheric difference.