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Presented at workshop on “Emotions in Latin American Culture and History”  
Mexico City, September 2016

*Color: Technology and Affect in La Cucuracha (1934)*

*This paper is part of a project that I am calling “Projections: Latin America on Screen.” My purpose is to trace the ways in which Latin America figures in non-Latin American (that is, primarily Hollywood) film and, perhaps more importantly, to outline a history and theory of film from the perspective of these points at which the cinema takes on latinidad. In other words, I take it as given that when Hollywood (or other non-Latin American cinemas) portrays the region, we learn much more about Hollywood than about the purported object of its representation. As such, I also methodically avoid terms such as “stereotype,” on the basis, first, that of course these films don’t provide us with the “truth” of Latin America or Latin Americans (who would ever think that they did?) and, second, that the mere critique that a medium of representation employs lazy short cuts is itself one of the laziest of short cuts that a critic can employ.*

Cinema has always dreamed of the hyper-real. It has dared to measure itself up against the real, and indeed to outdo it: to be larger than life. Film-makers may compare what they are doing to the other arts: describing it as “painting with light” in film-noir cinematographer John Alton’s words, for instance; or “sculpting in time” as Russian director Andrei Tarkovsky would have it. But ultimately cinema has set itself up against reality itself. It can draw on formidable and ever-new technological resources to do so, from lenses and lighting to Surround Sound and 3D. But as film theorist André Bazin notes, it is not so much that technical developments drive cinematic “progress.” Instead, it is the medium’s founding myth of a “total cinema that is to provide [a] complete illusion of life” that forces technical change. The dream that sustains cinema, Bazin argues, is that it can provide “a recreation of the world in its own image, an image unburdened by the freedom of interpretation of the artist or the irreversibility of time” (“The Myth of Total Cinema” 20, 21). As such, there should really be no arguing with

movies, any more than one would argue with the real itself. The cinema can also then be presented as somehow apolitical or beyond politics, at least if politics is imagined in terms of argumentation or the attempt to win some kind of consent. For the more that the movies construct an environment to rival the real, rather than a portal through which to understand it, film spectatorship becomes less an intellectual exercise than an immediately visceral experience. It becomes, in short, less a matter of interpretation than of affect.

This cinematic fantasy is signaled at the outset of the medium's history in the famous story of the Parisian audience that allegedly fled in panic upon viewing the Lumière Brothers' *Arrival of a Train at La Ciotat* (1895), thinking that a locomotive was really bearing down on them through the silver screen. Here, as elsewhere, the proof of film realism is taken to be the affect it inspires in its viewers. The thrilling terror that the image provokes is an index of its power to blur the boundary between art and life, and of its direct effect on the body more than the brain. But it is also an indication that the cinematic Real is intimately linked to the fears and desires that lurk in our collective unconscious. It is then both more and less than life itself: as we become inured to its artifice, it can frustratingly fall just short of our expectations, unless the apparatus continuously renews its technical powers to shock and distract; and yet in so far as these powers are indeed sustained, the cinema can also overwhelm us as it makes both dreams and nightmares overshadow our everyday experience. At the same time, a new plane of politics opens up, which has less to do with ideology or persuasion than with cultural imaginaries that are engrained in the social body. It is then no surprise that, to negotiate and explore this tension between a realism that merely presents us with what we already (think we) know, and a Real that threatens to overturn and overwhelm it, film-makers have often turned to Latin America. For the region south of the border--so close and yet so far from cinema's heartland in Southern California--is a space that has historically often been seen as both realer than real and yet somehow fantastical and unworldly. It is full of places where (we are told) affect runs wild, but this is an affect that can still perhaps be contained if it can be marked as indisputably "other." Never has this dance with difference been more evident than in the film industry's initial experiments with "true" color in the early 1930s. For it is color, and its ambivalent powers to illuminate but also distract the viewer, that are most closely associated with affect in the history of the cinematic apparatus's technical development. And Latin

America, more than anywhere else, is where Hollywood has sought out the color that brings life to our screens.

In pursuit of the dream of mimicking and even overpowering reality itself, film-makers have consistently sought to expand the range of senses and sensations that their films can elicit. The basis of cinema--what makes it distinct from other art forms--is visual movement. The movies are, first and foremost, moving pictures, and this is what an early short by Thomas Edison still has in common with the latest blockbuster at the Multiplex or a downloaded video viewed on an iPhone: they give us images that move. But the film industry has seldom been content simply to give us a record of motion in front of the camera lens. The cinema soon built up a formidable repertoire of different kinds of displacements in space that each impart a distinct visual experience: from moving pictures *per se* to the moving camera that allows for pans, dollies, tracking shots, crane shots, and so on; the close-up and the zoom, which enable dramatic changes in scale; and moving focus which, especially when combined with a shallow depth of field, can direct the eyes' attention even without any other movements within the frame. Then montage (editing) allowed for a whole different set of transitions, as a cut could take us swiftly from one location to another--and with parallel editing, back again. Moreover, the briefest of dissolves could even shift our setting in time, returning us to the past (in flashback) or pushing us to the future (flashforward).

None of this was enough. In the late 1920s, the movies added a sonic dimension with the transition from silents to talkies. Since then, sound quality has become ever more important with the introduction of stereo, the invention of Dolby noise reduction, and in the past few years the upgrading of most theatres to 5.1 Surround Sound, such that at the cinema we are now literally enveloped in a cinematic soundscape. There have been attempts, moreover, to add appeals to other senses, such as to smell with experiments in the 1950s and 1960s with "Aromarama" and "Smell-O-Vision," and to physical movement with in the 1970s with "Sensurround," which used low-frequency sounds that were felt rather than heard. In similar vein, amusement parks have given us films viewed on mobile platforms as in aircraft simulators, to appeal directly to the sense of balance. These were relatively short-lived or niche ventures, but in the past decade 3D has become mainstream, projecting images back out to the audience in ever more convincing and realistic manner. This in turn has driven the content of studio

blockbusters in particular, as the cinema tries to compete with the myriad of smaller screens that these days accompany us wherever we go. What makes the cinema still a destination, and movie-going an event, is its continual effort to provide an environment in which we can be transported from our humdrum lives, a task that perhaps increasingly has to be achieved through technical means given that we have so many other forms of narrative distraction on tap, literally at our finger-tips. Above all, the entire history of special effects and special formats from Georges Méliès to Steven Spielberg, Widescreen to Imax, has been the story of cinema's desire to blot out and trump everyday life, to interpellate the spectator directly into the silver screen's alternative reality. At times, as society itself has become hooked on the logic of the spectacle derived in part from the cinema, we have seen a veritable technological arms race between the makers of (say) adverts and architecture on the one hand and the makers of films that proleptically anticipated our contemporary immersion in media entertainment in the first place. Where once we went to the movies to imagine what the future might be like, now cinema battles against that same future, made present, that it in part called into being. It is as though the myth of "total cinema" had come true, only not in a movie theatre but in the palm of our hands.

Of all these developments in the cinema's sensory arsenal, the crucial transition was the shift from black and white to color. After all, the talkie, famously, came about almost by accident: Al Jolson's line in *The Jazz Singer* (1927), "Wait a minute, wait a minute. You ain't heard nothin' yet!" was improvised, unexpected. The arrival of color, by contrast, was long anticipated, the fruit of countless experiments, much investment, and long hours of labour. There is immense nostalgia for the so-called "silent era." But there are few who have regretted the passage from monochrome to color. Ironically, this is despite the fact that silence perseveres in the cinema in a way that black and white does not: almost every film has its moments of silence, however raucous the soundtrack may be otherwise; but it is rare to see even snippets of monochrome. Despite its occasional resurrection in movies such as *Rumblefish* (1983), *Schindler's List* (1993), or *The Artist* (2011), black and white firmly marks the pastness of the past. It is as though only once it had mastered color could the cinema finally come into its own. Cinema has always dreamed in color.

In fact, cinema has always *been* in color. The "black and white" era seems that way only because the precarious pigments and dyes used to coat or tint early monochrome negative have often long faded. Many early movies were as gaudy as Greek statues, which we likewise today imagine to have been perpetually cast in muted greys. As, for instance, Tom Gunning's *Fantasia of Color in Early Cinema* shows, the truth is that (now in Richard Misek's words) "early films were alive with color" (*Chromatic Cinema* 16). Gunning's book showcases movies from before the First World War, alive with nymphs and acrobats, bizarre creatures and monsters, many in the most garish of hues. For from the very outset, film technicians strove to take the movies into a world of polychromatism. This was the era of what Gunning elsewhere calls the "cinema of attraction," closer to the fairground than the theater, which thrived before the drive to narrativization (plot, story, meaning) took hold in the hands of directors such as D. W. Griffiths ("The Cinema of Attraction"). As early as the 1890s, film-makers were laboriously hand-coloring individual frames of film to add to the spectrum of delights and wonders that the cinema could project. The most famous of these brief shorts are probably Edison's clips (such as *Annabelle Serpentine Dance* [1895]) of a dancer with a flowing gown and drapes that change color before our very eyes. Hand-painting continued for decades: in 1925, for instance, Sergei Eisenstein provided the ship on which the sailors mutiny in *Battleship Potemkin* with a vivid red flag by means of hand-colored celluloid. But producers looked for more efficient and effective ways to include color within the image, which led first to the use of stencils and then to tinting and toning. Within a couple of decades, the regular use of such processes meant that "by the early 1920s, between 80 percent and 90 percent of films were colored" (Misek 19).

Tinting involves dying the clear sections of the negative and so (essentially) replacing the whites with color; toning, by contrast, replaces the blacks. So the "black and white" era was as much "black and color" or "color and white," depending on the process employed. But in either case, in any individual frame only one color at a time featured (though of course different sequences could have different hues depending on the effect desired). The race was on to find a means to include multiple colors within the same frame, in a manner that was less labor intensive than hand-coloring or stenciling. There were many false starts. A patent was issued for a three-color motion picture system as early as 1889. Other experiments included Kinemacolor, a two-color additive process, which means that images were projected through two colored filters, which

combined on the screen to produce a relatively limited palette. Kinemacolor was developed by 1906, but it soon had a host of imitators and competitors, for instance Gaumont Chronochrome and Roux Color, Biocolor and the Horst Process. Kodachrome, the first successful subtractive color process (using a color negative), appeared in 1915. Cinecolor was a serious player in the 1930s, and on until the mid 1950s. But because these were all two-color systems--that is, they relied on combinations only two of light's three primary colors--they could produce a range of hues but not the entire spectrum. Accurate reproduction of flesh tones was a particular problem. Hence color was used less to reproduce the real world as it is, and more to indicate affective states that often go beyond what can conventionally be registered by the eye. An entire color code emerged, as film historian Scott Higgins outlines: "blue signaled night, red indicated fire and passion, magenta designated romance, green was used for nature and gruesome scenes, amber indicated lamplight, and so forth" (*Harnessing the Technicolor Rainbow* 2-3). Again, then, it was not so much realism as hyper-realism that drove developments. Eventually it was Technicolor Inc., founded by three graduates of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (hence the name), that, after two decades of experimentation with two-color systems, in 1932 finally achieved the cinematic holy grail of a viable three-color process, and so full-color picture. "Glorious" Technicolor had arrived.

This is not, however, to suggest some kind of linear progress or technological determinism in the long transition from painstaking brushwork hand-coloring to the possibility of mass-produced full color. If anything, indeed, the cinema had *dimmed* by the early 1930s: the earliest cinema was in fact *more* colorful than the earliest talkies. Or as Misek puts it, it was in "the mid- to late 1920s [. . . that] cinema--contrary to all models of historical evolution that one might apply to it--*became* black-and-white" (25; emphasis added). Indeed, Misek goes even further to argue that it was not until the 1930s, with the invention of true color, that "black and white film" as such was invented; in other words, that black and white were no longer treated as colors, but instead as the absence of color. It is as though the real challenge were first to conceive of and invent black and white film, as only then could the technology of full-color reproduction take off.

Pragmatically, the reasons why the cinema became black and white in the 1920s were both technological and social. In the first instance, the various colorization

processes in vogue interfered with film's technical devices for reproducing sound, its optical soundtrack. Moreover, in front of the camera, developments in lighting had established practices on set that were uncondusive to the immediate take-up of color reproduction. Colored lights, for instance, were often used to illuminate the *mise-en-scène* in ways that would look decidedly un-naturalistic in true color, though they were of course not perceived as such on black-and-white film stock. Most significantly, an entire monochrome visual vocabulary was by now in place, which color filming threatened. The forms of montage that now dominated privileged psychologically motivated links between shots and sequences, and so narrative emplotment over the pleasures of the spectacle itself. The danger was that the reintroduction of color might set film history (apparently) backwards, returning the movies to the age of attractions, with color garishly returning the audience experience to that of a fairground ride. So there was no consensus on how the new technology, seductive as it was, could best be put to use. This mattered all the more in that, as Misek further observes, with "the rise of Technicolor, color could no longer be added to a film as an afterthought; color films had to be shot in color" (27). Hence the adoption of Technicolor was far from automatic. Indeed, as film historian John Belton argues, "what is fascinating for the historian of technology about the invention, innovation, and diffusion of colour within the industry is the relatively lengthy time it took to occur" ("Cinecolor" 344). In fact, Belton notes, "it was not until 1955 that productions in colour outnumbered those in black and white." Or rather, we should say, it was over thirty years before color was *once again* dominant in the movies.

There would first have to be some kind of proof of concept, a film or series of films in which the possibilities of color reproduction could be explored and put to the test. And some films or types of films seemed more appropriate for such a test than others. It is no accident that the first full Technicolor film should be an animation: Walt Disney's *Flowers and Trees* (1932), which established a long association between the Technicolor Corporation and Disney, first of all through a series of so-called "silly symphonies." But as the series title suggests, these were presented as manifestly unserious, and they foregrounded music and mood over plot. Cartoons and color, it was felt, went naturally together. Live action, however, presented both technical and philosophical difficulties: technical, in so far as the lighting on live-action productions

was much more complex; but above all philosophical and even political as the cinema dared to establish itself as a "serious" medium. Yet within the panoply of film genres, there were some that still had more in common with the visceral thrills of the cinema of attraction, specifically those that film theorist Linda Williams calls "body genres," which "promise to be sensational, to give our bodies an actual physical jolt" ("Film Bodies" 2). These include horror, which makes us jump, and pornography, which turns us on, as well as melodrama, comedy, and musicals, which aim to move us to tears, laughter, and song. For the first several years of true-color, the technology would be associated with these "lower" film forms, and with the musical above all.

But "color" also refers, of course, not only to wavelengths of light but to anything that is perceived as particularly vivid or vital for whatever reason. Hence music, for instance, can also be described as expressing color (just as both sound and sight can be qualified in terms of "tone"). In other words, color implies much more than an incremental improvement in representational capacity. Color is an index of health: color in the cheeks indicates vitality as opposed to the sickly wan of the unwell. One of the first changes registered by a deceased human body is the draining of color from its skin tones. Color also, concomitantly, is an index of affect: rage, embarrassment, shame, cowardice, and envy are all chromatically marked in the medical or popular imagination. Color suggests personality, originality, and singularity: a colorful character is distinguished from his or her pale imitators or the grey ranks of besuited bureaucracy. Finally, then, color is a sign of culture, a distinguishing mark of difference and the thickness of experience.

Color, above all "local" color, is what tourists seek in their travels to escape the drab everyday: they search for the specific features or distinguishing marks of alterity cast in visual terms as "picturesque" or in affective terms as exaggeratedly lively. For Americans, such color--literal and figural, in clothing and handicrafts as well as music and food--could be found above all south of the border. In the 1930s, increasing motor car ownership, improved highways, and especially the efforts of the Mexican state led to a boom in mass tourism. Mexico's image started to shift from being the dusty site of lawlessness or backwardness to a potential treasure trove of interesting and colorful accents. And this shift in perception was strongly encouraged by Mexican officialdom and commercial interests alike. As historian Dennis Merrill notes, the director of the Mexican Automobile Association, invited to contribute a foreword to the 1933 *Motorist's*



*Guide to Mexico*, "touted his country as a land "rich in romance and history" yet 'young and vital,' with freshly-constructed highways, modernized agriculture, and shiny new industries" (*Negotiating Paradise* 70). Above all, Merrill tells us, small colonial towns such as the silver-smithing center, Taxco, thrived: "Its aged white-stucco and red-tile-roofed buildings; hilly, winding cobblestone streets; and overhanging balconies gave the town Iberian charm. Its central plaza and cathedral bespoke of a bygone era of colonial grandeur. The completion of the highway from Mexico City to Cuernavaca, Taxco, and Acapulco in 1931 delivered tourists by the busload" (71-2). Such fascination would soon find itself echoed on the silver screen, and what better setting than a provincial Mexican town for an experiment in color?

And so it was that the first full-color live-action movie was a twenty-minute short entitled *La Cucaracha*, released in 1934, and set in a bar somewhere in Mexico outside of the capital. The movie is a combination of musical, melodrama, and comedy, crafted as the ideal vehicle for the test of Technicolor. Yet Film critics and historians have tended to downplay the movie's plot: Higgins, for instance, calls it no more than a "trifle" (*Harnessing the Technicolor Rainbow* 32) and focuses instead extensively on the technical issues of color design. He does not even comment on the significance of the movie's setting. And it is true that, on the one hand, this is a movie in which plot is constantly overwhelmed by color. But this is precisely what is of interest here: the way in which the form and future of narrative film itself is under interrogation by the technical devices that the cinematic apparatus itself has unleashed. The way, in short, that affective color threatens to take over. Then, on the other hand, precisely as what Higgins calls both "a technical demonstration" and "an experiment in color aesthetics" (27), in many ways the true subject, the object to be represented, is not Mexico at all but the technology of representation itself. But this suggests a kind of inversion, which deserves at least as much analysis: that Mexico or a particular image of *mexicanidad* becomes the technical means by which color becomes visible. As such, for instance, historian Patrick Keating is more on the right track when he observes that the choice of Latin American locale was no accident, in that Technicolor's technicians were keen to "flaunt the process's ability to capture a wide range of skin tones." It is then in part for this reason that, Keating continues, "from *La Cucaracha* to *King Solomon's Mines* (1950),

filmmakers relied on 'exotic' subject matter to put the technology's skills on display, turning racial diversity into pictorial spectacle" (*Hollywood Lighting* 214).

It is worth noting, however, that none of the featured cast were themselves Mexican. The female lead, Steffi Duna, was a Hungarian relatively recently arrived in the United States, though she could "pass" sufficiently for Latina that she would go on to play similar roles later in films such as *Panama Lady* (1939), *Law of the Pampas* (1939) and *Girl from Havana* (1940). In these three movies she plays characters named, respectively, Cheema, Chiquita, and Chita. Here in *La Cucaracha* she is Chatita, a singer who fears she will be spurned by her dancer boyfriend Pancho because he is too busy wowing a Mexico City impresario who has come to the bar scouting for talent. The impresario, Señor Martínez, is played by an Italian, Paul Porcasi, whose career likewise demonstrated the Hollywood assumption that a whole range of swarthy foreigners were in effect phenotypically indistinguishable: he would go on to be French in *Café Metropole* (1937), Greek in *Crime School* (1938) Turkish in *Road to Zanzibar* (1941), but more reliably Latin American in *Hi, Gaucho!* (1935), *Juarez* (1939), and *Torrid Zone* (1940). The third featured actor, playing the inconstant boyfriend, was at least partly Hispanic: born José Paige in Albuquerque, New Mexico, he had ditched the Anglo surname and taken on the stage name Don Alvarado to fit in with the cinematic vogue for Latin lovers. Alvarado has been acting in the movies for a decade already, with parts in movies such as *The Bridge of San Luis Rey* and *Rio Rita* (both 1929), but would achieve perhaps more success behind the camera as production manager or assistant director, including on Latin American or Latino-themed pictures such as *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre* (1948), *East of Eden* (1955), and *The Old Man and the Sea* (1958), as well as the *Bronco* TV series (1958-59). By this time, though, he had changed his name again, to the hybrid Anglo/Latino, birth name / stage name Don Page. And of the more minor characters, only two of the actors were born in Mexico, notably the band leader Eduardo Durant, although several were Latino, as no doubt were plenty of the extras such as the other dancers in the bar. In any case, inadvertently or otherwise, the film presents a whole range of skin tones on which the camera might linger to demonstrate the Technicolor process's supposed fidelity to naturalism. Indeed the confusion or malleability of racial and ethnic difference in the Mexican setting might be part of its suitability for such a cinematic "color test."

Yet the film's claim to naturalism in its portrayal of skin and flesh (so long a problem for two-color processes) are further complicated first by the fact that the harsh lighting required for the slow speed of the film stock necessitated all the more dedicated make-up effects. Indeed, part of the contract that the studio signed with Technicolor stipulated the use specifically of Max Factor brand cosmetics, and the firm busied itself with developing a whole new range of products designed to complement and accommodate the new technology. More importantly still, the film recognizes and indeed highlights other ways in which flesh is mutable, in ways that mimic the effect that the movie itself has on its audience: affect takes hold of and transforms the body in ways that betray any attempts at conscious self-control. So when Chatita, the girlfriend, realizes that her boyfriend may be whisked out of town by the self-important musical promoter from the capital, she makes it her business to scare Señor Martínez off by any means necessary. Her initial stratagem involves a trick to ensure that the impresario's salad is laced with lashings of burning Tabasco sauce, playing on the visitor's gourmand pretensions by insisting that this is the way that the salad should by rights be eaten. Martínez tries to appear nonchalant as he eats the fiery mixture, but the camera moves in for a close up to show his face glow bright red as his body reacts involuntarily to the concoction. Color reveals the way in which affect involves physiological transformation. In turn, Chatita cannot help but laugh, providing a model for the spectator's own reaction to the spectacle before us as the would-be epicure (who only moments before was regaling his companion with an entire speech about how food should be best prepared) loses control and affect takes over. At the same time, Chatita herself in a comic (if conventional) reversal of both class and gender has proved herself too hot to handle.

Though the reddening blush on Martínez's face is motivated by the plot--as an embodied consequence of the food he has eaten and the trick Chatita has played--it is, at the same time, a trick of the light, part of a new arsenal of special effects available to the color film-maker. A red light has simply been brought close to the camera to illuminate the actor's features. Similar effects can be seen in other contexts throughout the film, and indicate both the power and potential of the new technology to conjure up affect almost literally from thin air, though this will be of the ways in which *La cucuracha* eventually proves something of a dead end for film history more broadly. For the frequent recourse to colored light proves somewhat overwhelming, a return at time

to the effect of tinting and toning, by which the entire frame was bathed in a single hue. Thus for instance, when Chatita initially overhears Martínez's plans for the evening, and so understands that her relationship with Pancho is in jeopardy, we see her face bathed in a green glow that none too subtly (and in line with the kinds of simplistic color codes of a decade previously) indicates her jealousy. Likewise, and even more strikingly, when she and Pancho subsequently argue they do so in a shot bathed entirely in red as a sign of the anger at play.

At stake is the distinction that Misek outlines between surface color and optical color, which is also the difference between subtractive and additive. Surface color is the hue on the surface of objects themselves, the color of paint and its primaries red, blue, and yellow; it is subtractive in that it is an outcome of the wavelengths that are absorbed or subtracted by the surfaces from which light reflects. Optical color is the color of light itself (and its primaries red, blue, and green); it is additive in that new hues are created by combining these primaries in differing proportions. Almost without exception, the cinema will subsequently stick to surface color and (as with most color photography) "balance for white" by ensuring that white light dominates on set or location. It is as though the film industry wishes to deny the materiality and potential (affective and otherwise) of light itself, even though this is the very fundamental of the apparatus: without projected light, the cinema screen would be forever no more than a blank space. In allowing, by contrast, colored light to take over at moments of heightened affect, *La cucuracha* draws attention to the technology and takes away from both plot and realist illusion alike. Though this is what the film sets out to do, as a showcase for what the technology can achieve, it also thus raises the specter that color may overwhelm the cinematic experience. To tame this threat, Natalie Kalmus, Technicolor's own color consultant and head of the corporations Color Advisory Service (whom the studios would have to hire as another part of their contract to use the technology) would subsequently publish what is effectively a manifesto for the use of color in which she declares that "natural colors and lights do not tax the eye nearly as much as man-made colors and artificial lights" ("Color Consciousness" 25). Kalmus's article, originally published in the *Journal of the Society of Motion Picture Engineers*, is entitled "Color Consciousness" but it might as well be a guide to ensure that the audience should *not* be conscious of color, that affect be normalized and not spill out beyond individual

character and a realist psychology that had been painstakingly elaborated during the brief preceding interregnum of black and white.

Failing in her bid to oust Señor Martínez by spiking his food, and enraged by the fact that Pancho has denounced her as a *cucaracha*, or cockroach, Chatita goes on to engage in a musical duel, drowning out Pancho's tune with her own show, backed by the rest of the bar. The duel transforms into an impassioned duet, as she dances out her aggression with her inconstant boyfriend in a feisty *pas à deux* that transforms the colorful folkloric spectacle of Pancho's own performance into something much more modern, jagged and angular, bursting with barely-contained violence. The song Chatita sings is, fittingly enough, "La Cucaracha," a traditional Mexican melody often appropriated to provide satirical commentary on topical events, whose chorus invokes a marijuana-addicted cockroach. In the aftermath of the Mexican Revolution, however, the song was particularly associated with the capricious partisans of Pancho Villa, the resentment of an underclass that Bartleby-like will fight only on their own terms. The Cucaracha's song is about lethargy, affectlessness, lack: "The cockroach wants to go no further; because he lacks, he has no marijuana to smoke." But, sung with such vituperation, this manifest mockery of affectlessness indicates the way in which everything else here in this film is in surplus: too much color, too much Tabasco, too much emotion, all on the verge of carrying the characters and the paper-thin plot away.

Pancho is outraged at the way in which his erstwhile girlfriend has disrupted his act. But it turns out (of course) that this intensity is precisely what the impresario wants. On the spot, Señor Martínez books the both of them for his capital-city nightclub. And intensity is clearly what Hollywood is seeking with this film. Dance, passion, hot food, hot women, drugs, love, jealousy, anger, conflict, and above all color, deep, saturated color. This film has it all. The Latin context and setting enable or justify it in spades, allowing a demarcated space (south of the border) in which affect can flourish, if only for the purpose of immunizing the industry as a whole against its potential contagion. Now in full color, cinema demonstrates how rapidly (and for both better and worse) it is becoming a highly efficient mechanism for the production and distribution--expression--of the affects. With the addition of color, cinema can now become a fully equipped expressive machine. Color, after all, is life itself, a property of the Real as opposed to its representation. With its entry into color, cinema could convince itself that it had ceased to be a purely representational medium. But the film industry reacts with

ambivalence and uncertainty to this experiment, and soon institutes rules both formal and informal (and in either case surprisingly long-lasting) that aim to put both color and affect in this place. But it is in and Latin America that it finds and projects the raw materials on which it works its modulation and intensification: upping the heat, heightening the tension, saturating with color.

In the end the plot such as it is of *La cucuracha* concerns an audition, indeed multiple auditions, as one audition (Pancho's) turns out to be two (Pancho's and Chatita's). Chatita takes over Pancho's performance, adding spice and life and so inadvertently becoming part of the spectacle. But the diegetic auditions that the movie portrays are doubled again by the fact that extra-diegetically the film shows off and tries out a new mode of representation for its cinematic audience and the industry at large. The film itself is an audition. Hollywood and Technicolor want to convince us and themselves of the uses to which this new color process can be put: they are looking to create a need for their machinic expression, to create a sense of lack within the audience, an addiction that only Technicolor can satisfy. From affective surplus and excess, to habitual desire premised on lack. But this is achieved only by first enveloping us in affective color, as Pancho envelops Chatita in his bright red serape, and by flirting with sensual excess, playing with the possibility that the show may be hijacked by a return to the cinema of attraction when narrative played second fiddle to visceral wonder, fear, and delight. Hollywood draws us in to its hyper-real, its dream of full sensual immersion, and it does so via its fantasy of Latin intensity. But it also seeks to distance us from the perceived dangers of this intensity by projecting it elsewhere, on a Latin American other that functions as a screen for its own technological doubts and anxieties at this period of its awkward institutional adolescence.

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