

speech, stipulating civil rights for all Americans throughout the USA.

In 2010 the intriguing documentary *Freedom riders* (Stanley Nelson) returns to the topic. The film is based on the book *Freedom Riders: 1961 and the struggle for racial justice* (2006) written by the American historian Raymond Arsenault. The documentary is about 400 courageous black and white Americans who challenged racist prejudices by travelling by bus and train, side by side during six months in 1961. The first freedom riders set out from Washington DC, May 4 1961, and they started without major trouble. However, when the two Greyhound buses reached Alabama May 14, the first bus was attacked by members from the Ku Kux Klan who set fire on it. The passengers managed to escape from the burning bus. When they were released from the hospital, they continued their mission by entering a new Greyhound bus (Lundell, 2013). In 1967, six years after the first freedom riders set out, the topic of racism was explicitly addressed in a today classic film. This time one wants to explore racist prejudices from its more subtle sides: interracial marriage. How liberal had American society become at the end of the 1960s?

The film *Guess who is coming to dinner* (Stanley Kramer, 1967) was an attempt to answer this question by bringing up the topic of interracial marriage. The film was a box office success, and was nominated for 10 Oscars (1 win, best actress in leading role, Katharine Hepburn), when it was released in 1967 (Rich, 2008). The film is about an upper-class elderly couple Christina Drayton (Katharine Hepburn) and Matthew Drayton (Spencer Tracy), who have raised their young daughter Joanna Drayton (Katharine Houghton) in a liberal way, mirroring their own political and social convictions. Matt is the publisher of a liberal newspaper in San Francisco, where they live, and Christina runs a gallery in the city. The plot unfolds in the beautiful house of the wealthy Drayton's, to which Joanna returns, for a day, with her fiancé Dr. John Prentice (Sidney Poitier), who she had met during a stay in Hawaii where John at the time attended a conference. Joanna returned with a specific aim, namely to seek her parent's approval to marry John.

However, Joey's new fiancé turns out to be black, to Matt's and Christina's revelation. Their liberal views are instantly challenged by this fact. The film aimed, as mentioned above, to raise the issue of interracial marriages. However it failed in its attempts, since the topic was considered to be outdated by many liberals at that time (Rich, 2008).

Another reason for its failure might have paradoxically have been that the film did not bring up the whole scope of the issue, because of considerations for a prejudiced audience who were not believed to be prepared to *see* passion between a black man and a white woman (Wartenberg, 2005: 232). Thus, there is a contradiction between the emancipatory aspects of the narrative and the visuals: we do not get to *see* any passionate affections between Joanna and John, except indirectly in a taxi's rearview mirror, which was followed by the taxi driver's (John Hudkins) facial reaction displaying disgust (Wartenberg, 2005: 229). Even though the issue of interracial marriages might have seemed a bit out of date at the time, this particular subject has got a renewed interest today by the publishing of Barack Obama's memoir *Dreams from My Father: A Story of Race and Inheritance* (1995) where he tells about how his white mother meets his black African father at the University of Hawaii, and of the memories of a dinner when his mother introduces her fiancé to her liberal parents (Rich, 2008). Thus, a dinner not unlike the one in *Guess who is coming to dinner*.

The aim of this essay is to further explore the cultural and social dynamics behind the plot and the characters in the film. With some aid from insights made in cultural and cognitive semiotics, film and social psychology, the role of stereotyping in *Guess who is coming to dinner* will be analysed. Cognitive semiotics is an unfolding field based on the conviction that problems dealing with such complex notions as meaning, need to be "transdisciplinary" (see Zlatev, 2012). Another aim of this essay is to illustrate this approach.

Cultural semiotics, social psychology and the importance of contextualising

In semiotics, the notion of *Culture* is used as a tool to analyse cultural encounters, as the pioneering work of the Tartu school, notably the work of Juri Lotman, introduced the term in the seminal work "Theses on the semiotic study of culture" in 1975 (Lotman et al., 1975; Cabak Rédei, 2007: 51–75; Sonesson, 2000). The notion of ego-culture, in one's own culture, determines itself in relation to other cultures, indeed it becomes a conscious entity in the encounter with the other culture. The object of cultural semiotics is "the study of the correlation of different sign systems" (Cabak Rédei, 2007: 52). Cultures might be defined as different systems producing specific artefacts (sign systems, or "texts" to

use a term elaborated by Lotman et. al., 1975) reflecting needs, interests and values of the culture in question. The term in-group, used in social psychology to define the group to which an individual considers to be a member of, is reminiscent of the term ego-culture although there are important differences. Ego-culture is used as an analytic tool that may be applied when analysing texts, films and so forth in order to explore differences between socio- and/or cultural groups. In social psychology the terms in-group and out-group are subject to experiments in order to display cognitive mechanisms behind human behaviour. Now, the term out-group in its turn has similarities with the notion of non-culture in cultural semiotics.

Non-culture (Cabak Rédei, 2007; Sonesson, 2000) may be defined as an "it" from the standpoint of the ego-culture. That is, the culture one (the ego-culture) only speaks about, and has no interest in, or knowledge to be on speaking terms with. In these latter cases prejudices are to prevail in the cognitive processing of the communicative act, and are not likely to change (for that, the opposite is required, namely dialogue). The term may be understood in the light of out-group in social psychology: the group that is subject to prejudices, (negative) attitudes, or cultural bound schemas through which we process contextual information (Aronsson et al., 2010: 432; Bartlett, 1997). Now, cultural bound perceptions are sometimes tied to stereotypes in use in the specific sociocultural context. And these stereotypes might be activated unconsciously as well as consciously. Recent experiments have shown, for instance, that stereotypes existing in the US regarding African Americans have not faded over the years from the time *Guess who is coming to dinner* was released in 1967, a film that gives us several good examples of how cultural stereotypes might be activated, as the plot unfolds. What does research tell us about the history of Black American stereotypes, and how might one define the notion of stereotype?

Stereotyping: a way of categorizing the world

Aronson and his co-workers (2010: 214–215) defined two types of attitudes in the human attempt to make sense of the world, through categorizing phenomena and objects in the environment: implicit and explicit. The first one is automatic (involuntary) and sometimes unconscious. It also seems as implicit attitudes are formed in childhood (Aronson et al., 2010: 214). As they are automatic the implicit attitudes have similarities

with the notion of automatic prejudice, connected in its turn to the narrower notion of stereotype (Aronson et al., 2010: 434), which is culturally bound. Moreover, these stereotypes are automatically triggered in situations when we encounter groups, or individuals, of which we have prejudices. Most commonly those groups consist of people from a different culture, or of people being of, for example, different ethnic backgrounds, or being homosexuals.

Explicit attitudes are those opinions that are plain and have their origin in adult experiences. In fact, on these grounds I would like to suggest that they have similarities with the notion of personal beliefs, a distinction used by Patricia G. Devine and Andrew J. Elliot (1995) in social psychology. Personal beliefs are by definition more or less negotiated in relation to socio-cultural norms that reign in society, and which we encounter the minute we are born into society. One of the important findings made by Devine and Elliot (1995) is that previous research on the topic of stereotypes and African Americans has failed to address the problem of discrepancies between stereotypes (implicit attitudes) and personal beliefs. Devine and Elliot criticized the so called Princeton trilogy, three studies conducted on the basis of a list of adjectives/stereotypes attributed to African Americans assessed in the first of these studies in 1933 by Katz and Braly, and later on confirmed by Gilbert (1951) and Karlins, Coffman and Walters (1969) (Aronson, 2010: 432). Thus, on the basis of this list and similar methodology the three studies suggested that stereotypes were fading in the US (Devine & Elliot, 1995: 1139).

Devine and Elliot (1995), by looking at the shortcomings of the instructions used in these studies on students at Princeton, came to the conclusion that these studies were not at all measuring stereotypes but rather personal beliefs, due to methodological flaws and outdated lists of adjectives regarding black Americans (for example "lazy" and "happy-go-lucky" being on the list 1933 as well as in 1969; Aronson, 2010: 432). By making corrections accordingly they got different results when studying students at University of Wisconsin showing that the Black stereotype, in the sense of knowing of, was not fading but was a constant variable (manifested in, for instance, media). On the other hand, they were able to show that personal beliefs regarding African Americans had improved substantially, and thus, white Americans today have to a lesser degree negative opinions of African Americans. Moreover, by assessing for levels of prejudice in their sample Devine and Elliot could show how high-prejudices' personal beliefs about African

Americans overlapped to a greater extent with the stereotypes, than was the case with low-prejudices. Nevertheless, the stereotypes were automatically triggered also in the latter group, but given enough time this sample could cognitively control the process and inhibit the stereotype (Devin & Elliot, 1995: 1147). Thus, their explicit attitudes (or personal beliefs) were decisive, not the stereotype.

A good example of this in *Guess who is coming to dinner* is when the mechanism is put into play in the scenes when Mrs and Mr Drayton meet John Prentice for the first time. They are both shocked, and react with silence when they understand that John is Joanna's fiancé. Thus the prejudices and the stereotypes are manifested non-verbally, but nonetheless their first reaction clearly shows that the situation was unexpected and yes, unwanted, by their facial expressions. In this scene the correlation between the silence (no sound) and the facial expression (visual) is an effective tool to convey the message: shock (which in this initial state of the narrative is negative). In the following, Mr and Mrs Drayton go into the former's study. Mr Drayton phones his secretary and asks her to check on John's background. Meanwhile John enters the study and explains to them that there will be no marriage against their approval, because John is not prepared to take on any "special problems" on top of those they will obviously have.

Mr Drayton: When you say special problems Dr Prentice, what do you mean?

Dr Prentice: Well ... your attitude Mr Drayton, and your Mrs Drayton.

Dr Prentice exits. Mr Drayton's secretary phones back and gives him the information he asked for: an impressive academic record. But it turns out that John is also a committed to the World Health Organization. Mr and Mrs Drayton are stunned and impressed by the news:

Mr Drayton (to his wife): Well...I can certainly understand why he had not much to say about himself ... who the hell would have believed him!

With these lines the stereotype is indirectly addressed. According to a list of stereotypes in 1969, African Americans were musical, happy-go-lucky, lazy, pleasure-loving and ostentatious (in Aronson, 2010: 432). As one may see, John Prentice did not match any of those stereotypes, on the contrary. In fact he rather fulfils the white

American stereotypes on the same list of that year: materialistic, ambitious, pleasure-loving, industrious, conventional (in Aronson, 2010: 432). So, on the one hand John fulfils the socio-cultural criteria for being a white American man, but on the other, addressing an important insight made by the film scholar Wartenberg (2005: 232–233), John is deprived of passionate drives normally attributed to African American men since Griffith's *Birth of a Nation* (1915) since there is only one scene in the film (in the taxicab) showing a romantic intimacy between the couple. It is interesting, though, to note that the stereotype "pleasure-loving", is attributed to both white and African Americans (in contrast to those on the same list regarding Japanese and Jews). However, it is not clear whether there might be a gender-blindness in those lists of stereotypes used in the studies here referred to (see, for instance, Devine and Elliot, 1995), a question important to consider in future research. Be as it may, after that phone call in Matt Drayton's study the initial attitude towards John changes.

As we have seen in the Mr Drayton's dialogue with his wife, stereotypes might be used indirectly—Dr Prentice's background does not fit the "vocabulary" commonly used when describing African Americans and therefore the stereotypes emerge non-verbally. Nevertheless, the words operate on a cognitive level (on the level of emotions and judging) and are implicit, but once given one or another expression words enter in to the realm of the dialogical word (the socio-cultural order), a paradigm established by Bakhtin and his circle.

The in-group, or the ego-culture is the locus of establishing stereotypes of the other belonging to an out-group. In connection with cultural semiotics we use two distinctions for defining the other: extra-culture (*Alter*) and non-culture (*Alius*). Extra-culture refers to the other with whom one is in dialogue, non-culture to whom one only speaks about (no dialogue is established). Thus, stereotypes are cultural artefacts operating in a socio-cultural context, sometimes used unconsciously, sometimes consciously. One may here rephrase the communicative act in terms of indirect discourse, the appropriation of someone else's word (the stereotype) into one's own discourse (Ponzio & Petrilli, 2013), likewise in a conscious or unconscious manner.

However, stereotypes may also be seen in the light of prototypes, or rather idealtypes. The notion of prototypes, according to the psychologist Eleanor Rosch, defines the best example of a category placed at the top of a hierarchy of other members of that category

(Sonesson, 1989: 67). The robin being a prototype for birds, the best suitable representative for the bird category (in contrast to for instance penguins, who cannot fly), is an example of this. However, Sonesson points out an important distinction between prototypes and idealtypes, the latter term containing exaggerated features that do not exist as such in the empirical world, and which may be combined in a way that do not necessarily pertain to "reality" (Sonesson, 1989: 72). For instance, the sociologist Max Weber may be said to have used idealtypes in order to make his point when studying religion and the economic man (Sonesson, 1989: 72). Idealtypes may also be connected to *types* as used by the phenomenological sociologist Alfred Schutz, who referred to Weber (Brodersen, 1964: x). Schutz writes:

Typification consists in disregarding those individual features in the typified objects, facts, or events which are irrelevant to the actual problem at hand. [...] For instance, we think of people as Frenchmen or Germans, Catholics or Protestants, aliens or neighbors [...]. Each of these terms designates a type, and all individuals falling within such a type are considered as being interchangeable with respect to the typified trait (Schutz, 1964: 239).

The result of typification may thus result in biasing the presence of certain features at the expense of others, depending on the situation and on demands (not necessarily confined to the empirical world, the ordinary world of everyday life). Hence, types are transformed into idealtypes. Features, as we have seen with the example of prototypical birds, come in clusters of two or more traits that usually are connected to a (proto)type. That way one feature may be used as a tool of inference in deciding what category an animal, for instance, may belong to. If the animal in question has fur, four legs and so forth, we may draw the conclusion that it belongs to the category of mammals. In semiotic terms we may formulate the problem as Sonesson does: "categorization is based on indexicality, in particular abductive contexts" (Sonesson, 1989: 73).

Hence, it seems as we might now conclude that stereotypes rather have similarities with the notion of (ideal)types, as they do not necessarily pertain to actual facts, than to prototypes as they have been defined by Rosch and Mervis (1981). When under cognitive load, people apply stereotypes to a larger extent when forming an opinion than when being more relaxed because it "frees mental capacity" (Fiske & Taylor, 2008: 271).

Moreover, stereotyping may be connected to emotions, in accordance with the opinion that cognitions influence the way people feel and behave (Fiske & Taylor, 2008: 284). Thus, emotions are involved when stereotyping. Certain moods have been connected to the readiness to stereotype. People tend to stereotype more when they are angry or happy, the first one for obvious reasons and the second one because people do not concern themselves to think things through. Moreover, people being sad stereotype less than in a neutral mood, because in the former case people are thinking harder than in the second (Fiske, & Taylor, 2008: 285). Stereotypes are also culturally and historically bound. A position of a group may vary over the time, and the stereotypes tend to follow, according to Fiske and Taylor (2008: 285). This is in line with Devine and Elliot in their study of black Americans (1995) showing that the stereotypes (in contrast to personal beliefs) have largely remained the same. That is also why several cultures, to give an example, define out-groups such as Jewish people and Chinese people as competent but not necessarily warm, because warmth and competence are stereotypes that distinguish groups according to the Stereotype Content Model (SMC) (Fiske & Taylor, 2008: 285). Connected to the stereotypes are "clusters of emotions" that influence and predict behaviours between groups. For instance, the in-group (ally) is viewed through a prism of emotions of pride and admiration (in contrast the out-group associated with emotions of envy, pity and disgust). Emotions, behaviours and stereotypes are results, according to SMC, of social structures such as status (connected to the stereotype competence) and competition (connected to the stereotype warmth) (Fiske & Taylor, 2008: 286). Thus: "Pride assimilates the other to the self, and admiration places the other above the self but still assimilates" (Fiske & Taylor, 2008: 287). This is what happened when Mr and Mrs Drayton learned about Dr Prentice's background in the scene in the study, described above.

Guess who is coming to dinner: an example of (stereo)typing and overcoming prejudices

After the first scene in the study, when Mr and Mrs Drayton are informed about Dr Prentice's impressive *curriculum vitae*, Christina readily accept this handsome and incredibly successful doctor as a future son-in-law. She is proud of the free spirit that rules over Joanna, who seems to be totally uninfluenced by the surrounding prejudices

against interracial marriages. In fact, Christina views Joanna as a perfect example of their liberal upbringing, something that she discusses with her husband. Thus, Christina assimilates (behaviour) John on the grounds of the in-group emotions pride and admiration, and Joanna might be said to be *kept* in the in-group on the same grounds (in contrast to be facing exclusion from the in-group as a consequence of her having a black fiancé). Now, John Prentice is more aware of the predicaments, the prejudices and the stereotypes connected to them, than both Joanna and Christina, and he understands the difficulties.

John is almost too good to be true. His is the perfect match, honest, calm and intelligent. When Matt enters the house his reaction to the news about the young couple is strong and adverse, as have seen. But a bit surprisingly perhaps, so is also the reaction of the black maid in the house, Tillie, who thinks that John should know his place in the world. And John, as a black man, not only breaks the *social norms* of the time, but he also deviates from the expected *social role*, behaving and having a position like a white man (Aronson et al., 2010: 287). Or as Tillie puts it: "I don't care to see a member of my own race getting above himself". In cultural semiotic terms Tillie expresses concerns about John transgressing the borders between their ego-culture (with which she identifies) and the extra-culture, which is here represented by white Americans. Tillie's reaction interpreted in cultural semiotic terms, differ from Wartenberg's (2005: 229) conclusion that her reaction, on the contrary, depends on her strong identification with the Draytons. Then, how do the Draytons relate to Tillie? Wartenberg (2005: 229) brings forth an important element in their relationship: the social and historical role given to many African American women of that time, namely that of being a maid in white American's households. That role is not called into question in *Guess Who's is coming to Dinner*, and therefore one might say that Tillie is left out from the problem the film is set to illuminate, that is, racism. Perhaps the question that Tillie represented was more difficult to handle for the contemporary audience than interracial marriages, because of the former being of concern of far more white Americans than interracial marriages? Wartenberg (2005: 229) touches upon the topic in this connection: "For even if Americans were suddenly to decide that skin color has no moral significance, there are structural aspects of racism that would not thereby be eradicated". Thus, these structural aspects of racism seem to have been overlooked by the filmmakers, perhaps for various reasons. One explanation

might perhaps be their own failure to see them.

Moreover, John knows exactly how to give a good impression, and he is intelligent enough to know what he is going to face when encountering Matthew. In fact, he anticipates him by behaving as an impeccable young white man would do in the same situation, only he does it twice as good. Thus, there rests no reason what so ever to reject John as the future husband of Joanna, besides the colour of the skin. Even Matt realises this during the face-to-face talk in his study. One might say that John, by skilfully managing cultural stereotypes, overcome them by refusing to be a victim of the same, instead Matt turns into be just that. From the point of view of social psychology one might say that John is engaging in *impression management* (Aronson et al., 2012). And from the point of view of cultural semiotics, one might say that John managed the cultural tools (that is knowledge of narratives and other semiotic artefacts in use in the American culture of the time) better than Matt, since John is a man of his times (Wertsch, 1998; Cabak Rédei, 2007: 72–73).

The film is also about generations, foremost the film deals with the sons debuting the old fashioned ways of their fathers, respectively. Thus one may speak about different cultures in time. Because, strangely enough, John's father Mr. Prentice holds the same adverse view towards the marriage as Mr. Dayton does. The film peaks when Joanna decides to invite John's parents to have dinner with them, and they decide to take a flight from Los Angeles the same night in order to meet the couple before John is supposed to go to Switzerland for one of his many important missions as a doctor.

John and Joanna go to the airport to pick up Mr. and Mrs. Prentice at the airport and as John expected they are also shocked when they realize that John's fiancée is white. Meanwhile, Matt argues, back in the house, with the old friend and priest, Monsignor Ryan, (who is in favour of the marriage) about all possible wrongs with the marriage and how he is finally going to put an end to it. Now, why is Matt suddenly so upset? Having realized all the qualities of John, he was not reluctant to at least consider the marriage. In psychological terms one might perhaps say that he was primed. Earlier he and Christina had taken the car into town and had stopped to buy some ice cream. Matt is clearly being nostalgic about the whole situation. In the parking of the drive-in-coffee shop there is a bunch of young men and women sitting around in the cars. The viewer gets to be aware of the contrast between Matt's generation and that of the young men. Not even the ice-

cream tastes the same, although Matt ends up accepting the new flavour and even likes it. When leaving the parking Matt accidentally backs into a car driven by a young black man. This young man gets very upset and shouts at Matt, who also loses his temper and scornfully gives the man 500 dollars (100 dollar more than the man asks for) to get his car repaired. After that incident Matt does no longer appear as a liberal man to the viewer and in the car on their way back home he says angrily to Christina: "What the hell is it today? Less that 12% of the people in this city are coloured people. I can't even have a dish of Oregon Boosenberry without runnin' into one of them!". His experience in the parking lot makes him pour scorn on John when back in the house, and this might be the explanation why Matt is completely unreasonable in his discussions with Ryan before dinner. The stereotype African Americans being ostentatious seems to be addressed in this scene, since the coloured young man is portrayed as being very fuzzy about his show-off car. The dialogue between the two was impossible from the outset and collapses in a quarrel. One might say that Mr Drayton was presumably more prompted to rely on automatic stereotypes since 1) he was in an angry mood (the black man driving the car was angry) and 2) the cognitive load was high (feeling of fear when he realized he had backed into the car). The question remains whether the young black man driving the car would have acted differently if Matt had not been a white middle-class man? Perhaps the young black driver considered Matt to belong to the group of "outside entrepreneurs" (viewed as rich and urban) and who trigger emotions such as envy and jealousy (Fiske & Taylor, 2008: 285–286)? In other terms, would Matt belong to the non-culture in terms of validation and intelligibility (socio-culturally) from the viewpoint of the driver? Hard to say from the scene.

Before the film resolves there are two seminal conversions leading up to the last scene in the film, which settles the plot. The first is the one that John has with his father, unmistakable set in Matt's study where he had his first conversation with Matt, which made such a good impression on the latter. This time we see another side of John, he shows anger and frustration with his father and the latter's attempt to dominate him and to tell how to live. His father thinks he has a right to that because of all sacrifices he had made for the sake of John. Mr. Prentice is presented as the hard working mailman who has given up everything for his son's education and future. John's reaction is intense:

You listen to me. You say you don't want to tell me how to live my life. So what do you think you've been doing? [...] Let me tell you something. I owe you nothing! If you carried that bag a million miles, you did what you're supposed to do! Because you brought me to this world. [...] You are 30 years older than I am. You and your whole lousy generation believe the way it was for you is the way it's got to be. [...].

Clearly, this is another side of John, speaking very harshly to his own father in flat contrast to the way he spoke to Mr. Drayton, although the two fathers hold the same view and belong to the same generation. Who is John? In the beginning of the film John is presented as being the perfect man, to the extent that he becomes a type of composite man, constituted of all good features we *attribute* to the successful Western white man, or the American dream in its quintessence. Overlooking the influence of the situation we would make the mistake of doing a *fundamental attribution error* (Aronson et al., 2010: 131), that is, to explain John's different behaviours with personality traits. That way, John would appear as a very contradictory person, indeed. Now, clearly the two situations are very different for John. It is not difficult to understand that he has to make a good impression on Mr. Drayton, in order for him to approve of the marriage. When it comes to his own father, John may be more honest about his frustration with the old generation and their attempts to impose their ways on the younger generation. This conflict comes forth when John ends the conversation with his father: "Dad, you are my father. I'm your son. I love you. I always have and I always will. But you think of yourself as a colored man. I think of myself as a man." With this words John suggests that his father goes out and look after Mrs. Prentice. The two scenes show that context is paramount in understanding motives behind people's behaviours. The importance of context is as crucial in cultural semiotic analyses as it is in social psychological studies, both fields attempting to understand the particular in a specific socio-cultural setting (the general).

The second conversation is between Mrs. Prentice and Mr. Drayton on the terrace. This conversations turns out to be decisive for Matt and for the resolution of the plot. Mrs. Prentice, as is Mrs. Drayton, is in favour of the marriage and asks Mr. Drayton if he with old age has forgotten what passion is and how it felt when he fell in love with Christina. These words made the self-assertive Mr. Drayton speechless, for the first time. He gathers the dinner guests and gives a moving speech about his inner journey and how he has come to understand that there is nothing more important than love in life. The scene (and

the film) closes with Matt's speech:

Anybody could make a case, a hell of a good case, against your getting married. The arguments are so obvious that nobody has to make them. But you're two wonderful people who happened to fall in love and happened to have a pigmentation problem, and I think that now, no matter what kind of a case some bastard could make against your getting married, there would be only one thing worse, and that would be if— knowing what you two are and knowing what you two have and knowing what you two feel—you didn't get married. Well, Tillie, when the hell are we gonna get some dinner?"

The closing lines encompass a paradox embedded in the film and which illustrates the its failure to spot the interrelation between social and political structures on the one hand, and racism on the other. Thus, I agree with Wartenberg's (2005: 228) claim that the problem with *Guess who is coming to dinner* is that the film understands racism as a result "of the prejudices of individual social actors". John's skin color and the prejudices tied to it are problematized with the aim to change negative attitudes in the audience (by making them to identify with the Draytons, as individual characters representing different social standpoints) towards interracial marriages. John is free to move and to get "above himself" as Tillie puts it—but Tillie is not, she is still the one to bring in the dinner.

Conclusions

The topic of the film is still relevant nowadays, if agree that some marriages are more readily accepted than others, and if we agree that breaking norms is still difficult. We see this almost everyday, when reading the newspapers. Marriages are impeded because of religion, sexuality and perhaps still because of "a pigmentation problem" as Matt expresses it in *Guess who is coming to dinner*. Social and cultural norms are strong and decisive and are not easy to break, and they are the locus for stereotypes and prejudices. Sometimes, perhaps, because we do not even see them (the stereotypes being unconscious and automatic) and sometimes because we realize how much it takes to negotiate them, and to break them, in terms of other people's prejudices and disapprovals. *Guess who is coming to dinner* illustrates that, in its failure to address

underlying structural social aspects of racism, summed up in Matt's ending speech. The reasons for that might have been considerations for the audience. If so, they succeeded—the film was a success. Another explanation might have been that the film-makers themselves did not spot the underlying problem: social structures at play within the ego-culture.

As we have seen, the scope of cultural semiotic and social psychology overlaps in both fields attempt to come to grips with how the socio-cultural setting influences prejudices and stereotypes in relations between groups, and in relation between the individual and the context. Secondly, this approach to analysing film has hopefully succeeded in shedding some new light on the problems of racism and prejudices addressed by *Guess who is coming to dinner*. Cognitive semiotics of today approaches social psychology also in another sense, namely methodologically by using experiments as empirical sources. Nevertheless, semiotics has also the tools to analyse artefacts such as for instance film (as has been done here), by attending to the expression side as well, not only to the mental. In sum: this essay was an attempt to integrate, in accordance with the “central task of cognitive semiotics” (Zlatev, 2012), the first person (subjective) perspective using conceptual analysis as method applied to norms (stereotypes) as displayed—verbally and non-verbally—in the film *Guess who is coming to dinner*. Other options suggested by Zlatev (2012) are to use second person (intersubjective) and/or third person (objective) perspectives by way of other methods (i.e., experimental set ups) such as measuring, for instance, degrees of empathy and/or brain activity. These possibilities might be considered for future research.

Would the audience still identify with the Draytons and their different struggles with prejudices fifty years after Kennedy's speech and 46 years after the release of *Guess who is coming to dinner*? Today we may say more readily that this is an “empirical question” that can be tested, scientifically in a lab.

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