

Joi-Noelle Worley  
Semiotics for Creators of Popular Culture  
Semiotic Analysis # 5  
Date: 3.4.14 | Revised 5.14.14  
Media: Horton Hears A Who (2008) | Image



**Signifier:** JoJo is the signifier in this image. From the perspective as a fellow filmmaker, I applaud the relevance the animators achieved even if it was unintentional.

JoJo is the character with the least amount of saturation. He's black and white. His monochrome pattern even mimics that of cartoony jail cell stripes. Because of this, he seems out of place since the world of Whoville is a colorful place, and black and white is the least impressive colors one could have. His hair is somewhat disheveled and his disposition is unconfident. He's also the smallest person in the room as it nearly swallow him.

**Signified:** The rows and rows of endless framed pictures of the preceding lineage of mayors literally paint a picture of tradition, history, and culture in a seemingly never ending hallway. JoJo's father, the Mayor, is also a signifier in a more humorous way. His disposition is whimsical and joyous. He's off in his own world of picturing the future of "mayor-dom." He's not looking his son in the eyes so he can't see his unenthusiastic expression.

**Overall Sign/Metaphor:** With his small size and jail striped clothing, JoJo is being swallowed by the traditions of becoming mayor by his disillusioned father.

**Image:** The Mayor, Jojo, scores of paintings and pictures on the wall, flower pots symmetrically in line.

**Symbol/Index/Icon:** Frames can be a representation for something time honored. People frame things because they want to protect the memory and preserve it. The frames in this image almost seem to go on forever symbolic of the overwhelming sense the traditions carry.

**Jail Cell Stripes:** Since none of the people in Whoville wear clothes, their fur has become their clothing. For the Mayor, his clothes resemble a blue and white collared suit, fitting for his position. But JoJo's resembles that of classical cartoon jail uniform: black and white stripes. This is reflective of JoJo feeling of being imprisoned by his father's expectations.

**Denotation:** This is a room with thousands of predecessors in the mayoral line. The current Mayor is telling his son what his job is like while recounting those who came before.

**Connotation:** The Mayor is painting the picture of his son's future, oblivious to the fact that JoJo wants to create a future for himself. The Mayor has such great expectations that he can't see that JoJo really doesn't want his career of being Mayor.

**Synchronic Analysis/ Diachronic Analysis:** In American culture, the mayor holds the position of a glorified city president. In Whoville, the mayor is treated the same way. The contrast lies in who is the next successor. In Whoville the title of Mayor is given to the firstborn son; whereas, in our world, the person who receives the most votes becomes mayor. It's the tradition in Whoville that the position of the Mayor be succeeded by an heir, sort of like a monarchy. JoJo doesn't have that much of a choice here.

**Syntagmatic Analysis:** In the scene before this, the narrator clearly says that JoJo doesn't want his father's career. This allows the audience to know something that the Mayor doesn't and to sympathize with JoJo. Had the narrator not said that, we could assume that JoJo is just a rebel teenager who doesn't respect his father. This simple statement lets us know JoJo's thoughts and tells us that he's not rebellious, just misunderstood.

**Paradigmatic Analysis:** Had JoJo been just as colorful as the other citizens of Whoville, he would blend in with everyone else. The fact that he's a bit more gothic in style than most makes

us as the audience remember him specifically from all the rest. We know who he is in comparison to the Mayor's other 99 daughters who all look alike.

JoJo is the Mayor's only son. So not only is he one in a sea of girl faces but his father pays extra attention to JoJo because of that fact. Had JoJo been a girl, this scene wouldn't have taken place since the mayor gives each of his daughters mere seconds of his time, but JoJo gets a full scene with him. He also doesn't speak. The fact that JoJo doesn't verbalize his thoughts is significant because had he spoken regularly he could have told his father plainly that he doesn't want his job.

The Mayor cares a great deal that JoJo follows in his footsteps. Had the Mayor been passive and nonchalant, JoJo wouldn't feel pressure to make his father extremely proud. It's the Mayor's relentless enthusiasm that makes JoJo tongue-tied. In the ending of the film JoJo and the Mayor share a lovely moment where the Mayor lets him know that no matter what happens, "[he] couldn't ask for a better son." Up until this point, JoJo hadn't felt freedom to be himself or speak until this moment.

**Codes/Ideology:** "Like father like son." The Mayor is trying to tell him all the perks of being Mayor, prepping him to follow in his footsteps.

**Structuralism/Auteur Theory:** In terms of image design, this is a very effective image in this animated movie. The element of repeated frames at a one point perspective make it seem the

hallway of frames goes on forever to the point where it can be overwhelming. And that's what needs to be implied for JoJo's character: the mayor, his father, is unintentionally imposing his will on his son. The frames are overwhelming and so are his father's expectations.

**Obfuscation:** JoJo is claimed to be the smallest person in Whoville. While his desaturated colors make him stand out due to the lack of color, it come in very handy for when he sneaks out at night to go to the abandoned observatory outside of town to be alone.

Also, I propose that JoJo refuses to speak because it's his way of coping and hiding from his fear of disappointing his father.

**Jingoism/Interpellation:** JoJo is a relatable character for youth who feel like their parents project their expectations of destiny onto them. Moreover some parents have good intentions for their children, but the kids themselves don't have the courage to speak up because they don't want to disappoint their parents.