
SPIDER-MAN
ANATOMY OF AN ICON
intra
TEAM VISIO

TEAM VISIO

SPIDER-MAN

ANATOMY OF AN ICON

intra



Visio & Pop Icons Series



Edizioni Intra®
www.intrapublishing.com
info@intra.pro

All rights reserved.
Copyright © 2025 Intra S.r.l.s. – Pesaro, Marche, Italy

ISBN 979-12-5991-798-0

Contents

CONTENTS 3

INTRODUCTION. THE IMPERFECT HERO 4

PART I. THE BIRTH OF A MODERN MYTH (1962–1973) 7

Chapter 1. Stan Lee, Steve Ditko, and the Invention of the Everyday Hero 8
Chapter 2. The Spider and the Test Tube: The Symbolism of a Scientific Hero 15
Chapter 3. "With Great Power Comes Great Responsibility" 23

PART II. SPIDER-MAN BETWEEN COMICS AND SOCIETY 29

Chapter 4. New York and the Fourth Estate: The Hostile City 30
Chapter 5. Enemies as Mirrors of Trauma 39
Chapter 6. The Masked Body and the Visual Revolution 49

PART III. THE SCREEN: FROM TELEVISION TO GLOBAL CINEMA 57

Chapter 7. The Japanese Detour: *Supaidāman* (1978) 58
Chapter 8. *Spider-Man* (2002): The Body of the Myth and New York's Wound 64
Chapter 9. The Rights War and Reinventions (Garfield & Holland) 71
Chapter 10. *Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse* (2018): The Plural Icon 78

PART IV. ANATOMY OF AN ICON 83

Chapter 11. The Psychology of the Hero: the Atlas Complex 84
Chapter 12. Visual Language: Poses, Lines, and Sounds 87
Chapter 13. Eternal Adolescence 90
Chapter 14. Pop Culture, Memes, and Video Games 94

CONCLUSIONS. THE MASK THAT CONCERNS US 101

LEGAL NOTICE 103

Introduction.
The Imperfect Hero

Spider-Man is born in an unusual place for a hero: not on a sacred mountain, not in a lost kingdom, not in a mythological dimension. He is born in an ordinary neighborhood, among anonymous buildings, fire escapes, cramped apartments, and problems far too large for the age of those who face them. He is a "proximity" superhero, as we might say today: he does not dominate the world from above, he moves through it up close; he does not rule, but navigates the folds of everyday life. He is not a god, not a king, not an unattainable symbol. He is, first and foremost, a neighbor.

This closeness is his distinctive and revolutionary trait. When Spider-Man first appears in the early 1960s, the superhero landscape is still dominated by exceptional figures: superior beings, infallible billionaires, icons of power and certainty. Peter Parker, by contrast, is an ordinary teenager: a brilliant but awkward student, socially invisible, economically fragile. His body is not armor, but a problem; his mind is not a certainty, but an unstable laboratory; his life is not a mission, but a continuous negotiation between what he should do and what he would like to be. Spider-Man introduces a radical novelty: the superhero not as a solution, but as a complication.

His founding gesture is not a calling, but a mistake. Spider-Man is not born from destiny, but from guilt. The defining event is not the acquisition of powers, but the decision not to use them at the right moment. Uncle Ben's death is not a sacrifice necessary for the hero's birth: it is an irreparable wound, a moral failure that cannot be erased. From that moment on, every action Spider-Man takes is a belated response to an original error. He does not fight evil out of vocation or glory, but out of reparation. Being Spider-Man means carrying a debt that can never be paid off.

This is where the famous formula of responsibility finds its true meaning, often reduced to a slogan but in reality deeply tragic. "With great power comes great responsibility" is not a promise of greatness, but a sentence of renunciation. It means that every choice has a cost, that every intervention

entails a loss, that no balance is possible between private life and heroic mission. Spider-Man is the hero who always pays: in time, in relationships, in stability, in happiness. His greatness lies not in victory, but in perseverance; not in triumph, but in the ability to get back up without ever feeling absolved.

For this very reason, Spider-Man is perhaps the most human icon of the twentieth century. In a century marked by the collapse of certainties, by the crisis of traditional authorities, by the emergence of fragile and contradictory subjectivities, Spider-Man embodies a form of heroism compatible with modernity. He is powerful, but not invulnerable; extraordinary, yet always inadequate; masked, but never truly hidden. His mask does not separate him from the world, but allows him to remain part of it. Beneath the costume there is not an unreachable myth, but an ordinary person who could be anyone.

Spider-Man does not ask us to believe in him as an absolute ideal. He asks us, more simply and more harshly, to recognize ourselves in his fatigue. He is the hero who does not promise salvation, but responsibility; not order, but precarious balance; not power, but choice. And perhaps this is why, decades later, he continues to speak so powerfully to different generations: because he does not represent what we would like to be, but what we are when we try, despite everything, to do the right thing.



The history of Spider-Man

Chapter 8. *Spider-Man* (2002): The Body of the Myth and New York's Wound

When Sam Raimi's *Spider-Man* reaches theaters in 2002, the character already carries forty years of comic-book stratifications, yet cinema has not truly assimilated him. Earlier attempts—long stuck in development—had revealed how difficult it was to translate to the screen a hero so physical, so urban, and so inwardly fragile. Raimi confronts this challenge by choosing a path that seems countercurrent: he does not modernize Spider-Man, does not ironize him, does not deconstruct him. Instead, he rebuilds him as a classical myth, relying on a clear, almost archetypal narrative, capable of making the character immediately legible even to a non-specialist audience.

Raimi's film gives Spider-Man a fully cinematic body—heavy, present, tangible. The camera lingers on the hero's physicality, on the effort of movement, on the weight of falls, on the pain that accompanies every confrontation. There is not yet the hyper-fluid digitality that will characterize later superhero cinema: Spider-Man runs, jumps, swings with a certain awkwardness, as if his body must each time persuade space to support it. This choice is consistent with the comic-book tradition and, at the same time, profoundly cinematic. The hero is not a special effect, but a body that suffers.

Onto this physical foundation Raimi grafts a strong melodramatic component, which becomes the true backbone of the film. Spider-Man is not merely an origin story, but a romantic tragedy. The central conflict does not simply oppose hero and villain, but love and duty. The relationship between Peter Parker and Mary Jane Watson is constructed as a promise continually denied, a desire that must be sacrificed on the altar of responsibility. Raimi—an author shaped by classical American cinema and Gothic horror—recovers an intense emotional dimension, almost out of fashion, which renders the film surprisingly serious in its ethical framework.

This seriousness emerges powerfully in the portrayal of the antagonist as well. The Green Goblin is not only a spectacular foe, but a tragic figure, bound

to Spider-Man by an affective and symbolic tie. The final battle is not a celebration of strength, but a painful clash between two models of power and responsibility. Once again, the film insists on the cost of heroism: to win means to lose something irreparable.

All of this acquires even deeper meaning when placed in the historical context of the film's release. *Spider-Man* arrives in theaters only months after the attacks of September 11, 2001, in a city still visibly bearing the wounds of trauma. New York is no longer merely a narrative setting: it is a wounded, vulnerable city in need of consolation. Raimi and the production suddenly confront an unexpected limit of spectacle. Certain images, conceived before the attacks, become abruptly untenable.

The most emblematic case is that of the initial trailer—later withdrawn—in which Spider-Man captures a criminal helicopter, suspending it between the Twin Towers. That sequence, conceived as a spectacular demonstration of mastery over urban space, becomes, after September 11, an image impossible to show. The heroic gesture comes too close to an open wound. Cinema, for once, is forced to step back, to acknowledge a boundary it cannot cross.

This withdrawal is not merely an act of commercial prudence, but a powerful cultural signal. Spider-Man suddenly comes to embody a new function: no longer only to entertain, but to accompany a collective processing of trauma. The film avoids gratuitous destructive spectacle and instead insists on images of solidarity, protection, and community. The hero does not dominate the city from above, but stands alongside its inhabitants. He becomes a figure of comfort rather than vengeance.

In this sense, *Spider-Man* (2002) marks a crucial passage in the history of superhero cinema. It demonstrates that the urban hero can be not only spectacular, but also empathetic; not only powerful, but responsible toward the audience's gaze. Raimi restores Spider-Man to his original role as a "neighborhood" hero, capable of speaking to a wounded community without exploiting its pain.

The film's success lies not only in its fidelity to the character or in the quality of its special effects, but in its ability to intercept a deep need of its time. In a moment of collective disorientation, *Spider-Man* offers an image of sober, imperfect, human heroism. A hero who does not promise absolute safety, but presence. And who, precisely for this reason, succeeds in embodying the body of a myth capable of adapting to trauma without betraying itself.



***Spider-Man* (2002) – © Marvel / Columbia**

Title	*Spider-Man*
Director	Sam Raimi
Year	2002
Country	United States
Running Time	121 minutes
Genre	Fantasy / Superhero / Action
Production	Columbia Pictures / Marvel Enterprises / Laura Ziskin Productions







Full-color edition with QR codes



intra

Collana Visio