

## PLAY IT AGAIN, SPIDER-MAN: IN DEFENSE OF REPETITION

Through years of exposure to soft-spoken podcasts and college students that believe the Wes Anderson posters hanging in their dorms fundamentally prove they're better people than you, I've been trained to believe that sophisticated people turn up their noses at the sight of a Spider-Man movie. Spider-Man movies are tacky and tasteless to sophisticated people, like cold pizza or ABC shows that claim to be unscripted. But I love a refrigerated slice of Little Caesars, I've happily spent entire Saturday nights watching *The Bachelor*, and I love—I love—Spider-Man movies. My love for Spider-Man movies has genetically altered my DNA. If you were to do an extreme, cinematic zoom through one of my blood vessels (you know, like they always do in Spider-Man movies), you would see a million tiny, over-saturated screenshots of Tobey Maguire's pained face.

I was only seven years old when Sam Raimi's *Spider-Man 2* first premiered, and I wasn't allowed to see it in theaters. Later that year, my dad came home with a copy on DVD. He would pull a laundry basket into his room and let *Spider-Man 2* play in the background while he sorted and folded pajama sets. My sister and I watched the movie again and again, perched on the edge of our parent's bed frame. At one point, she and I had played the DVD so many times that it was past watch-ability. We tried to repair the scratched and smudged disk with elaborate home remedies, including licking it and smearing it with peanut butter.

At twenty years old, I've already lived to see three different live-action Spider-Man sagas. Each one comes with a few predictable, well-worn tropes: girls that inexplicably still like wearing headbands as much as their 1950s counterparts; a character painfully attempting to

rephrase the line, “With great power comes great responsibility,” is always a must; and a couple dozen people in the audience of any given screening that are muttering, “Ugh, I’m *so* sick of origin stories,” under their breath never fail me.

A few months ago, Christopher Ford, one of the screenwriters of *Spider-Man: Homecoming*, explained the inspiration behind the film's biggest plot twist, in which an important character in Peter Parker’s life is revealed to also be a villain that terrorizes New York City in his downtime. "A surprise/coincidence like that is a genre element of Spider-Man movies," he said. "There have been so many at this point that as we wrote it, we were always playing against or playing with the genre of ‘Spider-Man movie,’ almost as clearly as if it was a western, and the audience was expecting a gunfight.” Repetition gives us the ability to build on the human canon, for better or worse. It allows us to uncover tropes and cliches that otherwise might go unnoticed, and to teach ourselves what to expect and then tear down those expectations and develop new ones, almost like building muscle.

Certain stories can become so familiar that they have a comforting power in times of uncertainty, like turning on a repetitive sitcom in your hotel room. Other media resonates with us in a way that makes us want to download it into our mental hard drives, as we memorize passages of *Hamlet*, or every lyric of Lorde’s new album. It might not be Spider-Man, but each of us has at least one story, one piece of writing, art, music, or film that we’ve chosen to make a part of us, ensuring through repetition that the sounds and images, messages and ideas don’t have the ability to leave us ever again. The media we choose to love again and again and again becomes a part of our DNA, and, if we let it, it has the capacity to make us stronger.