



Unhomed: Cycles of Mobility and Placelessness in American Cinema



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Chapô

In this rich cultural history, Pamela Roberston Wojcik examines America's ambivalent and shifting attitude toward homelessness. She considers film cycles from five distinct historical moments that show characters who are unhomed and placeless, mobile rather than fixed—characters who fail, resist, or opt out of the mandate for a home of one's own. From the tramp films of the silent era to the 2021 Oscar-winning *Nomadland*, Wojcik reveals a tension in the American imaginary between viewing homelessness as deviant and threatening or emblematic of freedom and independence. Blending social history with insights drawn from a complex array of films, both canonical and fringe, Wojcik effectively "unhomes" dominant narratives that cast aspirations for success and social mobility as the focus of American cinema, reminding us that genres of precarity have been central to American cinema (and the American story) all along.

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