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## Preliminaries

“Sitting on a park bench, eyeing little girls with bad intent. Snot running down his nose, greasy fingers smearing shabby clothes.” For fans of classic rock, these lines should be familiar. They open the band Jethro Tull’s 1971 tune called “Aqualung” and are part of the description of the homeless man who had something like a tuberculotic lung condition that caused his phlegmy breath to rattle (the “aqua” in his lungs). The image of Aqualung on the original album cover is of a man with long snarled brown hair, wearing a long overcoat, bent over in an urban alley near a wall with graffiti and handbills, his face looking a bit maniacal and his posture appearing defensive.<sup>1</sup> Tull’s Aqualung character, in both the lyrics and the image, mirrors common stereotypes of the homeless—poor hygiene, disheveled and dirty clothes, a danger to children, physically and probably mentally ill, and generally a haunt of our urban worlds. In fact, this hews closely to the classic images and interpretations of the homeless across the academic, artistic, and public worlds (Desjarlais 1997, 1–5). While most stereotypes are challenged and changing these recent years, our imaginings of the homeless have not been put under fire and critically evaluated all that much yet.

Homelessness and the homeless, as process and social group respectively, have long been with us (Glasser and Bridgman 1999, 2–6). Since the beginnings of the modern era and capitalism in the 1500s, people have been landless, homeless, wanderers, itinerants, and poor (Cresswell 2006, 1–24). Scholars in recent years who focus on post-1980 homelessness, usually in urban milieus, often seem to assume that contemporary forms are markedly different from (and more socially problematic than) the modes of homelessness that existed in the past. Hobos and itinerant workers of the early twentieth century, for example, almost seem quaint for some when compared to today’s seemingly more dire-straits mix of children, drug-addicted adults, and psychologically traumatized people who seem to many

observers to comprise the bulk of the urban homeless population (Wagner 1993, 5–10).

As a history-minded person, I am not inclined to emphasize how something today is far worse than it was in the past, whatever we might be talking about. The homeless and homelessness are no exception. Rather, I see homelessness as a necessary social trajectory or arc across the history of us and our capitalist society that changes across time while involving people of almost all backgrounds, classes, and identities. In fact, homeless people across the centuries have been important subgroups within the wider social stratum that Marxist thinkers call the Reserve Labor Army, who were as guided as anyone by their choices, decisions, and social standing, and by external conditions well beyond their control. The complex world of the past 500 years, which we often identify with capitalism or systems on their way to becoming capitalist, seems to perpetually create and re-create social, physical, and economic spaces for homelessness and a homeless population. In fact, capital, and its economy-dominated social systems, has never relented in perpetuating homelessness. This is partially because as part of the Reserve Labor Army, the homeless exist as social pressures on workers by looming as potential scabs, to use the language of labor unions, and simultaneously standing as glimpses of those workers' own possible futures if they were to cease working for wages. Homelessness and its embodiment in real people are a threat and compelling motivation to conform to work-a-day life and to rely on capitalists for wages and our possessions, including our houses.<sup>2</sup>

An appreciable number of people—no doubt hundreds of millions—across the past 400+ years were homeless. That means that for the historical archaeologist, they are a significant and pronounced aspect of modern U.S. history up to today, and we should consider focusing our attention on them and associated systemic processes, like class struggle, economic crises, and diasporas. And yet we in historical archaeology are a long way from giving homeless people their place in our research and conceptualizations of modern history.

The homeless, as such, do not exist without the seemingly opposite phenomenon and concept of the home—this is a basic and simple premise of the dialectical perspective I develop in this book. If homelessness and being homeless is so significant in the negative, what is so important about the home, then, in the positive? I can find no better summary of what I consider a typical understanding of the significance of home than in Mathew Desmond's work on poverty and homelessness, *Evicted*. In that

book (Desmond 2016, 293), he states the following: “The home is the center of life. It is a refuge from the grind of work, the pressure of school, and the menace of the streets. We say that at home, we can be ‘ourselves.’ Everywhere else, we are someone else. At home, we remove our masks. The Home is the wellspring of personhood. It is where our identity takes root and blossoms, where, as children, we imagine, play, and question, and as adolescents, we retreat and try. As we grow older, we hope to settle into a place to raise a family or pursue work. When we try to understand ourselves, we often begin by considering the kind of home in which we were raised.”

Desmond (2016, 294) adds the following comment to round off his statement on the significance of home in the United States: “America is supposed to be a place where you can better yourself, your family, and your community. But this is only possible if you have a stable home.” If what Desmond writes here is indicative of commonly held opinions and views of the weight and significance of home, then we have our answer as to why home is so important. It is at once an anchor, a center of selfhood and identity, a refuge from the world, a place we can be real or true to ourselves, and much else.

When compared with the word homeless, it is curious that it is not in our everyday language to speak of being “homed” or “homeful.” If you do not have a home and can stake no claim to one, there is the word and social label of homeless that people will use to describe and even define you. But if you do have a home, there is no single word in *common usage* that denotes this state of social and economic existence. We must ask some questions about the home and the social significance of it if we are going to discuss the homeless. While archaeologists have studied home sites of various kinds across the modern era—surely, multiple thousands have been excavated—they have largely been explored as houses or households more than they have been analyzed as homes. The difference between the notion of home and house is important. Some of that difference is elicited in old clichés, such as “home is where the heart is” and “a house does not make a home.” Home, for many, is a kind of loaded experiential, complexly symbolic, patently economic, and chronically existential idea, as Desmond suggests. And few would argue with the statement that home is an essential part of the American Dream and central to the American Experience. And yet, for so many people, the home, today and yesterday, is a place that is not welcoming, not safe, not a refuge from the world beyond, and not a place of freedom. Contrary to the warmth of the home, as suggested by Desmond,

for many, their home (or a home) has been a hellish, nightmarish place in their lives.

We care about the words we use to communicate our ideas. Home and homeless are commonplace terms that everyone knows (however differently they may define them). They are somewhat universal terms and seem clear in their meaning. However, I am going to modify them for the bulk of this discussion. With home, I will be using it and related formations additionally as a verb and adjective—homed, as in possessing or having a home or, in adjective form, as a descriptor for such a person or people as a group. For the term homeless, I am going to primarily use the term “unhomed,” as a noun, verb, and adjective. Unhome is the state of existing without a home while unhomed will work similarly to its counterpart, homed. In the case of unhome and unhomed, I am following my instinct here that the term homeless *passively* defines someone or a group because they lack a home. Unhomed brings with it an active mood and helps remind us that people can lack homes for reasons beyond their control *or* because they intend to or willingly accept that mode of living. That state of existence, like homed, is decidedly active wherever it is practiced and lived.

### **The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly of Home and Unhome**

Several years ago, news broke about the three girls who had been kidnapped and held captive for over a decade by Ariel Castro in his home in Cleveland. The adult Castro held them in his home as prisoners, where regular aspects of their lives were characterized by pedophilic rape, violence, forced miscarriages, and periods of being in chains. It all happened in a normal-looking two-story house at 2207 Seymour Avenue, which was demolished later because of the horrors that occurred within its walls and under its 45-degree-pitched roof. It was home for Ariel Castro, and it was an unbidden home for those girls.<sup>3</sup> I remember feeling a deep helpless sadness for those girls as the details of their captivity emerged over a few weeks. I was jarred by what it said about America and what goes on in the houses, homes, and buildings of this vast country. I was also forced to think about communities and neighborhoods across the land, and those in which I have lived, including Cleveland during my first year on this planet. I began remembering those conversations I had with many different friends over the decades who confided to me their memories of sexual, physical, and psychological domestic abuse—sometimes once but most often repeatedly—at the hands and bodies of uncles, parents, neighbors, husbands, wives, and

friends, most often in their own home. I thought of movies, such as *Psycho*, *Halloween*, *The Burning Bed*, *Silence of the Lambs*, *Mystic River*, and *American Beauty*, that have captivated people for decades about the dark and often perverse underbelly of lives lived within American homes in urban, rural, and suburban communities and locales.

Domestic violence is a well-known and experienced fact of life for millions of people who can be described and self-identify with so many different social positions—women, men, boys, girls, LGBTQI, elders, differently abled, White, Black, and many others. As Rachel Louise Snyder’s remarkable work, *No Visible Bruises* (2019), shows, domestic violence is a prevalent mode of “terrorism” (Snyder 2019, 17) that can have physical, sexual, privational, emotional, and psychological impacts on identity, health, life, and senses of self-worth among its victims. This mode of domestic terrorism is surely as woven into the fabric of home existence as are the emotional, warmth, security, freedom, hope, well-being, and sanctuary qualities of home life that seem to dominate national narratives as well as many of our individual beliefs about home and being homed.

Having a house and home is so much a part of the American Dream. Yet so much nastiness has occurred in them that one has to wonder why it is that having a home is so central to American yearning and ambition. Our houses not only manifest the American Dream but also are essential to the material world in which we live, create, and experience: a house becomes and persists as a home to its occupants. Material culture, in the form of these domestic buildings and the possessions we hold within them, is elemental in our ideas about what it means to be a (however modestly) successful American. I wonder, again, how the almost glowing myth of the American home has persisted (“home is where the heart is,” “home, sweet home,” etc.) when we have so much evidence, such as the recent Cleveland imprisonment crimes, that homes are historically also places of depredation, criminality, violence, abuse, and much else that we abhor and condemn. The privacy of houses and their homes, and the spate of laws and customs that privilege that privacy, can work to hide modes and instances of domestic terrorism within. Focusing on the good, the bad, and the ugly aspects of house and home, I believe, will help us understand the home and the homeless more clearly.

In many academic, liberal, policy making, government, and social services quarters, unhomedness is seen as a social problem that is best challenged by finding housing and homes for the unhomed—through programs, welfare assistance, self-improvement programs, or employment.<sup>4</sup>

For my part, I do not understand the homeless or homelessness to be a social problem in the traditional or typical sense of that phrase. Rather, the historical view of homelessness demonstrates that many different people from many backgrounds have been unhomed and some among this throng due to radical political views and critiques of the wider capitalistic worlds into which they were born and lived. That there have been many people who did not choose to be unhomed is certainly true. But there were and are some people who chose lives rooted in transience, movement, and drifting that were anathema to American norms (see Weber 1993, 4–10 for a broadly similar position). Archaeologist Eric C. Drake (2010, 2019, 2020), through his work with the Michigan's Upper Peninsula Anishinaabe people, reminds us that spatial and temporal mobility are important aspects of many Indigenous American traditions about home and homelands. And this historical awareness of their own mobility has led them to enact many modes of resistance to the modern U.S. imperative of settling in one place or location. Meanwhile, ethnographic anthropologist of the unhomed Vincent Lyon-Callo (2008, 15, italics added) points out, “anthropological scholarship has established poor people are active agents in their lives and there is little to be gained from understanding them as passive. Instead, we need to investigate the apparent *consent* to the existence of homelessness.” These scholars’ insights into differing deep histories of home mobility as resistance, and a lack of societal resistance to the fact of the existence of homelessness, remind us that we must think complexly and with nuance rather than thinking of homelessness as simply a chronic “social problem” in need of a solution. And if houses and their home cultures are often loci of domestic strife, struggle, terror, and malaise, why would housing all people be considered the best “solution” to the social problem? People actively flee their violent and abusive homes into states of unhomedness, so why would we wish to compel those same people back to similar kinds of places and spaces? Perhaps we tend to think of domestic violence not as an inherent potential dynamic of the modern home but as a phenomenon that erupts independently of home even if it happens within the home. In another way, home is so important and good that if bad things happen in a home, it must reflect and be caused by something other than the home. If this is in any sense accurate, then we may consider whether the very nature of the modern home under capitalism does, in fact, inherently contain within itself the seeds of potential psychological, physical, and emotional trauma.