



# BRITISH SCHOOLS FILM FESTIVAL #5

## STUDY GUIDE FOR THE FILM **UNMADE BEDS**

UK 2008, directed by Alexis Dos Santos.

Questions for the class are organized in two categories: before viewing (bv) and after viewing (av). A work sheet with planned activities is also attached.

### **Synopsis:**

Written and directed by the young Argentinean filmmaker Alexis Dos Santos, **Unmade Beds** is a beautifully shot work depicting the youthful pleasures and pains of three rather lost twenty year olds whose paths incidentally meet in London's hip underground nightlife. With his name printed in large letters on the screen, we are first introduced to Axl (played by Fernando Tielve), a rather tender naive and often forgetful Spanish young fellow, who is trying to trace his long-lost father in London. Seven minutes into the film, we read the name of the next main character, Vera (Déborah François), a rather pale poignant French speaking girl who is lamenting an old love while searching for a new one. Shortly thereafter, Vera is approached by a tall thin friendly young man (Michiel Huisman) outside a pub. As a jet plane flies overhead, Vera tells him she is a stewardess. Smiling, he says, "That explains everything...I work in the airport. I'm the X-ray machine guy. I frisk anyone that bleeps." Is this new person - the X-ray machine guy - Vera's new love? Although he turns out to be the third main character in the film, it is interesting to note that the film audience never gets to either read or hear his name. Indeed, Vera even tries to carry on a relationship with the guy which, though tender and intimate, is based on the promise that they never reveal their own names. As a result, each a may be their last. That is to say, their paths may cross, but will they ever meet again? The underlying fragility of relations between people is further emphasized in the film by the fact that none of the three main characters actually know the names of the other two protagonists. It is almost as if behind these anonymous relationships lies a certain sense of fear. Yet, behind these relationships also lies a search for love and a yearning to find out who you really are. This is what makes the film so especially appealing to younger audiences.

The film begins with Axl sleeping on a train, asking us rhetorically in Spanish, "...How many beds have I slept in my life?" Slowly waking up on a train going to London, we now hear him say in Spanish, "Some people sleep in the same bed all their lives!" Axl's name is now flashed across the screen in big bright blue letters as music begins. This is how Dos Santos introduces the first character into the film.

Not knowing anyone in London, Axl eventually finds himself waking up in a London squat (Squatters are people who temporarily take possession of unoccupied buildings in order to live in them, but not pay rent. It is important to note that squatting is not an illegal action in the UK. Like in Germany, however, breaking and entering is also considered a criminal offence in Britain. This, of course, is the "grey area" of the squatter scene in the UK). There he meets Hanna (Katia Winter) and Mike (Iddo Goldberg), who helps him trace his father. Still feeling rather disorientated, Axl asks Mike where the toilet is. Music begins.

As Axl goes into the "engaged" bathroom, the camera comes across a sad looking girl just getting out. The music suddenly stops as the screen goes black and we hear the noise of a jet plane. Then we see the name Vera quickly flashed onto the screen in big blue letters. The noise of the plane slowly dies as we see Vera now in her room. Through a series of snap shots, Vera relates the story of how once on one rainy day she and her friend Lucas entered a maze. While she made all the right turns and found her way out very quickly, Lucas was stuck inside for a very long time. When he finally came out, he was furious. Ever since then she feels she always takes the wrong turns in her life."Have I used up all my happiness?" she asks herself rhetorically. Now back inside her room, she sadly takes down all her photos of Lucas and herself from her walls, puts them all in a box which she marks with the letters LU and puts it away, high up on a shelf.

Now knowing where his father lives, Axl at first follows him secretly on the street. He then goes to the club "Lost and Found" where Hanna and Mike work. Listening to the music from the group "Plaster of Paris", Mike asks Axl, if he has met his father. Axl answers, "He wasn't in." Here we see that although Axl clearly wants to meet his long-lost father, he also feels hesitant and unsure.

Vera behaves equally insecurely when she first meets the "X-ray machine guy" outside a pub. They share a bottle of wine as we hear the rather melancholic song "Cherry Blossoms" by the group Tindersticks, which will become the sort of theme song of their relationship. Now wearing the guy's school uniform jacket, they both go to a hotel. As they enter the room, the music stops. The guy goes to the bathroom, while Vera takes out her Polaroid camera and takes a snap shot of the bed, putting the photo in the jacket. When the guy returns from the toilet, he finds Vera sleeping fully dressed on the bed. Tenderly, he caresses her as we hear the noise of a jet plane a short moment. Vera wakes up in the morning and sees the guy sleeping fully dressed on the bed beside her. She leaves quietly, deciding not to leave him a note.

Axl finally gathers enough courage to meet his father, who works as an estate agent. Ironically, when they first meet, his father says to Axl, "Good morning son. What can I do for you?" Pretending to be a foreign student looking for a flat, his father writes down his details, arranges a subsequent meeting and finally gives him his business card. They both then formally shake hands as we now begin to hear loud exuberant music. Clearly excited and very happy, Axl goes to the club "Lost and Found", where he has a drink, listening to the song "Short, Sharp Shock" by the group (We Are) Performance. The music is as high-spirited as he is. Is his lost father now found?

Vera, on the other hand, is doing some emotional spring cleaning, getting rid of her old mattress while re-arranging her room. Later on, she sees Axl wearing the school uniform jacket, but she doesn't particularly care. She doesn't know that Mike discovered her Polaroid snap shot of the bed in the jacket, thinking it would be a great image for a poster. For her, the chapter with the X-ray machine guy is over. Or is it? One evening the guy accidentally meets Vera on the street. The two obviously like each other. They go to a pub. Giggling, the guy tells Vera, "I'm just having this strange feeling like...I'm a teenager again....It's a good feeling though...this teenage feeling." They smile. In the background we hear the tender song "Don't Be Upset" by Jeffrey Lewis. The song ends as we see them having sex in a hotel room. Next morning, they still don't know each other's names. "When am I going to see you again?" the guy asks. "You have to say when, and I say where", answers Vera. As she leaves, Vera takes a Polaroid snap shot of the bed.

Axl is also re-arranging his life. Interestingly, while setting up his room in the squat, he unknowingly uses Vera's discarded mattress for his bed: new mattress, new luck? We begin to hear the aggressive song "Hot Monkey, Hot Ass!" by Black Moustache, with the rhyming lyrics "No future, no past!" Feeling free of the usual constraints, Axl clearly lives for the moment. Even his meetings with his father - who appears to be a nice, friendly family man - seem to be going well. That is, until he unexpectedly meets one of his father's children: the six year-old girl, Alice. As Axl talks to Alice in the car, she calls out to her father, shouting out the word "Dad!" At that moment Axl realizes that he can never use the word "dad" in such a carefree way as the little girl. For Alice, having a dad is taken for granted. For Axl it is something he has desperately longed for. Turning sadly to his father, who has just entered the car, he says, "I don't think you have the kind of thing I'm looking for." Smiling slightly, his father asks, "What exactly is it you are looking for?" Shrugging his shoulder, Axl responds, "I don't know", and leaves the car. Holding back his tears, we see Axl alone, putting on his earphones as we hear the tender song "I'm Fine" by Kimya Dawson.

As for Vera and the X-ray machine guy, all their various rendezvous were wonderful - except the last one in Soho, where they fail to meet. Now Vera is just as sad as Axl. Meeting for the first time at a party in the squat, they tell each other their woes. "I have no name, no number, no address, no nothing...It was the point between us," says Vera. "Did you fall in love with him?" Axl asks, as Vera gazes sadly into space. Axl now talks to Vera about his father. "Deep inside I really wanted him to be a heroin addict or someone so fucked up" says Axl rather inebriated, "...but when I see this guy, he was like a completely normal functional boring human being." "Do you want to be part of his life?" asks Vera. "I thought I did, but now I'm not so sure", answers Axl. Both now fully drunk, they wave good night and go to sleep in separate beds. Will they fall in love?

Although Vera and the guy try to track each other down, they only have a chain of hotel rooms for clues. We hear again the song "Cherry Blossoms" as they desperately search for each other. Will they ever meet again? Axl, on the other hand, decides to meet his father at his office. It is an awkward moment: both intimate and still formal. Axl tells his father he is no longer looking for a flat. Axl also hands him back his lighter, which he inadvertently took from him. Smiling he takes it, but then gives it back to Axl, saying "Actually you, you can keep this one...if you want." Taking the lighter, Axl smiles and leaves the office. Will they also ever meet again in their lives?

While walking down the street with two of her recent work colleagues, Vera notices some posters from the Lost and Found Club announcing a series of gigs. Looking more closely, she recognizes the photographic image on the poster. It is the Polaroid snap shot she took of the very first hotel bed, where she and the X-ray machine both slept in together. Entering the club, Hanna serves them their drinks at the bar. Strolling towards the music, she sees the X-ray machine guy on stage, guitar in hand, singing the love song "Hello" for...her. Vera smiles deeply. The music continues as we now see Axl and Mike - who has finally overcome his fear of sky diving - both preparing to jump out of an airplane. As they leap into the sky there is silence followed by the whistling of the wind. Taking the initiative, Axl and Mike are both clearly happy to have jumped as we hear the music "I'm Fine" one last time.

### Questions:

**bv: There are many TV programmes geared to a youth audience. Give examples. Are they youth programmes just because they include young characters? What distinguishes these programmes from other TV series like "Tatort", "Two and a Half Men" or "Die Simpsons"? What do these TV youth series have in common? What kind of stories do they tell?**

**What is a youth film? Can anyone give examples (i.e. "Harry Potter", Japanese Anime films like "Wedding Peach", German productions like "Knallhart" and "Kroko")? "Harry Potter" is often described as a fantasy film. The latter sequels, however, can also be described as a youth film. Why?**

**Which locations would you choose if you were shooting a youth film? Where would the young characters meet? How would they get together? Where would they go? What would they do?**

**av: Why is it so important for Axl to meet his long-lost father? What is he actually looking for? Does he find it?**

**Of all the three main characters in the film, which one do you like most? Why?**

**Why is Vera such a terrible bookseller? Give examples.**

**Would you like to live in a London squat like in the film? Explain.**

### **No longer teenagers, not yet adults**

Alexis Dos Santos' film **Unmade Beds** has a number of quite unusual features. Firstly, all the main characters in the film are in their very early twenties. Axl, Vera, Mike, Hanna and of course the X-ray machine guy, are all still young, but they are no longer teenagers. Thus, while they all have sex, their behaviour shows it's not for the first time. Nor is heavy drinking, doing a job or living alone something new for them. In other words, they are all beginning to experience life no longer as teenagers. This clearly marks the film off from other types of "coming-of-age" films.

Yet, while these characters are no longer teenagers, they are still far from being adults. The reason for this is that all of them are still very much in the midst of discovering who they really are. That is to say, **they are all still mainly absorbed in exploring their own persona**. In short, they are all still trying to find out who they are and what they really want. This explains why, for example, none of the main characters in the film have a very strong and clear sense of themselves. They are all searching for love and experimenting with life. Searching for love? Experimenting with life? These are existential questions every generation has to face anew. Dos Santos gives us an insight into how today's European youth deals with these issues. Indeed, this is precisely what makes the film **Unmade Beds** so interesting and compelling to watch - especially for young people.

Moreover, by stipulating that all the main characters in the film be in their very early twenties, Dos Santos is able to dwell on an interesting underlying dilemma: one which all these characters invariably face. No longer being a teenager, but still not yet sure what it means to be an adult, **all the main characters are shown living in a rather awkward in-between world**: one which lies between being a teenager and being an adult. Clearly they do not fit in either world. That is, they no longer belong to their teenage past. Nor do they fully belong to their grown up future. They are in a sense outsiders. This is hinted at in many ways throughout the film. For example, many of the scenes between Axl, Mike, Hanna and Vera are shot in a London squat, where they don't pay rent. Most people living in London, of course, do pay rent. Secondly, many scenes in the film are shot at night (Hence the alternative film title "London Nights"). Most people, of course, are sleeping at this time. If they are teenagers, they have to get up and go to school. If they are mainstream adults, they have to wake up early and go to work. Thirdly, not only are practically all the protagonists in the film young, they are also very international and cosmopolitan (like in fact Dos Santos himself). This means that these characters - although living in London - could be very easily seen living in an similar subculture in any one of the other great cosmopolitan cities of the world like Paris, New York, Tokyo or

Berlin. This makes the characters, on the one hand, more global, but also more detached.

A second unusual feature of Dos Santos' work has to do with his general depiction of young people. One is struck by how nice and pleasant young people are presented in his film. They all seem to genuinely like each other. There are no fights, bouts of jealousy, backstabbing or malicious chatter. There is not even a drug scene presented in the film. While it may be difficult to believe there is no actual drug scene among young people living in London, Dos Santos clearly **wants to show today's youth in a more affirmative light**. In short, Dos Santos' film is unusual because he consistently portrays young people as truly caring. There are many illustrations of this throughout the film. For example, there are the numerous scenes where Mike asks Axl about how he is getting along with his search for his father. Or the various times Hanna tenderly asks Axl about how he feels. These scenes are some of the most touching moments in the film. And there is the wonderful closing scene, where both Axl and Mike parachute out of an airplane, each encouraging the other to overcome their own fears. Clearly, all these characters care for each other. All this, of course, contrasts sharply with films which tend to associate young people with such problems as drugs, crime, gangs or bad social behaviour - that is, with negative issues. Indeed, this is precisely what makes Dos Santos' film **Unmade Beds** so positive and refreshing. It does not follow this standard pattern so common among youth films.

A third interesting feature of Dos Santos' work relates to **how the older generation is perceived among the younger characters in the film**. To begin with, it is important to note there is only one person in the whole film who is substantially older than twenty - namely, Anthony Hemmings (played by Richard Lintern), Axl's long-lost father. Through Axl's questioning of Hemmings, we learn that he is 43 years old, married, has two young daughters and has been working for the last six years as a real estate agent. In short, he lives a very conventional life. But is this the kind of life Axl wants to have? Not really, as Axl tells Vera in a scene towards the end of the film. As they both drown their sorrows at a party, Axl tells Vera, "Deep inside I really wanted him to be a heroin addict or someone so fucked up, and I'd be like, yeah, I get it. I get it. I understand why you don't want me to see you, why you don't want me to be part of your life. But when I see this guy, he was like a completely normal, functional, boring human being. And I'm like, why? Why? Fuck you! Do you know what I mean?" Nodding her head, she asks Axl "Yeah, but do you want to be part of his life?" Looking into her eyes, he answers, "I thought I did, but now I'm not so sure." For Axl and Vera, Hemmings' life is dull and dreary. That is, it seems to lack any sense of vitality and spontaneity. Clearly, for them, such a life is utterly uninspiring.

Yet, Hemmings is not only an important figure in the film because he plays Axl's drab father. He is also important because he is a member of an older generation. As the only "older" person in the film, and one who is portrayed as very conventional, Dos Santos clearly wants us to associate him with all the more traditional values of his generation, like that of marriage, family and the virtues of hard work. Furthermore, from the point of view of all the young people in the film, someone like Hemmings clearly belongs to the generation of their parents. In this way, Hemmings becomes essentially the figure which represents all the traditional values of their parent's generation. These values, however, are conspicuous by their absence in the film. None of the young people seem to care about these values at all. Hemmings is thus rejected in two ways: first personally from Axl; and secondly, in a more general sense from all the other young people in the film. This makes Hemmings a rather sad figure in Dos Santos' work.

Of course, when you're young, you are not particularly interested in the social norms and values of your parents. You want to explore life on your own. You want to experience independence. A certain level of conflict between generations is therefore not only normal, but also healthy. But where does all this aversion to traditional values that we see among the young characters in the film actually come from? It is not clear. There is no evidence in the film of any major generation conflict. Dos Santos gives us no hint of any polarizing struggle between the two generations. In fact, no opposing views on anything are discussed in the film. This clearly marks Dos Santos' work off from other typical youth films, which often tend to focus on some generation conflict. Indeed, **it is precisely the lack of any generation conflict in the film that makes Unmade Beds so different**. Without critical social dialogue, however, traditional values cannot be adequately questioned and perhaps rejected. They just come to be seen as "boring". This term is very revealing for it is neither a political or social term, but rather a reflection of a highly individualized attitude towards society. In short, in Dos Santos' work, both generations seem unable to truly engage in critical dialogue. This is very problematic for the following reason. People - whether young or old - can only really grow up, when they grow up together.

#### Questions:

**bv: Is it good to live with your parents when you're over twenty years old? What are the advantages and disadvantages?**

How would you describe the traditional values of your parents? How many of these values are important in your own life?

On TV young people are often presented in one of two ways. Either they - mainly the girls - are obsessed with searching for romantic love or they - mainly the boys - are involved in criminal activities. Why is that?

av: Do you think the film is a good description of young people today? Explain.

Although Axl clearly wants to meet his long-lost father, he also feels ambivalent. Similarly, although Vera clearly likes the X-ray machine guy, she too also feels very ambivalent. Why do they feel ambivalent? How is this ambivalence shown in the film?

When does Axl realize he is no longer wants to continue meeting his father (The specific scene is when he is sitting in his father's car, talking to the little girl Alice)? Why does it happen at this moment?

Hemmings certainly leads a very conventional life. What values does he represent? Are these values cherished among the young people in the film? Why? Why not? Give examples.

The characters Axl and Vera are introduced quite into the film. How many of you believed during the course of the film that the two would eventually meet and fall in love? When does Axl almost fall in love with Vera?

Does the film have a happy ending? Explain.

### Sound and Camera Work

Dos Santos' work **Unmade Beds** is wonderfully filmed. In particular, he is very adept at combining different filming techniques in order to create an atmosphere of singular emotional intensity. One of the most common techniques he uses is that of **voice-over** (also sometimes called off-camera commentary), where the sounds we hear come from sources we do not see. That is, voice-over is a creative device where an audience hears a voice (or voices) during a film sequence, but this voice does not come from the character (or characters) talking on the screen. Dos Santos uses variations of this technique to great effect at numerous key moments in the film. Indeed, Dos Santos' film begins with a voice-over. In the opening scene, we hear Axl speaking Spanish as we see him sleeping on the train going to London. That is, we are hearing Axl's internal thoughts. That is why this type of voice-over is called a diegetic internal sound. It is a sort of internal narration, where the character is reflecting on something. Dos Santos uses this same creative device once again, when Axl finds himself waking up in some unknown bed, wondering in Spanish if he had slept with the girl lying beside him. Interestingly, Dos Santos suddenly stops using this internal voice-over effect precisely at the moment when the girl says "good morning" to Axl, and he responds to her in English. The dialogue now continues in English. Only then are the voices we are hearing coming from the characters we are seeing on the screen. In other words, what we see is what we hear. Sight and sound are fully synchronized. This, of course, is what we would normally expect in a film. Everything is fully synchronized on the screen. That is why this type of sound is defined as a diegetic on screen sound. All sounds and voices come from sources we can see on the screen.

Dos Santos also uses a number of various voice-over techniques when introducing Vera, the second main character in the film. The sequence begins with Axl and Mike sitting on the sofa. Finding his father's name listed three times in the internet, Mike turns innocently to Axl and asks him which one could be his father. Feeling a little bit uncomfortable, Axl does not answer. Instead, he asks Mike the directions to the toilet as we now begin to hear an ever louder music soundtrack. The source of this aggressive music obviously lies beyond the realms of this scene. In cinematography, sounds which come from outside the world of the film are called **non-diegetic sound**. The most common examples of this type of voice-over technique are to be found in soundtrack music. Normally, the music is used to parallel the emotions conveyed by the protagonist on the screen. In **Unmade Beds**, Mike's question has clearly provoked some very deep emotions in Axl. As the loud music continues, we now see Axl being filmed in slight slow-motion, walking to the toilet. By combining a non-diegetic music soundtrack with slight slow-motion, Dos Santos is able to further emphasize the inner emotional quality of this sequence. It is within this setting that Vera first appears in the film. Coming out of the toilet, we continue to see her in slight slow-motion as we hear the loud music. Suddenly the music stops as the screen goes black. We hear the non-diegetic sound of a jet plane as Vera's name is flashed across the screen. The sound of the jet plane gradually dies away as we now see Vera in her room. We hear her voice for the first time. She is speaking French, narrating a story. Here, we are clearly listening to her internal thoughts as she tells us of the time she and her boyfriend once walked through a maze. Again like

in the opening scenes with Axl, Dos Santos uses a similar internal voice-over technique - diegetic internal sound - in order to heighten the internal emotional intensity of Vera's first appearance in the film. Moreover, Dos Santos cleverly combines this voice-over technique with the use of freeze-frames (see below) or still photographs, thereby further emphasizing the subjective point of view of her story.

Dos Santos also uses voice-over as a technique for dialogue. A very good example of this is the sequence when Vera and the X-ray machine guy decide to spontaneously take the train to the coast. The sequence begins with both of them being filmed very shortly in slight slow-motion as they run for the train. We then hear in voice-over the X-ray machine guy asking Vera the question, "Do you have any secrets?" Now both on the train, Vera responds also in voice-over, saying, "Yeah, of course." Ultimately, we hear the two talking to each other in voice-over as they stroll along the seaside. With the sound of seagulls and wind in the background, we listen to how each one tells an intimate secret to the other. This is a very tender moment in the film. Here, Dos Santos clearly wants to emphasize the special emotional quality of their conversation through the use of voice-over. This voice-over, however, is not based on the internal thoughts of the protagonists, but rather on their intimate sharing of secrets. That is why this type of voice-over is called a diegetic off screen sound. That is, the dialogue comes from a source we do not see on the screen.

**Music** of course also plays an important role in Dos Santos' work. The music can come from one of two basic sources. On the one hand, there is the music we hear coming from the musicians we see simultaneously see on the screen. Examples of this diegetic on screen sound include the club scenes, where Axl listens to the bands on the stage. That is, with sound and image fully synchronized, we are able to see as well as hear these bands in the same shot. Here, Dos Santos clearly wants to convey a realistic feel of the club. He also however selects the songs being performed by the bands on stage very carefully. Thus, when Axl is just embarking on his journey to find his father, we hear the song "Beat a New Heart Beat" by the group Plaster of Paris. When Axl finally meets his father and is very elated, we hear the exciting song "Short Sharp Shock" by the group (We Are) Performance. On the other hand, there are also scenes in the film where sound track music is clearly used. That is, music which definitely comes from beyond the realm of the film. This type of non-diegetic sound is normally used to parallel the emotions conveyed by the actions on the screen. Interestingly, Dos Santos is so skilful at using this technique, that he is even able to convey diverging emotions using the very same sound track in two different scenes. The first scene is where Axl is sad and alone in a park, after realizing that meeting his father has not filled his expectations. We now begin to hear the music "I'm Fine" by Kimya Dawson. Putting on his headphones, the music gets louder. Although the music refrain "I'm fine" is heard several times in this sequence, Axl clearly looks very sad. Here, it is the contrast between the sound track and the image which emphasizes Axl's sad emotional state. The second scene is the closing sequence of the film, where we see Axl and Mike skydiving. As we see them falling, we hear the music "I'm Fine" once again. This time, however, the sound track is used to emphasize the state of exhilaration being felt by Axl and Mike. The music continues right through to the very end of the credits.

Dos Santos also uses a number of interesting visual techniques in his film. The most unusual visual technique he uses is a creative device called **freeze-frame**. This is a technique whereby a still picture - in effect a photograph - is continually projected onto the screen. That is, instead of looking at a moving picture, we see a still photograph on the screen. Dos Santos uses this technique to great effect in a sequence quite early in the film, where Vera tells us what happened when she and her boyfriend went into a maze. While she was able to find her way out of the maze in little over a minute, her boyfriend needed ninety minutes. This, of course, made him extremely angry. By using freeze-frame in this sequence Dos Santos is able emphasize the uniquely subjective point of view of Vera's narration. It is literally, her picture of things. Dos Santos adds another personal touch to this sequence by shooting it on Super 8 film. This gives the images a special graininess very different from the rest of the film. By combining these two techniques, Dos Santos provides us with a unique visual expression of Vera's inner thoughts.

Finally, Dos Santos' film **Unmade Beds** is a very carefully edited work. Editing is important because it can give a film a certain tempo or rhythm. Especially interesting in Dos Santos' work are the "**hard cuts**" in the film. Generally speaking, this is when a cut linking two different camera shots is at first hard to follow by viewers. That is, in the subsequent shot, audiences may momentarily find it difficult orientate themselves. Hard cuts must of course be very carefully used. If successfully used, hard cuts intellectually challenge the audience and give the film a certain pace or dynamic. Yet, if hard cuts are unsuccessfully used, they may just confuse audiences, leading to frustration. Fortunately, Dos Santos is very adept at using this editing technique throughout the film. An early example is when Axl first goes to a club. This is immediately followed by him waking up in some unknown bed, emphasizing his disorientation. Dos Santos also consciously uses this technique to link both slow and fast action. For example, towards the end of the film there is the rather slow, dark and melancholic sequence, where Vera and the X-ray machine guy are desperately looking for each other. After a very short moment when the screen goes black, we find ourselves in some brightly lit music video party at the squat with people are dancing funnily in animal costumes. Directly linking these two sequences together of

course marks a big change in tempo. Indeed, this is precisely what Dos Santos wants. For as a filmmaker he knows, by changing the tempo you give the film rhythm.

#### Questions:

**bv: Music is often heard in films. What role can music play in a film? Give examples. Why is music especially important in youth films? Explain.**

**What is a film sound track? Which film sound track music do you know? At which moments in a film do we often hear sound track music (i.e. kissing scenes, scenes of pursuit etc.)? Although the source of the music cannot be seen on the screen, this never disturbs audiences. Why not?**

**Sound is also extremely important in film. What role does sound play in action films (The explosions seem bigger with a louder sound)? And in horror films (The use of squeaky doors and hidden footsteps always make things seem scarier)? Give other examples.**

**av: In the opening sequence, Axl is sleeping on the train, but we can still hear him speaking Spanish in his own voice. Is Axl a ventriloquist? Has he previously recorded his voice? Or is it his internal thoughts we are hearing? Explain. In a subsequent scene where Vera is talking about her boyfriend in the maze, Dos Santos uses a similar technique. Is this also her internal thoughts we are hearing? Why does Dos Santos use this technique here?**

**Normally we share secrets only with our closest friends. These are very special moments where we intimately open ourselves up to another. In the film there is a sequence where Vera and the X-ray machine guy, walking along the seaside, tell each other a secret. How does Dos Santos show us that this is also a very special moment in the film?**

**When in the film are the moving images on the screen turned into still photographs (i.e. when Vera is telling her maze story; and of course, when she takes pictures with her Polaroid camera)? Why does Dos Santos use still photographs - often called freeze-frame - in this particular film sequence (i.e. she is telling her story literally from her own point of view)?**

#### Language

Language definitely adds to the cosmopolitan flavour of this film. Indeed, there are various moments in the film when Axl speaks Spanish and Vera speaks French. Of course, for those unable to understand these languages, this is a problem. For this reason, this film should best be seen with subtitles. Moreover, just like Dos Santos himself in the film, both Axl and Vera speak English with rather heavy foreign accents. Clearly Dos Santos sees this as typical of today's European youth. This may however hinder some audiences from fully understanding the dialogue. Interestingly, the only character who actually speaks English extremely clearly in the film is the much older Anthony Hemmings.

#### UNMADE BEDS

**UK 2008, 92 minutes**

**Director: Alexis Dos Santos**

**FSK: 12, recommended age: 14+**

**English with German subtitles**

**Themes: love, friendship, family, freedom, metropolis, drugs, dreams, art, nouvelle vague**

**Study Guide by Julian Name, 20101**

#### WAS IST BRITFILMS?

**BRITFILMS ist eine Schulfilmreihe der AG Kino-Gilde, Verband der Programmkinos und Filmkunsttheater in Deutschland. Sechs englischsprachige Filme touren 16 Monate lang durch die deutschen Kinos und werden von den Kinobetreibern in Schulvorführungen für Kinder im Alter von 8-18 Jahren eingesetzt. Die Vorführungen können direkt in den teilnehmenden Kinos gebucht werden. Begleitend werden Fortbildungen/Filmreviews für Englischlehrer und -Lehrerinnen angeboten.**

**Ebenso gibt es als pädagogisches Begleitmaterial englischsprachige Study Guides zu allen Filmen als Download. Das Ziel von BRITFILMS ist der Aufbau eines Netzwerks aus Filmtheatern, Verbänden und Schulen, das sich kontinuierlich für die Vermittlung von englischer Filmkultur in Deutschland einsetzt. Informationen zu allen Filmen, Termine der Fortbildungsveranstaltungen, englischsprachige Study Guides und Tourneedaten unter: [www.britfilms.de](http://www.britfilms.de)**



# BRITISH SCHOOLS FILM FESTIVAL #5

## WORKSHEET FOR THE FILM **UNMADE BEDS** BY ALEXIS DOS SANTOS

1. In class generally discuss the film, letting people freely make comparisons with other films they know. These could be other youth films, romantic films or music films. In particular, draw out the differences and similarities between other youth films and **Unmade Beds**, writing the information on the board. What do these differences and similarities tell us about the film **Unmade Beds**?

2. Working now in groups, please identify and describe in your own words all the main characters in the film. These of course include Axl, Vera, the X-ray machine guy, Anthony Hemmings as well as Mike and Hanna. After writing everything down, discuss all points in class. What do the characters have in common? What makes them different?

3. Work in small groups. Describe in your own words the relationship between:

- a. Axl and Hemmings. What is Axl's real motive for meeting his long-lost father? Why does he become hesitant in his relationship to his father? Sometimes it appears Hemmings really wonders who Axl is. Yet, he never really insistently asks. Why not? Is he just too polite?
- b. Vera and the X-ray machine guy. Why is Vera so hesitant in her relationship with him? What is she really looking for? Does the X-ray machine guy like it, that he does not know Vera's name? Why does he continue with her game?
- c. Axl and Mike: Both of them must eventually face up to their own problems. What are these problems? How would you best describe them? Do they overcome their problems?

After writing everything down, discuss all points in class. All these relation seem to be ambivalent. Write on the board the words which best describe the source of this ambivalence. Discuss.

4. Work in small groups. Describe the role music plays in the following sequences:

- a. The club scenes with Axl and in the end with Vera. Are these scenes filmed realistically? What atmosphere do these scenes convey?
- b. The sequences where Vera and the X-ray machine guy are first in the hotel; and where the two are later desperately looking for each other, also in the hotel. The song "Cherry Blossoms" is heard in both occasions. Why?
- c. The sequence where Axl is extremely sad, standing all alone in the park, crying; and the closing sequence of the film, where Axl and Mike are skydiving. The song "I'm Fine" is heard in both occasions. What emotions does this sound track music convey in the two different sequences?

After writing everything down, discuss in class, highlighting key words on the board.

5. Give pupils time to do research (i.e. via internet) on the issue of squatting and young people. What differences are there between the UK and Germany? Could you imagine living in such a manner? What are the advantages and disadvantages? Present results in class.