

NEON

Presents



STRESS POSITIONS

A film by
Theda Hammel

Run time: 95 min

Synopsis

Terry Goon (John Early) is keeping strict quarantine in his ex-husband's Brooklyn brownstone while caring for his nephew Bahlul, a 19-year-old model from Morocco, bedridden after an electric scooter accident. Unfortunately for Terry, everyone in his life wants to meet the model. The whole pack of them — including his reckless and outspoken best friend Karla (played by director/writer Theda Hammel) — descend on the dilapidated house, crowding the model, breaking Terry's cherished rules, and putting his barely formed political convictions to the test.

Director's Statement

The youth phase of the hapless millennial generation (to which Terry Goon and I belong) is bracketed by two world historical events — 9/11 on the one hand, and the COVID pandemic on the other. In between? Smart phones, food delivery, and social justice.

Our young model character, Bahlul, is roughly as old as the new millennium. He's a member of the next generation, the one people my age look on with a mix of awe and terror. Why are we afraid? Because they see us for what we are — old, lame, anachronistic.

In a moment of crisis, every little thing is suddenly charged with allegorical significance. Small social interactions seem to stand in for huge historical or familial traumas. The house is falling apart, and so is the world. My husband has abandoned me, and so has the world.

If things can't be interpreted literally — if they refer allegorically to any number of other things — then this proliferation of potential meanings can lead to a kind of vertigo. That vertigo is something all the characters in this movie are feeling. This feeling was especially pronounced during the summer of 2020.

That was four years ago. When we shot the movie, it had been three years, which makes this a sort of period piece. It was not filmed — or written — in the heat of the pandemic. The movie also avoids explicit mention of many of the big banner issues of that moment. Why have I found it necessary to be this oblique?

A character is accused of making an unsavory remark. We never hear her say it. Instead, we hear the phrase ventriloquized by all the people who have a problem with it. In order to call attention to a problem, you have to make a spectacle of that problem. You become a recirculator of horrible words, and horrible images. What follows in this movie is an examination of the problem, not of the character's remark, which is never addressed again.

The problem, as I see it, is a sense of primordial guilt in relation to otherness — and some self-deceiving people's attempts to rid themselves of that guilt. It's impossible to be living today without an awareness of how difficult it is to represent this problem ethically. It's also impossible not to notice that in our attempts to tell stories more ethically, we do not necessarily become better storytellers, or better people.

Another of our characters, the writer, tries her version of ethical storytelling. Suspicious of her own imagination, she commits to writing only what she knows. In the process of narrating her own life, she delivers a frank account of someone close to her, and the resulting portrait is more offensive than anything she could possibly have made up. Later, she is asked why she couldn't have just used her imagination.

A good question for all of us who have come to believe — in our paralyzing and very typically millennial self awareness — that our gaze is suspect, that our imaginations are corrupt, and that we are forever condemned to be voyeurs, tourists, or exploiters of authentic experience.

Filmmaker and Cast Bios

Theda Hammel / “Karla” / Director / Writer/ Editor / Composer

Theda Hammel is co-host of the KNFW Nymphowars Podcast with Macy Rodman. She has a Masters in Music Technology from NYU Steinhardt and has released three EPs (Very Great, SondHamm, and Partial Magic). Her original music can be found at majortransceleb.bandcamp.com. Her 2021 short film My Trip To Spain starring John Early played at the Sundance and Tribeca film festivals. She is currently in post-production on her feature directorial debut, STRESS POSITIONS, which NEON will finance and distribute, also starring John Early.

John Early / “Terry” / Producer

John Early is an actor, comedian, writer, and producer. His HBO stand-up special, “Now More Than Ever”, was released to critical acclaim in June 2023. John is currently nominated for an Emmy award for his A24 sketch special “Would it Kill You To Laugh” co-created with his partner Kate Berlant. He starred in five seasons of the critically acclaimed Max Original dark comedy series “Search Party” and co-starred in the comedy series “The Afterparty” with Tiffany Haddish. He wrote, starred, and executive produced his own episode of “The Characters” and the critically-acclaimed web series “555,” also with Berlant. In the New York theater world, he produced a revival of Wallace Shawn’s “Marie and Bruce” and directed Jacqueline Novak’s hit off-Broadway show “Get On Your Knees.” Early’s film feature credits include “Neighbors 2,” “Beatriz at Dinner,” “The Disaster Artist,” and “Other People.” He can also be seen in “Wet Hot American Summer: First Day of Camp,” “Wet Hot American Summer: Ten Years Later,” “Broad City,” “High Maintenance,” “30 Rock,” “I Think You Should Leave,” “At Home with Amy Sedaris,” “Portlandia,” and HBO’s “Los Espookys.”

Qaher Harhash / Bahlul

Qaher Harhash is a Palestinian model and actor currently based in Berlin. Qaher has been featured in campaigns for renowned brands such as Jean Paul Gaultier (alongside Bella Hadid), Prada, H&M, Hugo Boss, and Dolce & Gabbana. The Jerusalem-born Harhash was discovered when he was just 16 years-old, making him one of the first-ever Palestinian male models.

Arlene Muller / Director of Photography

Arlene Muller is a cinematographer who seeks out work that pushes the boundaries of conventional filmmaking and embraces experimentation. She holds an MFA in Cinematography from the American Film Institute, and a BA from the National Film School of Poland in Lodz. Arlene has lensed features, shorts and series which have shown at many festivals including Sundance, SXSW, Tribeca, Clermont-Ferrand, TIFF, and the Berlinale. In 2022, she had two comedy specials nominated for Critics’ Choice awards. She speaks fluent Spanish, and is currently in pre-production for a feature in Colombia that was awarded the Colombian Film Fund grant.

Gordon Landenberger / Production Designer

Gordon Landenberger is an artist, designer, and actor. Recent production design credits include John Early: Now More Than Ever on HBO and Theda Hammel's My Trip To Spain. His work as a scenic designer has been seen at venues across New York City including LaMama and BAM. gordonlandenberger.com

Natasha Simkowitz / Costume Designer

Natasha Simchowitz is a costume designer working in film, theater and television. Her recent work includes John Early's HBO special Now More than Ever and NBC/A24's Would It Kill You To Laugh?

As an assistant she has worked for designers Ann Roth, Mark Bridges, and Colleen Atwood on projects including Maestro (dir. Bradley Cooper, prod. Steven Spielberg and Martin Scorsese, NETFLIX), Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret (Lionsgate, Gracie Films), The Humans (A24, Scott Rubin Productions) and High Fidelity (Hulu, TV Series). Her work has shown at Sundance, NYFF, Berlinale and other festivals.

www.planetnoodle.net

Erin DeWitt / Editor

Erin DeWitt is a Brooklyn based film editor and writer. Her work includes feature films, shorts and video essays. Her latest projects include an episode for Chillin Island on HBO, Italian Studies directed by Adam Leon, Funny Pages directed by Owen Kline, and she has recently completed work on a short film entitled Power Signal which she co-wrote with Oscar Boyson and premiered at Sundance in 2023.

Brad Becker-Parton / Producer

Brad Becker-Parton is a producer at Seaview, a New York-based film, television, and Tony-Award winning theater production company.

Recent credits include Tina Satter's REALITY, starring Sydney Sweeney, which premiered at the 2023 Berlinale and was released by HBO in May 2023; Mariama Diallo's MASTER, starring Regina Hall, which premiered at the Sundance Film Festival and was released by Amazon Studios in 2022; and THE YEAR OF THE EVERLASTING STORM, an anthology film by Laura Poitras, Jafar Panahi, and others, which premiered in Official Selection at the Cannes Film Festival in July 2021 and was released by NEON in September 2021.

Previously, Brad produced Eliza Hittman's BEACH RATS and co-produced Hittman's NEVER RARELY SOMETIMES ALWAYS. He is a 2022 Independent Spirit Award nominee for the Producers' Award.

Stephanie Roush / Producer

Stephanie Roush is a Brooklyn-based producer and co-founder of Roller Studios. A champion of independent filmmaking, Stephanie loves working with up-and-coming directors. Stephanie is a co-producer of Simon Hacker's directorial debut *Zoo*, starring Michael Zegen, and a producer of Iraqi director Oday Rasheed's first American feature, *If You See Something*.

Stephanie has produced a number of short films which have screened at Rooftop Films, Palm Springs Shortfest, and Woodstock Film Festival, among others. She developed and co-produced the Netflix Original documentary series *Principles of Pleasure* which premiered on Netflix in 2022. She won a James Beard Media Award for her documentary work with chef Vivian Howard in 2018.

Allie Jane Compton / Producer

Allie Jane Compton is a writer and producer for film and television based out of Los Angeles. She graduated with a BFA in writing and film from Emerson College, attended Columbia University's Graduate School of Journalism, and is a proud member of the WGA. Her credits include various feature, short, and episodic titles for streaming and network television. Previously, she produced the sold-out theater revival of Wallace Shawn's *Marie and Bruce* alongside *Early, Hammel, and Landenberger*, which *The New York Times* called a "frisson of erotic challenge." She also produced *Hammel's* episodic series *My Trip to Spain* (Sundance '22).

Greg Nobile / Producer

Greg Nobile is the co-founder and CEO of Seaview, a New York based theater, film, television and media company. On stage: Michael Arden's Tony Award winning revival of *Parade*, Lorraine Hansberry's 2023 revival of *Sign In Sidney Brustein's Window*, Alex Edelman's *Just For Us*, Mike Birbiglia's *The Old Man & The Pool*, Selina Fillinger's *POTUS*, Jeremy O. Harris's *Slave Play*, *Sea Wall / A Life* starring Jake Gyllenhall and Tom Sturridge, and *Sweeney Todd* at the Barrow Street Theatre. On screen: HBO's *Reality* starring Sydney Sweeney and NEON's *Cassandra at the Wedding*, *Ratatouille: The Tik Tok Musical*, and projects in production and development at Amazon Studios, FilmNation, 2AM, Automatik, and more. Upcoming: *Enemy of the People* starring Jeremy Strong directed by Sam Gold, *Lempicka*, directed by Rachel Chavkin. Greg is a *Crain's New York* "40 Under 40," one of the "10 Broadway Players to Watch" by *Variety* and is a proud college dropout.

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Credits

NEON Presents

A NEON Production

A Seaview Production

In association with Roller Studios

STRESS POSITIONS

John Early

Theda Hammel

Qaher Harhash

Amy Zimmer

Faheem Ali

Rebecca F. Wright

Davidson

Elizabeth Dement

and John Roberts

Casting by
Geraldine Baron
Salome Oggenfuss

Original Music by
Theda Hammel

Costume Designer
Natasha Simchowicz

Editors
Erin DeWitt

Theda Hammel

Production Designer
Gordon Landenberger

Director of Photography
Arlene Muller

Executive Producers
Tom Quinn
Jeff Deutchman
Mason Speta

Produced by
Brad Becker-Parton (p.g.a)
John Early (p.g.a)

Produced by
Stephanie Roush
Allie Jane Compton
Greg Nobile

Story By
Theda Hammel
Faheem Ali

Written & Directed by
Theda Hammel

Unit Production Manager Olivia Mastrangelo

1st Assistant Director Tess Raih

Cast

Terry Goon	John Early
Bahlul	Qaher Harhash
Abigail	Elizabeth Dement
Karla	Theda Hammel

Vanessa	Amy Zimmer
Coco	Rebecca F. Wright
Ronald	Faheem Ali
Friendly Neighborhood Lunatic	Gordon Landenberger
Lyft Driver	Elias Abawi
YouTube Presenter	Felipe Di Poi
Leo	John Roberts
Hamadou	Davidson Obennebo
Tarek	Tarek Ziad
Photographer	Joe Van O
Blonde Model	Macy Rodman
Blonde Young Woman	Louisa Judge
Stunt Coordinators	Corey Pierno Drew Leary
Stunt Performers	Nicolas Coccaro Leo Giannopoulos
Intimacy Coordinator	Amy Northup
Set Decorator	Louisa Judge
Art Assistant	Jackson Cashman
Additional Art Department	Sampson Hollander Ellie Manos Arisa Taddei Chris Carlson Cole Burnett Jonathon Botts Adam Matonic

1st AC	Justine Bertrand
2nd AC	Magnolia Velasquez
Additional 1st AC	Emily Kordovich
Script Supervisor	Gordon Bell
Sound Mixer	Matthew Ericson
Boom Operator	Adam Picard-Park
Additional Boom Operator	Ian Hunter
Gaffer	Sean Gradwell
Best Boy Electric	Kelsey Edwards
Key Grip	Matt Prueitt
Additional Grip	Samurai Angel-Bello
Special Effects Provided by	J&M Special Effects
Special Effects Supervisor	Bohdan Bushell
Assistant Costume Designer	Margaret Kimball
Costume Assistant	Spencer Olson
Key Hair & Makeup	Chris Tabassi
Additional Hair & Makeup	Randy Rosenthal Magnolia Polaris Morgan Paradis Siani Amalbert Elisa Abend-Goldfarb
Assistant Editors	Janna Emig Kali Kahn
Additional Editing by	Cooper Troxell
Casting Assistants	Elise Raven Emma Warren Ruby McCollister

Background Casting	Karen Etcoff
Additional 1st Assistant Director	Cameron Morton
Assistant to the Director	Nell Geer
Key Production Assistant	Quan Robinson
Production Assistants	Shannon Lyons
	Asia Jones
	Alberto Vargas
	Patrick Maruffi
	Sierra Boudoin
	Kahdeem Jefferson
	Jeremy Gurvits
	Maya Wade
	James Carolan
	Tarantino Smith
	Samurai Angel-Bello
	Karis Bongiorno
	Kirsten Pasewaldt
	Alex Prosser
	Sam Kaplan
COVID Compliance Officer	Karlo Corona
Additional COVID Officer	Aspen Nelson
Payroll Accountant	Arreen Garner
Sound Editorial & Mix Services	HARBOR
Supervising Sound Editor & Re-Recording Mixer	Ryan Billia

Sound Effects Editors	Josh Bisso Kevin Peters
Dialogue Editors	Beau Emory Alex Stuart
ADR Mixer	Bobby Johanson
ADR Engineers	Beau Emory Michael Rivera
ADR Supervising Producer	Tricia Schultz
ADR Coordinator	Lila Walsh
Chief Sound Engineer	Avi Laniado
Sound Engineer	Joel Scheuneman
Senior Producer, Sound Post	Lisa McClung
Associate Producer, Sound Post	Madeline Little
Coordinator, Sound Post	Natasha Nobre
Foley Services Provided by	POSTRED
Foley Supervisor	Alexander Sanikidze
Foley Artist	Beqa Turashvili
Foley Mixer	Joni Amiranashvili
Foley Editor	Levan Tserediani
Picture Finishing Provided by	Nice Shoes
Colorist	Marcy Robinson
Finishing Editor	Alex Hartley
DI Assist	Jonas Murad
Workflow Supervisor	Brandon Outhwaite
Head of Production	Megan Rumph

Production and Clearance Counsel Donaldson Callif Perez LLP
Lisa Callif
Natalie Locke
Sarah Schwarzman

Title Design by La Moutique
End Titles made with Endcrawl.com

Music Supervisors Melissa Chapman
Annie Pearlman

"In The Ground"

Written and Performed by mankind
Courtesy of Draye Wilson

"1-800-HITMYLINE"

Performed by Stevedreez
Written by Stephen Dries, Andrew Amurrio
Courtesy of stevedreez
By arrangement with Riptide Music Group

"Low Key"

Written and Performed by TANISHA
Courtesy of Tanisha Burnett

"Greased Up Freak Part 1"

Written and Performed by Macy Rodman
Courtesy of Macy Rodman

"Horreya"

Written by Hani Chenouda (SACEM), Dineh
Mohamed Salah (SACEM)
Performed by Al Massrieen
Courtesy of Habibi Funk 2017

NEON Business Affairs Abby Faber
Jessica Nickelsberg
Stacey Smith

NEON Creative Allison Rose Carter
Kate Gondwe
Darcy Heusel
Jon Read
Claire Timmons

NEON Finance Ryan Friscia
Chelsea Shister
Leo Ulloa

NEON Marketing Spencer Collantes
Mike Winton

Chief Executive Officer Greg Nobile
Chief Operating Officer Nate Koch
Head of Film & TV Brad Becker-Parton
Associate Producer Emily Bergquist
Associate Producer Anna Mack Pardee
Executive Assistant Chase Parker
Co-Founder Jana Shea

Malcolm Adams

Al Barakah Halal Supermarket

Julius Becker

Sam Bodrojan

Samy Burch

Sheila and John Compton

Darius Daftary and Elizabeth Giardina

Rory Demers

Jos Demme

Hesse Deni

Edie and Archie

Erin, And, and Eva

Andrew Kahn

Anne Kaufman

Jason Klorfein

Last Place on Earth

Amber Later

Le Baobab

Maura Lynch and Sam Pettibon

Adam Makroum

Amal Makroum

Dan McManus

Draye Wilson

Michael Wilson and Stella Voreas

Eleni Tasia Wilson

Mitchell Parrish

Torrey Peters

Joanna Rothkopf

Emira Shano

Melina Torres

Rita Walsh

Lindsey Weber