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TWO NEW “OBSCENITIES”: THE ACCEPTABILITY OF TABOO WORDS IN THE MEDIA

Probably nothing shows the way linguistic attitudes have liberalized in the past few decades than the media’s use of “obscenities.” Where only the most free-thinking and daring publications, such as Evergreen Review or Avant Garde, would have printed the normally tabooed “four-letter” words relating to sexual activity in the 1960s, the current scene is much more casual and accepting. In fact, two newly compounded nouns based on the traditionally censored “obscenities” fuck and cock/dick have begun quite recently to establish themselves as part of the American lexicon.

The first of these compounds, sport-fuck, initially came to my attention as I viewed MTV’s Dream On (1990), an adult situation comedy presented on Home Box Office. The series often contained material that involved unexpected and/or comically inappropriate language. In the episode entitled “Three Coins in the Dryer” (which I saw on Sunday, 2 Sept. 1990, 11:10 p.m. CDT), writers Jeff Greenstein and Jeff Strauss presented the main character, Martin Tupper, in a situation in which anger turns to lust in an apartment-house laundry room, but which progresses to the upstairs apartment of Nina (played by Julie Carmen). When this unexpected relationship begins to experience problems, Tupper accuses Nina of not caring for him. Her reply to his asking whether she really cares is filled with sarcasm: “No, Tupper, you were a sport-fuck on the floor of the laundry room.”
While it is possible that *sport-fuck* did not originate with the series itself, its use there may contribute to its spread and may increase its popularity. Certainly its origin is uncertain. None of my colleagues or acquaintances had encountered the term before. On the other hand, Connie Eble reports (in a letter to R. Butters, 15 May 1991) that, when she inquired about the term from her students at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, she found that no one acknowledged knowing the term at first, but that one of her students later reported that she had asked about it at work. . . . One of her managers—a 37-year-old male—thought it amazing that she didn’t know the term. He said he had been hearing it since he was 15 years old—he’s from Chapel Hill. Someone else told her that it was in use by fraternity members locally . . . [with the meaning] ‘sex with a female whom you don’t know and don’t ever care to know’. The female would never be introduced to anyone, not even another fraternity member.

The lack of recognition of the term in one area of the country and its apparent recognition in another may well point to *sport-fuck*’s being either a stunt word or perhaps even a slang term in the making.

Whether they created or simply used an already existing term, Greenstein and Strauss’s *sport-fuck* seems an extremely appropriate term using a form which has long compounded in English. As Urdang notes (1984), *sport(s)* is a word-initial combining element, also occurring as a word, derived from Old French *(de)sporter* ‘to divert, amuse’ . . . plus the (English) plural marker of nouns, -s, used in the sense of ‘of or pertaining to athletic competition (as a diversion or amusement)’ in combination with other English elements: *sportcast, sportsman, sportswear.*

To this list of compounds *OED2* adds *sport(s) breeder, sport(s)-lover, sport(s) maker, sport(s) meeting, sport(s) car, sport(s) cast(er),* and *sport-earnest* in addition to the numerous clothing compounds which have been coined. *OED2*, moreover, notes that the singular form *sport* as opposed to plural *sports* is generally a marker of American English compounds, when it says that *sports* is “used (chiefly *pl.* in U.K. and *sing.* in U.S.) to designate articles of attire suitable for outdoor sports or for informal wear, as *sport(s) clothes, coat, jacket, shirt, shoe, skirt, suit, wear,* etc.; also *sport(s)-coated, -jacketed, -shirted adj.*” To these *RH2* adds only *sportcasting, sportdom, sports medicine,* and *sportster* “[*sport(s car) + -ster, c. 1960-65,*].”

Greenstein and Strauss, moreover, have employed a word truly appropriate to a context in which the sex act, in Tupper’s view, has to be either very serious or totally worthless. In choosing, or possibly creating, this *mot juste,* they have played on three distinct semantic layers of *sport(s),* all of which
contribute to the connotative meaning of the compound: <+ activity>; <- serious>; and <+ sexual>.

The semantic aspect <+ activity>, first of all, is clear in the primary definition of sport(s) (either as noun or attributive adjective) given by such contemporary dictionaries as W3, which defines the noun sport as ‘something that is a source of pleasant diversion: a pleasing or amusing pastime or activity’; similarly, the adjectival sport(s) denotes ‘of, relating to, or suitable for sports and esp. outdoor sports: adapted to use in connection with sports’. Since both sport(s) and fuck share <+ activity> as a feature, the prefixed element serves both to intensify the “pastime” in keeping with the uncontrolled lust which triggers Martin and Nina’s involvement and to underscore its “pleasing” and “amusing” aspects. The idea of a sport as ‘pleasing or amusing pastime or activity’ leads quite naturally to the <- serious> implications of the compound. Again, W3’s second meaning for sport clearly includes this semantic component: ‘something light, playful, or frivolous and lacking in serious intent or spirit’. Added to -fuck, then, sport lends just the element of unconcern that Tupper is so concerned about. Termed a sport-fuck, Martin and Nina’s intercourse can only be viewed as a fun event without ties, pleasing without being binding. Finally, that fuck is semantically <+ sexual> requires no comment, but it is interesting to note in this regard that sport again augments the compound by recalling its once common, but now obsolete, denotation of ‘sexual dalliance: amorous play’.

The second, especially apt term (or more properly a growing set of terms) involves the expansion of the meaning of cinematographic to stunt—already a term of art adopted to describe some aspect of an aesthetic/creative process—to pornographic contexts. As a result, terms like stunt, to stunt, stunting, and stuntman have developed parallel meanings that are contextually (and in this case sexually) dependent. As ordinary film jargon, the meaning of stunt, to stunt, stunting, and stuntman develops from the concept of stunt as ‘any (daring) feat’ (DSUE 1984) and becomes a movie term that designates an athletic or otherwise difficult act that is usually performed by an athlete or otherwise specialized person who substitutes for the actor involved in the scene. As both gay and straight pornographic jargon, stunt, to stunt, stunting, and stuntman (and such new compound forms as stunt cock and stunt dick) add sexual prowess among the list of daring and/or athletic acts by allowing the context to redefine the term: stunt becomes ‘a feat in which one substitutes sexually for another’; to stunt, ‘to substitute sexually for another’; and so forth, as the usual extending of a neologism to new grammatical contexts co-occurs with the equally usual substituting of synonyms in compound forms. In short, stunt as substantive,
verb, or modifier has come to mean the replacement of a movie star by someone else better trained and/or better equipped to perform a scene, so that a *stunt dick* becomes ‘the filmed penis that substitutes for the star’s penis in a pornographic scene’.

In the context of heterosexual pornography, *stunt cock* appeared as early as the 1986 write-up on Marc Wallice in the Adam Film World Guide *Directory of Adult Films* (1986, 2: 162), which describes the actor as “most often used as a body, a stunt cock to deliver the basics.” Similarly, an early example of this relatively new usage for *stunt* in a homosexual pornographic context occurs in a review of *Classmates* (1986; produced and directed by Toby Ross for Bijou Sales): “David Ashfield’s name pops up regularly in porn castings, but he’s better known for his stunt work than for any star quality” (Hands Solo, “Video Reviews,” *Advocate Men*, November 1987, 76). This pornographic sense for nominative and adjectival *stunt*, moreover, appears in other reviews and commentary on gay pornographic films in which additional related uses occur. In the following excerpt from an inquiry (S.R. of Philadelphia, “Letters,” *Advocate Men*, March 1991, 5, 8) concerning the acceptability of pornographic stunting in Matt Sterling’s *Idol Eyes*, for example, the use of *stunt* in its reflexive sense is already so established as to allow the author to compound the form with the performer on the pattern of *stunt man/stunt woman/stunt person*:

I would be interested in Dave Kinnick’s comments on a major irritant in erotic videos: the “stunt cock.” . . . If video makers must use stunt cocks, they should at least try to be successfully deceptive (i.e., take the trouble to match shapes, sizes, body hair, and colors). . . . Am I alone in noticing these stunts and/or finding them objectionable?

The following excerpts from Dave Kinnick’s response are even more expansive of *stunt*’s uses in the lexicon of pornography:

I have to mention on David’s behalf, that when he stunts for someone, it’s not him we should find fault with. . . . There are many reasons for sexual stunting. . . . It’s more expensive to use a stuntman. . . . And if stunt dicking is used. . . . [8]

In this response are uses of *stunt* as a conjugated verb (*he* stunts ‘to substitute one’s sexual organ for another’s’), as a participial noun *stunting* ‘the act of substitution’, and as a compounded noun modifier in *stuntman* and *stunt dicking*, the former using *stunt* in its normal cinematographic sense albeit within a sexual context, the latter making the act of *stunting* more explicitly the substitution of the stuntman’s penis for the stars during copulation or ejaculation scenes.

Finally, in a recent review of *Jeff Stryker’s On the Rocks* (1990; produced and directed by John Trennel and Steven Saunders for Stryker Produc-
tions), Dave Kinnick continues the use of _stunt_ 'to substitute one's sexual organ for another's' when he notes, "The third and very tired scene involves Jeff's younger brother, Rick, rolling around on a bed with Nick Romano. In this scene, all the fucking is badly stunted" ("Video Reviews," _Advocate Men_, June 1991, 91). The use of _stunt_ in its various compounded and uncompounded forms over a period of four years is a fairly good indication that this particular term of art is becoming part of the standard language of gay pornographic film and will survive, at least in that context, for some time to come.

References


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