

CHOP
SLOP
LICK
SPIT
GOB
FLOB
MASH
MUNCH

Samuel Brzeski

I could eat you up.

My first word was apple. I ate mouse poison when I was a baby. I tear off pieces of my finger nails with my teeth. I like it when a lover bites my neck. I grind my molars in my sleep. I sometimes wear a night guard. About a month ago I discovered a small chip on one of my front teeth. I have no memory of how it happened. I suck the sides of my mouth in when I am nervous. The hair on my top lip always tickles. Sometimes I still give and get hickies. I eat too fast. I wore braces as a teenager for way too many years. This made me self conscious. I think I still have scars on the inside of my cheeks from the traintracks. They tore right in to me. I have had surgery on my mouth twice. Once I was awake and they were grinding bits of jaw away to make room for a tooth. Those bits of bone flew up and hit me on the rest of the face. Inside out. I think that my tongue is a little on the short side. When I extend it more than often I damage my frenulum. When I am stressed my tonsils swell up. For some years I was convinced that I had throat cancer. Now I understand it as a bodily barometer for over exertion. The first time I kissed a girl with tongues I bit her lip. I think maybe I bit her more than once. We were drunk and pressed up against the brick wall of a teenage garden party. Two other friends were also drunk and pressed up against the brick wall next to us. We swapped. I can't remember whether I bit the second girl's lip also. Probably. I once burned the roof of my mouth with hot pizza cheese so severely that I couldn't feel it for a month. Sometimes my tongue tastes bitter.

It was in the recording and playback of the voice-over track for an early video work that I was first made aware of the wet sounds of the corners of the mouth. It was not me, but another student in my class who drew my attention to this experience of vocal wetness. She found the sounds to be uncomfortable and directly questioned my motives for including them. She told me that it created a sort of an awkward intimacy, an intimacy that felt all too close, quite uncomfortable. She said that she could picture the thick saliva in the corners of my mouth in the pauses for breath between words. I was wholly surprised by the discovery that I had, up until the age of 27 years old, remained ignorant of the ghosted sounds of the mouth. In order to not lose face in this particular instance, I insisted that I was aware of the sounds, whilst at the same time tried to calculate how much time it would take to edit out these offending instances, and whether I would be able to get it done in time for the exhibition opening the following day. Those junk sounds, the by-products, the wet echoes that surround the production of words were somehow immediately undesirable. They could not be considered to deliver any particular level of expression or of communication but were nevertheless present and apparently needed to be accounted for, as they were more likely to cause annoyance to anyone who noticed their presence than to deliver any semblance of character or identity.

In the recent exercise of learning a new language, I have noticed that I need to pay particular attention to the shapes of the mouths of those who are talking to me, in order to assist in the process of understanding them. In focusing on the mouth of the speaker, I am able to associate the movements of my own mouth, and all of those correspondingly unfamiliar shifts and gestures of the tongue, lips and cheeks that are necessary for the making of new sounds. This shift of focus actually works in my favour, as I find it difficult to look people in the eye when I talk to them. The excuse of placing my attention on to the mouth of a companion is a welcome interruption from knowing exactly where to look during conversation.

It can be quite a stomach turning experience to focus upon the mouth of someone who is eating—seeing morsels of cloopy glump slump and flump around the interior, and, unfortunately, also sometimes the exterior, of pink fleshy holes. Worse still is if the offender talks whilst in the process of consumption—spraying a crumb or flinging a flob in my direction. Speaking with the mouth full seems like a wholly unnecessary endeavour, as you end up doing both things poorly: remaining mostly misunderstood whilst risking indigestion due to insufficient chewing.

I fell deeply asleep on a late night train once, overshooting my suburban destination by approximately thirty minutes. I was drunk and sleepy and annoyed. It was autumn or winter and cold on the platform, and I was counting the hours of lost bed time that I would incur from this involuntary slumber. There was no shelter at the station, and I shivered on the cold bench of the dark platform trying not to nod off to sleep, waiting for another train to come and take me back in the other direction. On the bench next to me sat three very pale teenagers, who I presumed had done some sort of psychedelic for the first time. They were gingerly oscillating between claims of not feeling anything to strange comments about the tarmac having the texture of elephant skin and the insistence that they could all hear some sort of ghost music. Each of their mouths hung open in a dumb stupor whilst they looked around them with wide anxious eyes. When the train finally arrived, the doors opened up to reveal a man passed out on the train. I stepped on to the train and prodded him, asked if he was OK. He informed me that I should fuck off and that he was fine. I sat down and physically held my eyes open to ensure that I would not repeat the same instance of unintentional napping, a position I maintained for the entire journey. One stop away from my destination, the passed out man on the floor of the train suddenly threw his eyes open and sat bolt upright. He looked me directly and feverishly with an expression of anguished and despondent panic. Taking in a horribly shallow gasp of air he said in a small voice 'help me', before producing a quantity of vomit that I did not think possible for a human body to contain. He spewed forth an entire lake of chunky, gloopy, stringy muck in a three hundred and sixty degree circumference from his sitting position. I sat there, in a state between shock, awe, horror, and disgust, still holding my eyes open, although now there was no danger of sleep. Thankfully, my memory of the smell of this encounter has been lost in the folds of time. The man vomited for the full seven minutes that it took to move between stops. At the next station, which was my destination, I realised that I would have to cross the vomit lake in order to exit the carriage and finally be on my way to bed. As I cautiously stood and evaluated the best possible route off of the carriage, the man stopped vomiting and told me to 'leave him the fuck alone'. Thoroughly confused as to his feelings towards me, in one large leap I jumped over the narrowest inlet of vomit lake, through the open doors and off of the train.

At one point or other, all of us have had the unfortunate experience of having to avoid the eating of a certain piece of a lovely dinner because it has been accidentally spat on by an overexcited conversation partner, one who is unaware of the truly gobby nature of their articulation. The question remains as to whether you acknowledge the offending spittle or quietly move around it so as not to embarrass the slavering transgressor. Instances like this make me think of all the bits of spit that I have unwittingly consumed when someone has spat on to my food without my noticing.

Yummy.

Written as a response to the exhibition *SKRIVESPILLET* by artist Ingrid Berven and author Cecilie Løveid. Through a video and sound installation, the work looked at quotidian experiences of language, conversation, and interaction over the sharing of a daily meal. Film sequences were recorded during the lunch break at the Bergen based writing school *Skrivekunstakademiet i Hordaland*, in which students discussed writing methodologies, games and interruptions.

The exhibition was part of the Bergen International Literature Festival and took place at Lydgalleriet, Bergen, between 7 Feb and 1 Mar 2020.

Samuel Brzeski is the Lydgalleriet Writer in Residence for 2020.