

# **Biting and Chewing as Sculptural Gestures**

By

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## Abstract

This thesis essay contextualizes a specific aspect of my art practice - the use of the mouth as sculptural tool. It examines the destructive and formative element of the bite exploring this gesture from a physiological, sense-related and art historical perspective. What drives my practice-based research (Borgdorff, Sullivan) is the question of how embodied sensations can be transferred from the mouth to an object.

Descriptions of bodily sensations related to the ingestion of food and its rejection (De Beauvoir) and theories of embodied perception (Merleau-Ponty, Grosz) inform my investigation of the biting process. Affect as a liminal space of acting and being acted upon (Seigworth, Gregg) and the relation between sensorial perception and emotions (Highmore) are considered in relation to the mouth. The process of biting and chewing is compared to traditional sculpting techniques such as molding using art historian Georges Didi-Huberman's analysis of the *empreinte* [impression] as backdrop. Related to explorations of soft materials and chance (Duchamp, Oppenheim, Benglis), as well as feminist art practices involving the body, I focus on the works *Petit Dessert I* (1970-71) and *Photosculptures* (1971) by Alina Szapocznikow, *The Destruction of the Father* (1974) by Louise Bourgeois, and *Gnaw* (1992) by Janine Antoni to situate my practice within a specific artistic context. The essay also considers the physical contextualization of the chewed objects within the sculptures through the concept of 'spitting'. The sculptures represent the liminal position of biting, between destruction and formation, through physical instability and suggestion.

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## Preface

*It starts with chewing gum. I spit it out and see a pink, sticky blob of material carrying traces of my body – my teeth. The gum becomes strangely intimate. Part foreign, part familiar it records a repetitive, daily gesture – chewing.*

I continue to explore chewing as a sculptural, form- and imprint-making technique involving mouth-sized items and malleable materials and am eager to observe what other kinds of impressive and extensive shapes my mouth generates. I chew marshmallows to spit them out and observe the traces of my body on them.

*Marshmallows are soft, white, neutral and have this mouth-sized, tubular shape. The powdery surface feels dry at first. A few bites and the marshmallow starts to melt and fall apart. So sweet. Saliva accumulates. I swallow. I didn't spit it out. The next one, I chew less, carefully form the marshmallow with my teeth. Push it around with my tongue. Imagining it at the verge of falling apart, I spit it out. It looks good. Not bad for an impression. Some parts are glossy, others rough. White and soft. Still humid, I put it down, let it dry, see if it will hold the shape.*

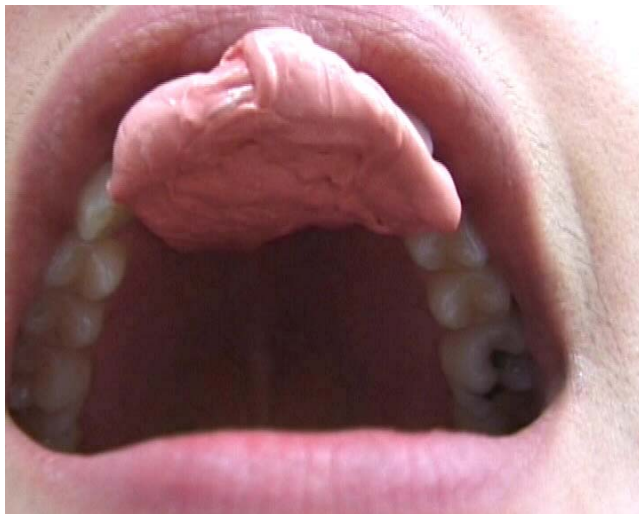


Fig. 1. Patricia Huijnen, *Chewing-gum*, 2005, video still.  
Photo: Patricia Huijnen. Used by permission of the artist.

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## Chapter 1. On biting, chewing and spitting

*Biting, chewing and spitting are generating gestures that make up significant components of my sculptures. They describe my artistic process and metaphorically frame the body of this thesis essay.*

My sculptures suggest embodied experiences and refer to the domestic realm through table-like structures, malleable materials, and the intimate traces of teeth on food items and found objects. Suggestion and ideas of instability play a central role in my practice.

This thesis essay presents a specific aspect of my art practice - the use of the mouth as sculptural tool. Through practice-based research I explore how a sensory experience that takes place inside the mouth can be transferred onto objects through contact. I examine the potential of biting as a sculptural gesture through investigating its destructive and formative qualities. The suggestive power of bitten objects withstands the categorization of words. Instead they speak through the repetition of corporeal impressions and manipulated every day objects that resemble and represent the mouth through their function, shape, material or size such as marshmallows, jawbreaker gums, bowls and spoons.

The mouth is of special interest to me, as it is the physical manifestation of an in-between state. I consider the mouth as a liminal space for transfer and interaction, of shifting from inside to outside, from private to public, from sensual to repulsive and vice versa.

As French and German are my first languages they inform my thinking as well as the choices of my references, such as Georges Didi-Huberman and his analysis of the *empreinte* [impression]. The term *empreinte* refers to the material result of an impression/imprint as well as the verb 'emprunter' which means 'to borrow'. The use of the term *empreinte* stresses the indexical<sup>1</sup> relation between the original form and its impression.

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<sup>1</sup> Philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce describes different kinds of relationships between objects and signs and establishes amongst others the following categories: Index, Icon and Symbol (Peirce, Charles Sanders and Justus Buchler, ed. *Philosophical Writings of Peirce*). Rosalind Krauss describes the index in "Notes on the Index: Seventies Art in America" with the following words: "As distinct from symbols, indexes establish their meaning along the axis of a physical relationship to their referents. They are the marks or traces of a particular cause, and that cause is the thing to which they refer, the object they signify. Into the category of the index, we would place physical traces (like footprints), [and] medical symptoms" (70).



Three of my works, *Chewing and Spitting*, *Jawbreaker* and *Spoon*, will serve as references throughout the text.

### 1.1 *Chewing and Spitting*



Fig. 2. Patricia Huijnen, *Chewing and Spitting*, 2010-2011. Wood, fabric, porcelain, marshmallows. 64x64x70cm. Installation at Mitchell Gallery. Photo: Patricia Huijnen. Used by permission of the artist.



Fig. 3. Patricia Huijnen, *Chewing and Spitting*, 2010-2011, detail. Wood, fabric, porcelain, marshmallows. 64x64x70cm. Installation at Concourse Gallery ECUAD. Photo: Patricia Huijnen. Used by permission of the artist.

For the work *Chewing and Spitting* (2010-2011) I chewed marshmallows, spat them out and placed them in hand made, cast porcelain mouth size collapsing bowls. I pushed and stuck the bowls and their content into a soft, thick, cream coloured tablecloth, heaped and huddled onto a tea table, intentionally resembling the soft and malleable shape of the marshmallows. Through the irregularity of their support, the bowls turned, tipped and spilled their contents. The installation of the marshmallows resembled their shaping process: unexpected, randomly chewed and spat out. The use of marshmallows as a sculptural material has been significant in my exploration of sculptural materials. Their malleability, white colour and the unspecific nature of their composition transforms them in my eyes into an artificial material – a sculptural material that can be sensed and formed by the mouth. My sculptural process transforms the marshmallows from edible to indigestible.

## 1.2 *Jawbreaker*



Fig. 4. Patricia Huijnen, *Jawbreaker*, 2011-2012. Steel, wood, glass, pigmented wax. 20x16x45 inch. Installation at studio. Photo: Patricia Huijnen. Used by permission of the artist.



Fig. 5. Patricia Huijnen, *Jawbreaker*, 2011-2012, detail. Steel, wood, glass, pigmented wax. 20x16x45 inch. Installation at studio. Photo: Patricia Huijnen. Used by permission of the artist.

The work *Jawbreaker* (2011-2012) consists of a set of partially bitten and chewed slightly off-white spheres that precariously balance on glass table structure at elbow height. The slightest movement might provoke them to fall off the table support. The spherical volumes were derived from a specific kind of chewing-gum, a two inch jawbreaker. Out of a mold from the original gum, the spheres were cast in white pigmented wax. Through their bitten and partially chewed treatment, as well as their ambiguous material properties, the spheres suggest both softness and resistance. They resemble milk, cream, something white but opaque; they visually convey a dense, hermetic almost rubber like feel. Through its ambiguous and poetic character the sculpture resists classification through words. Being slightly too big for the mouth, the partially bitten spheres suggest questions about the volumetric capacity of the mouth, about measurements and their relation to the body, as will be discussed in chapter 4.1.

### 1.3 Spoon



Fig. 6. Patricia Huijnen, *Spoon*, 2010-2011. Bronze.  
10x3x1 inch. Installation at Latitude 53, Edmonton.  
Photo: Patricia Huijnen. Used by permission of the artist.

The piece *Spoon* (2010-2011) is a bitten spoon hung on the wall. The spoon is bitten, not chewed and not melted. The spoon, an important component of the sculpture, was developed through multiple iterations and materials - sugar, caramel, wax, pewter and finally bronze. In previous forms the treatment of the spoon was not clearly identifiable. The traces of the teeth were too inconspicuous and the chewing seemed too close to the natural melting aspect of the material. I decided that it was important, that the spoon appeared to be unmistakably formed and affected by the mouth. As an everyday tool a spoon refers to the domestic and its nurturing function. A spoon is meant to contain and offer food. A bitten spoon is dysfunctional. In its present configuration, hanging on the wall and bitten, *Spoon* can't and is not meant to contain food. Cast in bronze the spoon is transformed and refers to traditional sculpture.

The violence inherent in the act of biting, the destruction of something that is caught inside the mouth, comes to the surface in this work.

This essay is divided into five main chapters, including an introductory chapter. Chapter two, “Implements”, presents the framework of my practice-based research methodology. It discusses the interrelationship of theory and practice in my research and is informed by the writing of art theorists Henk Borgdorff and Graeme Sullivan.

In the third chapter, “Introduction to the mouth”, biting is analyzed from a physiological as well as embodied perspective. I consider the affective potential of this gesture based on literary descriptions and theoretical investigations on the ingestion of food and the reactions it evokes. I refer to writing by feminist philosopher Simone De Beauvoir and affect theory as discussed by Gregory J. Seigworth, Melissa Gregg and Ben Higmore.

“Biting and chewing matter”, the fourth chapter, transfers the previously developed ideas into the physical realm of artistic creation. The technique of molding, the explored materials and their suggestive quality are examined using art historian Georges Didi-Huberman’s analysis of the *empreinte* [impression] as backdrop. I situate my sculptural practice within a process-based artistic context, relating it to Post-Minimalist and feminist art practices. The works *Dessert I* and *Photosculptures* by Alina Szapocznikow, *Destruction of the Father* by Louise Bourgeois and *Gnaw* by Janine Antoni are analysed and serve as specific artistic references for my work.

In the last chapter, “Spitting”, the contextualization of the chewed parts within the sculptures and their presentation is addressed. The question of how the different components of each work affect each other is examined.

## **Chapter 2. Implements**

*The mouth is my sculptural tool and the site of my research. The mouth is the area that I am uncovering and at the same time the implement to undertake this challenge.*

### **2.1 Practice-based research**

In his paper “The Debate on Research in the Arts” from 2006, Dutch art theorist Henk Borgdorff stresses that from a scientific point of view research is an “original investigation

undertaken in order to gain knowledge and understanding” (RAE<sup>2</sup> qtd. in Borgdorff 9). This leads to the question: In what ways can artists be considered as researchers and artistic practices a contribution to the development of knowledge?

I agree with American artist, art theorist and educator Graeme Sullivan, as argued in his paper “Research Acts in Art Practice” from 2006<sup>3</sup>, and with artist and researcher Michael Schwab, editor-in-chief of the recently published online platform *Journal for Artistic Research*, who both point out the transformative character of artistic research. Schwab describes the transformative nature of artistic research as “making the experience of a change of knowledge count” (Schwab). I suggest that through valuing experience in research the artist-researcher is considered an embodied subject, situated in a specific context. Borgdorff has described the kind of knowledge represented in art as one “which has been variously analysed as tacit, practical knowledge, as ‘knowing-how’ and as sensory knowledge” (Borgdorff 15). The knowledge that affects and transforms me, as an artist and researcher, is a type of knowledge intimately tied to the creative process. Sullivan adds that “research is a *transformative* act that has an impact on the researcher and the researched” (Sullivan 22). I argue that transformation in artistic research can be considered as an embodied experience that develops in an interactive process between the artist and her research, which occurs on a practical as well as theoretical level, and affects both. For example in my practice the act of chewing is an embodied experience in that it is a tactile, sensual experience. It becomes an imprint on an object that then carries this embodied experience. The theoretical concepts behind this are explained in chapter three and five.

Artistic research has been articulated differently according to its focus. Sullivan describes arts-based and arts-informed research as practices that essentially expand classical social science research methods for educational inquiry. Dance, photography etc become valid research tools in an educative setting. Sullivan qualifies practice-based research as a visual research method that is grounded in the artist’s studio (23-26). I consider my research a practice-based research that has its roots in the studio and is strongly process oriented. My research goals originate from my artistic practice and are the result of a close analysis of my process, its conceptual basis and experimental nature. Academic research and artistic

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<sup>2</sup> RAE stands for Research Assessment Exercise. The RAE produces quality profiles for each submission of research activity made by institutions in the UK. [www.rae.ac.uk](http://www.rae.ac.uk)

<sup>3</sup> The concepts exposed in this paper were originally published in Graeme Sullivan’s book *Art Practice as Research: Inquiry in the Visual Arts* in 2005.

practice are tightly interwoven. Borgdorff points out that in practice-based research “the artistic practice itself is an essential component of both the research process and the research results” (Borgdorff 7). The sculptures I produce are at the origin of my research and at the same time, as they transform, witness the process of my research. What drives my research is the desire to understand how embodied reactions can be transferred from the mouth to an object. As my theoretical research proceeds, the art is informed by concepts that name and contextualize what takes place on a physical level in my practice. My interest in specific areas of research, such as the mouth, its physiological characteristics and embodied ways of knowing, is sharpened by both theory and practice. Theory deepens the understanding of my practice and specifies my position in a critical and art historical context. The concepts I am confronted with on a theoretical level start to influence my sculptural objects and vice-versa. This manifests itself in the concept of bolus. Bolus is a biological definition for a mouthful of food. Applied to my work, this term names and theoretically situates the mouthful-sized shapes I produce within a somatic realm. This concept is described further in chapter three under “Physiological functions of the mouth”.

In this practice-based research context, corporeal and material association play an important role. My sculptural choices are strongly guided by the representation as well as the consistency and sensory perception of the mouth, teeth, tongue and lips. Malleable, fluid and flexible materials and found objects, such as bowls or spoons, are reminiscent of the mouth. I start to manipulate these substances and objects in order to suggest on a material level what happens initially on an intuitive, sensed level. I achieve a state of experimentation, in which material manifestations and suggestions are constantly adjusted, stretched and expanded through testing, observing and contextualizing. This process is what Sullivan describes as “forming acts in art practice” when he addresses where research takes place within an art practice (Sullivan 31). He states that

for many art researchers art materials are still the most tangible means that give form to imaginative thought. [...] In this process the artwork becomes the primary site and source of knowledge. [...] Forms, materials, properties, and qualities become the means by which concerns are explored and expressed. This reflective intent fuels an exploratory tendency as new forms and images are created, and these open up the possibility of new meanings. A characteristic of these research acts is that understanding emerges within the process of media experimentation, and this performative knowledge can be likened to more traditional grounded strategies such as observation and empirical confirmation. (Sullivan 31)



and its shaping capacity are described in the next chapter from a physiological and sense-related perspective.

### **Chapter 3. Introduction to the mouth**

*The introduction of the food into the mouth marks the contact between the outside world, represented by the food, and the inside of the body. The sensation against the lips and tongue are the first stage in this encounter, followed by the bite.*

#### **3.1 Physiological functions of the mouth**

The extensive and explicit vocabulary of scientific descriptions of the human physiology and its bodily processes fascinate me. With an apparent objectivity every notion of sensual experience seems to be eliminated or explained as a logical, linear sequence of events. And still, the amount of words and the seemingly endless listings of phrases used to describe the processes in their utmost detail resonate with me almost in a poetic way. In her paper “Situated Knowledges: The science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective” Donna Haraway, feminist theorist and philosopher of science and technology, describes this “objective” point of view as one that “claim[s] the power to see and not be seen, to represent while escaping representation” and situates it within the “unmarked positions of Man and White [...] in scientific and technological, late industrial, [...] male-dominant societies” (Haraway 581). She further on specifies that “all Western cultural narratives about objectivity are allegories of the ideologies governing the relations of what we call mind and body, distance and responsibility” (Haraway 583). Following Haraway’s postulation that “feminist objectivity is about limited location and situated knowledge” (583) I am attempting to make use of detailed biological descriptions of the mouth and its processes in order to situate them back within a personal, experiential and located realm, and consider the mind and body relation from an embodied point of view.

Physiological descriptions of the ‘upper gastrointestinal tract’ stress the digestive function of the mouth. The human mouth, also called the oral or buccal cavity, is described as the entry point into the human digestive system. The mouth receives food, produces saliva and contains a mucous membrane, a tongue and teeth. Saliva, tongue and teeth all



play a role in the first stage of digestion - the chewing of food, and its mixing with saliva. In his book *The Digestive System* Michael Windelspecht points out that “the human mouth is the site of both mechanical and enzymatic digestive processes” (16). Jaw, teeth and tongue are involved in the mechanical function of breaking the food into small portions and moving it to the back of the mouth. Viewed under this mechanical perspective the teeth are separated into three groups: the incisors cut the food, the cuspids tear and shred it, the molars crush and grind (Windelspecht 20). The saliva starts the enzymatic digestive process of the food and also has the mechanical role of lubricating the chewed food to facilitate swallowing. Once thoroughly masticated and swallowed the mouthful of food travels through the esophagus, from mouth to stomach. Such a mouthful of food is called ‘bolus’, in reference to the Latin word *bolus* for ball. Windelspecht’s glossary defines bolus as “the name given to the mass of food that accumulates at the rear of the oral cavity for swallowing” (170). The bolus is shaped and transported to the stomach through a muscular movement called peristalsis.

The tongue also plays an important role as a receptor for taste and sensations. Parts of the food dissolved in saliva come into contact with taste receptors, which then channel the information to the gustatory area of the brain.

In addition to its role as the beginning of the digestive system the mouth also has non-digestive functions. It plays an important role in producing sounds for verbal communication for example. While primary aspects of the voice are produced in the throat, the tongue, lips and jaw are also needed to shape the range of sounds included in human language. One may have experienced that speaking and eating or swallowing are conflicting gestures. If engaged in shifting around of food, the tongue can’t produce the range of fine movements needed for consonant or vowel sound pronunciation.

These multiple roles and its specific location turn the mouth into a transitional place. The lips for example mark the passage from the inner membrane to the outside skin. Feminist academic Elisabeth Grosz explains that the mouth “functions both introceptively and extroceptively. It is a primordial link or bridge connecting perceptions from the inside and the outside of the body” (Grosz 92). I am particularly interested in the double employment of the mouth, on the one hand working introceptively through nutrition for example, and on the other hand extroceptively, through speech and how both are connected. In my work, I make use of the mechanical characteristics of the mouth as a

sculptural tool, molding and modelling with teeth, oral cavity and tongue and deal with its conflicting forces in a formative way. Cutting, grinding, and chewing gestures are transformed into expressive artistic actions. What is ingested and enters the first stage of digestion through chewing and biting is spat out again. In the same way that the mouth shapes sounds through speech, the material object that is spat out is shaped by the mouth and conveys experiences from the inside.

The mouth also provides information from the outside to the inside of the body. The mouth as a perceptive organ plays an important role in childhood development. Babies explore the world through the mouth. Here the destructive gesture of biting is formative of sensory experience and knowledge construction. Elisabeth Grosz states in *Volatile Bodies* that

the mouth, as Freud recognized, is especially privileged in terms of its sensitivity to sensations. (...) There is a gradual shift from such contact perception to more distance-oriented perception, especially hearing and seeing, but to begin with the various senses are not all operational, not organized or integrated to form a coherent set of synesthetic perceptions. (Grosz 92)

Grosz refers to psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud and classifies sense related perceptions according to the distance between the object of perception and the perceiving body. The sensing experience of feel and taste inside the mouth are intimate processes. Contact perception and the focus on the sensory perception inside the mouth is relevant in my use of the mouth as a molding and modelling tool. In chapter four under “Material processes” and “The mouth as mold” this aspect will be analysed further.

For now, I take a closer look at how contact perception inside the mouth plays a role in the organization of our experience of the world. Due to the primordial role of contact perception in childhood, the following quotes by Vesta Farnsworth and Simone De Beauvoir relate to childhood experiences.

### **3.2 Ingestion of food and embodied reactions**

The door, or entrance, is so small we can not possibly go inside ourselves, so here is a slice of good whole-wheat bread we will send, and I will tell you what it finds within. As it has no tongue, I will speak the words it would say if it could talk, and you ask any question you wish. (Farnsworth 72)

Taken from a rather unconventional source, a children's education book on physiology from 1900, *The House we Live in, or, The Making of the Body* by author Vesta Farnsworth, this quote compares the body to a house and more specifically the mouth to a door or entrance. The entire book consists of a dialogue between a mother and her two children, a girl and a boy, and explains the body's physiology. In addition to exposing the now outdated ideologies of the period, such as explaining the relation between the mind and the body in dualist terms of master and servant, this quote addresses important concepts that are relevant for my artistic practice.

I enjoy the author's description of sending a piece of bread into the body to explore and narrate its inside experience. The mother in the book suggests taking the bread's point of view and explaining its experiences as if it was a human being. The knowledge described in the book stems from biological and scientific achievements of the time. But taking the voice of the piece of bread, this knowledge takes on an embodied perspective: the point of view of the bolus in the oral cavity. The same way my chewed objects are witnesses of an inside, sensory experience. Farnsworth details the bread's treatment inside the mouth: "Some of them [teeth] cut me in two. Others tore me into pieces and ground me till I thought I was passing through another mill. As I had a chance, I looked around, and then I saw the room I was in had a beautiful arched ceiling of a pale pink colour" (Farnsworth 74). The bread's experience inside the mouth is described as at once destructive and violent, and awe inspiring. This contradiction of sensations inherent to the mouth and concrete experiences as ways of knowing are significant concepts in my research.

I am viewing knowledge construction from a position which is informed by French phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty's statements on how perception is engrained in the body. In his book *Phenomenology of Perception*, first published in Paris in 1945, Merleau-Ponty writes, "I observe external objects with my body, I handle them, examine them, walk round them, but my body itself is a thing which I do not observe (Merleau-Ponty 104)." He adds that the body "is neither tangible nor visible in so far as it is that which sees and touches" (Merleau-Ponty 105). Writing essentially about the incarnation of visual perception, his words can also be applied to sense perception within the mouth. In my work the mouth becomes an interface between objects and embodied sensations. Through the sculptural process the mouth does not speak of those sensations but produces a physical manifestation.

Analyzing Merleau-Ponty's theories within a feminist context, speaking from the point of view of a female body, Elisabeth Grosz elaborates on the body's role in knowledge construction. The body

is "sense-bestowing" and "form-giving," providing a structure, organization, and ground within which objects are to be situated and against which the body-subject is positioned. The body is my being to-the-world and as such is the instrument by which all information and knowledge is received and meaning is generated. (Grosz 87)

Relevant to this essay is Grosz's framing of the body as an instrument that gives form and produces sense. In *Jawbreaker, Chewing and Spitting* or *Spoon* the body literally gives shape and form to objects and through this provides them with embodied knowledge. This type of knowledge is an experiential way of knowing; it is personal and coined by the individual body, similar to the one experienced by the piece of bread in Farnsworth's children's book. The knowledge that I am attempting to pass on through my work is not explained by words but shaped by an experience of contact in the mouth; similar to a squished and indented chewing-gum that speaks of constant, speechless mastication.

To understand the emergence of potentially contradictory sensations inside the mouth, I am investigating what kinds of experiences are generated through biting and chewing. I am taking a closer look at descriptions of bodily reactions to food. In her book *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter* Simone de Beauvoir describes childhood experiences of the world's intimate perception and ingestion through the mouth. She writes:

The world became more intimately part of me when it entered through my mouth than through my eyes and my sense of touch. I would not accept it entirely. The insipidity of milk puddings, porridge, and mashes of bread and butter made me burst into tears; the oiliness of fat meat and the clammy mysteries of shellfish revolted me; tears, screams, vomitings. (Beauvoir 6)

De Beauvoir describes how the food sensed in the mouth provokes bodily reactions. While in this quote, the sensation of mashes, puddings, oily and sticky consistencies incites revulsion, in another quote the cracking of candy creates a bright feeling of pleasure and enjoyment.

De Beauvoir narrates:

I would crack between my teeth the candied shell of an artificial fruit, and a burst of light would illuminate my palate with a taste of black-currant or pineapple: all the colours, all the lights were mine, the gauzy scarves, the diamonds, the laces; I held the whole party in my mouth. (Beauvoir 7)

Inside the mouth the intimacy of the contact results in an immediate reaction. The response to the ingested food is not described with words, instead it takes the shape of bodily sensations and eventual reactions: tears, screams and vomitings or the spreading of a sense of possession and power. It is as if the mouth that ingests the food immediately decides either its resentment through the food's rejection or its enjoyment through dissolution in its entirety.

The words De Beauvoir uses to describe the foods are strongly material-oriented. The sensations that the materials evoked are also highly subjective. Each individual could potentially react in a different manner to the recounted choice of foods. What is significant for this research is that before it is even ingested, food has the potential to both repulse and/or please depending on individual affinities and experiences. Through my artistic practice I am investigating objects that have the potential to trigger memories of previous experiences of sensations created through food inside the mouth. The potential of the mouth to contain pleasure and repulsion at the same time is intriguing and drives my wish to understand its nature. In the same way, the objects I create remain in this sensory threshold, and oscillate between disgust and delight, to become both at the same time.

### **3.2.1 Affect**

The theory of affect provides a background to frame the potentially shifting quality of sensations which occur on a sensory level. Affect could be defined as those guttural reactions or "pre-individual bodily forces, linked to autonomic responses" (Clough) that De Beauvoir described in relation to distaste. Academic Ben Highmore analyzes the every-day in his essays and delineates affect in similar words. "Affect gives you away: the telltale heart; my clammy hands; the note of anger in your voice; the sparkle of glee in your eyes" (Highmore 118). Affect is not carefully reflected. Affect takes place, and seems to be governed, by the body alone. In his essay "Bitter After Taste" Highmore highlights the inevitability of affective reactions in regards to distaste. In comparison to delight, the reactions to distaste appear to be far more noticeable and radical. "After all distaste is not simply disagreement: even in its mildest form it involves the wrinkling of noses, turning the head away, and so on. At its most extreme, distaste is revolt, physical nausea, vomiting, and retching" (Highmore 124). Food loathing provokes a reaction that is engrained in the body and that is beyond the cognitive. The body acts because it is affected. In this context the

action of spitting could be considered among the qualifiers or symptoms that are associated with distaste. Spitting is one of the creative gestures in my art work and is examined in chapter 5. I make intentional use of this originally guttural reaction when I am using my mouth as sculptural tool. The close contact between my mouth and the chewed material entails a sensing of the materiality and its consistency. An interaction develops - the slow disintegration of a marshmallow sensed against the gums. Once spat out the chewed pieces are submitted to an aesthetic selection. I determine which pieces best describe and represent the sensations I want to elicit from the material.

Through the contact with the mouth, taste and consistency of an ingested food item are sensed, the body is affected, then, forces shift and the body reacts, can reject, and spit. The moment of transformation that manifests itself through spitting, for example, is a moment of potential shifting and a generating condition for the artwork. In *The Affect Theory Reader* Gregory J. Seigworth and Melissa Gregg link this potential moment of transformation to the notion of affect and ask: “How does a body, (...), come to shift its affections (its being affected) into action (capacity to affect)?” (2) This leads to the following question: What is the force that brings forth the transformation, the shifting?

Inside the mouth the potential to affect and be affected culminates. Inside the mouth the potential to accept or reject is still open. The diagram below (Fig. 8) explains the interaction that is put into motion through a transformative shift of forces inside the mouth.

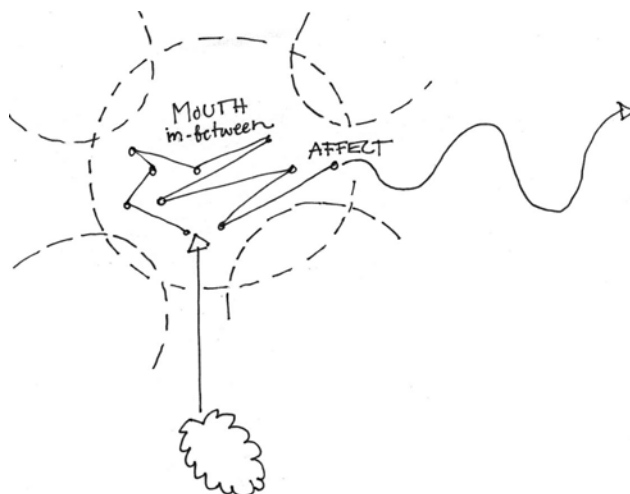


Fig. 8: Patricia Huijnen, *Interaction Diagram*, 2012. Used by permission of the artist.

Situated in a neutral position in-between terms, upon contact, the mouth acts on the bolus, it bites. In turn the bolus affects the mouth, through its consistency for example. We can not

determine a specific sequence within this system of interactions. It is the moment of contact that provokes a series of reactions. I imagine the interaction between the ingested food bolus and the body's taste receptors inside the mouth. What does their argument look, sound or taste like? To summarize I would like to quote Seigworth and Gregg. They identify that "affect arises in the midst of inbetween-ness: in the capacities to act and be acted upon" (Seigworth and Gregg 1). This inbetween-ness is a moment of potential and indeterminacy. The mouth, the way I understand it, contains a potentiality of sensations that can oscillate into seemingly opposing strong reactions.

It is the potential to fluctuate and transform that is relevant for my work. During the creative process of shaping an object there are moments of close alternation of affecting and being affected, of destruction and creation:

*While I am melting the wax for the Jawbreaker spheres, there is a moment where the colour and texture of the melted wax just feels right. Pleasure. I associate it to milk and cream - the wax is fluid, dense white, pigmented. I pour the wax into the mold, excited. I have to choose the right moment to extract the shape from the mold in order to bite it. I bite on the partially cooled down wax, feel its softness and its resistance in the mouth. I bite too hard and reach the liquid centre, wax splashes, flows out of control. I stop immediately, look at the bite, let it cool down. I bite again, wait for the moment of being affected, surprised, pleased by what takes place, then I don't touch it anymore.*



Fig. 9. Patricia Huijnen, *Jawbreaker*, 2011-2012, detail. Steel, wood, glass, pigmented wax. 20x16x45 inch. Installation at Latitude 53, Edmonton. Photo: Patricia Huijnen. Used by permission of the artist.

The intimacy of contact plays an important role in the use of the mouth as shaping tool. It is through the close contact with the material that the destructive effect of chewing and biting can be sensed as a formative gesture. They are formative in the sense that they induce bodily reactions or sensations through the disintegration of the food. The disintegration of the food is at the same time a material transformation that leaves its traces on it. Those marks can be observed once the bitten and chewed piece is spat out. If the chewing and biting process can be seen as formative in a physical way, the mouth can be considered as sculptural tool, for modelling, cutting and molding.

The works *Chewing and Spitting*, *Jawbreaker* (Fig. 9) and *Spoon* are all physical manifestations of bodily experiences or sensations. They suggest embodiment through the impression of teeth that altered the original shape of the object. They suggest through their openness and material ambiguity, form and content.

The next chapter explores how soft materials and chance contribute to the suggestive potential of sculptures and analyzes how the mouth can be seen as mold. Further, it examines the use of the mouth in the work of Alina Szapocznikow, Louise Bourgeois and Janine Antoni.

## **Chapter 4. Biting and chewing matter**

*Once the matter is introduced to the mouth the shaping and treating of this substance begins. It feels soft and is masticated and sculpted by teeth and tongue.*

### **4.1 Material processes**

With De Beauvoir's vivid description of delightful and repulsive substances in mind, I am examining Post-minimalist material and gestural explorations to trace the relationship between materials and a corporeal experience in art. In the 1960's artists such as Eva Hesse, Robert Morris, Claes Oldenburg, César and Lynda Benglis began experimenting with newly available, often soft materials such as latex, rubber, industrial paint and expanding foam. Similar to my explorations of malleable materials through chewing, those artists worked with pouring, hanging or heaping gestures that revealed the autonomy of soft materials through



exposing their resistance or surrender to gravity. In works such as *Totem* from 1971 (Fig. 10) American artist Lynda Benglis poured layers of polyurethane over wire mesh, until the chemical reaction froze the free flowing shape. She fixed the sculpture to the wall and it appeared as if frozen waves or immobilized streams reached towards the viewer's body, ready to engulf its space. In this installation the artist's body is meeting the viewer's body. Benglis' body determines the limit, size and scale of the sculpture. In an interview from 2011 she states: "I like the idea of scale: it's always human. [...] You can only throw as large as your body allows." (Benglis)<sup>4</sup>. In the same way as Benglis' sculptures are limited by her body's strength to carry, throw or pour material, the chewed objects in my sculptures are always related to the size of my mouth. I am playing with the body's constraint as a parameter for repetition. Generated from the same initial volume, a mouthful, the bitten shapes are all different. Details in the repetitive process vary, such as the force of the bite, the placement of the volume, the consistency of the material, and its autonomic reaction are notions that we could call created by chance.

This material has been removed for copyright restrictions. The image depicts an installation shot of artist Lynda Benglis' work *Totem* from 1971 at Hayden Gallery, MIT, Boston. Four individually poured shapes of pigmented polyurethane foam are attached on different heights onto the gallery walls. The image is sourced from "art 21".

Online link to the image:  
<http://www.art21.org/images/lynda-benglis/totem-1971>

Fig. 10. Lynda Benglis, *Totem*, 1971. Iron oxide, Geigy Red, Radiante Red and titanium white pigmented polyurethane foam (destroyed). Hayden Gallery, MIT, Boston. Dimensions variable.

In his book *Le mou et ses formes* [The Soft and its Shapes]<sup>5</sup> French art historian Maurice Fréchuret asserts how, through the use of soft materials, doubt, chance and instability became significant concepts in sculpture. He situates the intervention of chance through soft materials within the lineage of artworks such as *Three Standard Stoppages* by

<sup>4</sup> Quote stems from an interview with Alma Ruiz and Patrick Steffen, published in Artforum 2011, page 70.

<sup>5</sup> Transl. by the author.

Marcel Duchamp from 1913-14 and Surrealist sculptures such as *Fur Cup* from 1936 by Meret Oppenheim.

In *Three Standard Stoppages*, Marcel Duchamp explored a soft material, a thread, and its random reaction to gravity, while mimicking a scientific experiment. Under the title “Idea of the Fabrication”, as stated on a note in the *The Box of 1914*, Duchamp established mathematically framed guidelines for this work: “If a straight horizontal thread one meter long falls from a height of one meter onto a horizontal plane distorting itself *as it pleases* [it] creates a new shape of the measure of length” (Dalrymple-Henderson 61). Duchamp repeated this experiment three times, fixed the dropped threads on canvas and cut along their trajectory to develop a set of profiles and create new measuring units. He used the concept of chance to challenge the rational basis of the standard meter, which had been intensely discussed in the 1880’s and is still preciously conserved in Sèvres, France. Describing this work as “canned chance” in a note from the *Green Box* (Dalrymple-Henderson 61), Duchamp stresses the appropriation of chance as well as its subjectivity, considering it as ‘his chance’<sup>6</sup> in an interview with French art critic Pierre Cabanne published in 1967 (Duchamp qtd. in Fréchuret 30).

Similar to Duchamp’s appropriation of the unit of the meter, I am questioning the volume of a mouthful. Considered as variations on the concept of bolus the jawbreaker spheres, that are slightly too big for the mouth, or the marshmallows, that have this uniform tubular shape, are my take on the ‘disembodiedness’ of measurements. Through biting and chewing I compare them to the size of the mouth. They become subjectively measured units, tested by my own body.

The other reference that Fréchuret cited is surrealist artist Meret Oppenheim. In her work *Object* from 1936 (Fig. 11) Oppenheim makes use of a soft material to evoke an eroticised image of the female body (Fréchuret 96). Wrapped around a drinking cup the fur evokes sensations at the site of the mouth that can be both sensual and repulsive. The use of utilitarian objects and chance encounters of disparate elements in order to suggest bodily sensations, mostly of a sexual nature, was conceptually and practically explored in surrealist sculpture. Canadian art historian Steven Harris states that “the utilitarian object is estranged from its normal use-value in these surrealist objects” (Harris 160). Through its

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<sup>6</sup> Original text : “Cette experience fut faite en 1913 pour emprisonner et conserver des formes obtenues par le hasard, par mon hasard” (Duchamp qtd. in Fréchuret 30).

transformation, the object becomes “disponible”, open “whether to an external solicitation or an internal message” (32).

This material has been removed for copyright restrictions. The image depicts artist Meret Oppenheim's work *Object*, a cup, spoon and saucer covered in light brown fur and photographed on a grey background. The image is sourced from the collection of the Museum of Modern Art in New York.

Online link to the image:

[http://www.moma.org/collection/artist.php?artist\\_id=4416](http://www.moma.org/collection/artist.php?artist_id=4416)

Fig. 11. Meret Oppenheim, *Object*, 1936. Fur-covered cup, saucer, and spoon. Cup 4 3/8" (10.9 cm) in diameter; saucer 9 3/8" (23.7 cm) in diameter; spoon 8" (20.2 cm) long, overall height 2 7/8" (7.3 cm). MoMA.

Like the previously mentioned, Benglis, Duchamp and Oppenheim, I embrace the suggestive power of chance. I use soft materials and found objects and relate them to the body, through notions of size and shape and gesture. In *Chewing and Spitting* I chose a specific bowl to contain the marshmallows. Its shape and size reminded me of the oral cavity and its curled rim suggested lips. I used this bowl as a mold and multiplied it with ceramic casting techniques, playing with the softness of the material.

*The freshly poured porcelain bowl wobbles and collapses when I take it out of the mold too early. Gravity pulls. I can not control the shape. I let it fall to stop it from moving.*

The material investigation in my research is strongly guided by the corporeal experience of chewing. I search for materials that behave similar to the way food softens inside the mouth. Saliva, heat or chemical reactions influence marshmallows, wax, pewter, and rubber and they proceed from solid to soft, viscous, liquid to a solid state again. I chew marshmallows, spit them out and let them dry to harden. I heat wax, bite and let it cool down again. It is important that at some point the material softens, becomes malleable, shows its own forming potential and then solidifies to hold its shape. The interpretation and suggestive power of the object changes according to the material chosen.



Fig. 12. Patricia Huijnen, *Spoon, Experiments*, 2010. Sugar, wax. Dimensions variable. Photo: Elisa Ferrari. Used by permission of Elisa Ferrari.

The material research in my work *Spoon* (Fig. 12) for example took different iterations, and with every change in material, the intention of the work became clearer. The first versions of *Spoon* were cast in caramel and sugar. Chocolate was ruled out because I could not interfere with the hardening process and bite or chew it. Boiling, melting sugar - caramel and hard candy were next choices.

*While the caramel or boiled sugar is still soft and warm, I can deform it directly with my mouth. I take the cast spoon out of its mold, it curls around my finger, I push it towards the mouth and bite it. I feel the caramel around my teeth, it tastes sweet, warm, almost burning. Saliva collects under my tongue. The caramel hardens, I pull on the spoon to take it out. I pull harder, the caramel stretches - it feels as if my teeth are stuck to the spoon - and detaches. The sugar spoon versions are translucent, stretchy, soft, sticky and after a while, through the influence of humidity in the air, they become liquid. The impression of the teeth on the spoon is fluid, ephemeral.*

This evanescent character of *Spoon* did not fit with the rather violent action of biting it. *A moment of failure. Wax is the next option. The traces of biting and chewing on the spoon are clearer and remain. But the material still looks too soft, too fragile. To embody the violence of the biting action, the spoon needs to be cast in metal. In the pewter version of *Spoon*, the chewed parts look melted, the traces of the teeth are too close to the metals solidified flow. Finally I decide to bite the spoon and tear a part off. A wax mode, is cast in bronze. It looks bitten, not chewed and not melted.*



Fig. 13. Patricia Huijnen, *Spoon*, 2011. Pewter. 10x3x1 inch. Photo: Patricia Huijnen.  
Used by permission of the artist.

Depending on the material chosen the impression of the mold will vary in its openness or precision; it will react differently to the mouth-mold. Molding is a technique where material and form come into contact and interact to form an impression.



Fig. 14. Patricia Huijnen, *Spoon*, 2010-2011, detail. Bronze. 10x3x1 inch. Installation at Latitude 53, Edmonton. Photo: Patricia Huijnen.  
Used by permission of the artist.

## 4.2 The mouth as mold

In “Archaeology, Anachronism and Modernity of the Imprint” French art historian Georges Didi-Huberman defines how technique and chance both inform the “unexpected, precarious, open” character of an impression (Didi-Huberman 18). Didi-Huberman refers to the French philosopher Gilbert Simondon and his theory on the technical object. According to Simondon the degree of perfection of a technical object is dependent on the stability of its results (18). The shaping process of the produced result takes place inside of the technical system. An example is Simondon’s description of basic molding techniques used in pottery, such as the impression of clay onto the surface of a mold. He describes casting as a process which is prepared by the artist, but the impression of the material onto the surface of the mold takes place out of his control. It is not the worker that gives the clay its shape, but it is the clay which takes the shape of the mold (19). Simondon describes that one would have to be able to enter the mold with the clay, become clay and mold in order to experience their interaction and reflect on the shaping process itself (18-19). In its essence, the imprint is the result of an encounter, an encounter between *tyche* and *techné*: chance, coincidence and technique that the artist has to take into account (18). I embrace this open outcome of the printing process; never knowing exactly what will unfold. Embracing chance in a certain way allows for loss of control and being surprised by an outcome. It is a way of detaching the produced objects from my intentions and regarding them as separate entities.

I consider the mouth as a mold. It produces imprints which retain the openness Simondon is referring to, because the moment of impression takes place hidden from sight. The result of the chewing process can only be seen once the material is spat out, but the process can be felt and experienced within the body. The ongoing destruction of the material with every bite can be experienced and stopped, interjected. Using the mouth as mold is on the one hand a surrender from control exercised by vision. On the other hand, the contact between the material and the mold is sensed through tongue and internal skin and the body becomes the mold that feels the shaping process from within. For me it is the body that senses and constructs the knowledge about the shaping process. In this way it becomes a bodily experience that can be seen as personal or embodied and related to the construction of sensory knowledge.

### 4.3 The mouth as tool in sculpture by female artists

The direct use of the body as a sculptural tool or place has been experienced and discussed in feminist art practices and theories especially in the late 1960's and 1970's. Through performances involving the inside and outside of the body and notions of disgust, female artists from the 1970's reclaimed the body as a space of their own. I am referring for example to Carolee Schneeman's performance *Interior Scroll* from 1975, where she stood naked on a table, covered with mud and slowly extracted a paper scroll from her vagina while reading from it, Hannah Wilke who in 1974 in her photographic work *S.O.S — Starification Object Series* placed chewing gum, formed and folded into vaginal shapes, onto her nude breasts, arms, or back, or Eleanor Antin's work *Carving: A Traditional Sculpture* from 1972. She photographically documented her loss of 10 pounds over 37 days and referred to the traditional process of historical greek sculptors, "chipping away at a block of marble and discarding any unnecessary material" ("Eleanor Antin").

I situate my practice within a tradition of works that function within a female sensibility related to the use of the body as a sculptural tool, but where the performative element happens in private. The artists I chose to contextualize my work with, do not all relate to the body in an explicit feminist way, but relate to psychic and sensual experiences of their own body. Alina Szapocznikow worked with molds of body parts in the 1960's and early 70's in Paris and was concerned with questions of embodiment before feminist theories and writing on the *écriture féminine*, such as "Le Rire de Meduse"<sup>7</sup> by Hélène Cixous published in 1975, were developing (Chmielewski 40, 44). In 1974, Louise Bourgeois, already a practicing artist for more than 30 years (Crone, Graf Schaesberg 33-39), realized her work *The Destruction of the Father*, exposing a personal narrative in a context where young female artists, as mentioned above, were engaging in feminist art practices. Janine Antoni deliberately posits her work *Gnaw*, exhibited in 1992, in a feminist context, referencing feminist art performances through using the body as sculptural tool.

The following analysis of specific works by Alina Szapocznikow, Louise Bourgeois and Janine Antoni focuses on how the use of the mouth as a sculptural tool is considered, materialized and contextualized through their work. The cited artists refer to relevant psychoanalytic concepts, such as the development of subjectivity in Louise Bourgeois's work

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<sup>7</sup> Trans: The Laugh of Medusa

and the concept of desire, in Alina Szapocznikow's and Janine Antoni's work, but this will not be analyzed to a deeper extent within the framework of this essay.

#### **4.3.1 Alina Szapocznikow *Petit Dessert I* and *Photosculptures***

Alina Szapocznikow was a Polish sculptor who, after a career as a traditional figurative sculptor, began experimenting with newly available materials in the 1960's, such as polyester resins and expanding foams. The relation to her body is permanent in her work and deeply informed by her experience in Nazi internment camps during the Second World War and later on by her illness. While living and working in Paris, Szapocznikow writes an artist statement in 1972, sent to French art critic Pierre Restany, co-founder with artist Yves Klein of the Nouveaux Réalistes group.

As for me, I produce awkward objects [...] Through casts of the body I try to fix the fleeting moments of life, its paradoxes and absurdity, in transparent polyester. My work is difficult, as sensation that is felt in a very immediate and diffuse way is often resistant to identification. [...] Despite everything, I persist in trying to fix in resin the traces of our body. (Szapocznikow)<sup>8</sup>

I specifically relate her description of diffuse and immediate embodied sensations that remain difficult to name to my investigation around affect in chapter 3.2.1. Sensations can remain in a state of neutrality and slowly shift in a direction that can not be immediately categorized until visible reactions are provoked. For Szapocznikow the repetitive casting of the body is a way to materialize the indeterminacy of sensations and render them tangible. Szapocznikow often worked with tinted polyester resin casts of her own legs, belly, lips or breasts, "creating multiple casts of her own anatomy, with a distinct preference for erotically charged parts" (Chmielewski 42), to transform them, sometimes into objects with utilitarian functions, such as lamps or pillows. In her essay "Alina Szapocznikow and her Sculpture of Plastic Impermanence" art historian Amy Chmielewski states that, informed by Surrealism and the use of utilitarian objects in art by the Nouveaux Réalistes, Szapocznikow "explored objecthood not through mass produced goods, but by objectifying the human form" (42). The casts she makes are fragmented, not mass produced, and keep the traces of her own body. Even though sometimes framed as utilitarian objects Szapocznikow's representations of the human body remain ambiguous, appear unstable, multiple, impermanent, eroticised

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<sup>8</sup> Alina Szapocznikow's statement "My work has its roots" is published in Jakubowska, Agata, ed. *Alina Szapocznikow Awkward Objects*. Warsaw, Poland: Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw, 2011, p. 13.



and anxious at the same time. Seducing, they evoke a disturbing after taste in the viewer.

Art critic Jan Verwoert writes about the ambivalent representation of the mouth in her work:

The delicious joys of the mouth! But also, alas, the curse of having a mouth! Filled with the bitter taste of memories one chokes on; a melancholy mouth that neither swallows nor spits things out but continues chewing, dismembering the remembered, in a ceaseless grinding motion of the teeth. [...] Cast in bronze, cement, polyester or polyurethane, [Szapocznikow's] mouth is many mouths. Like autonomous, disembodied, strangely alive beings, these mouths populate the world of her sculptures; with their sensuous, often luminescent lips, they present ports of entry to a body of work that speaks of sweetest ecstasy as much as of terrifying pain. To look at Szapocznikow's work is to look at sculpture in oral terms. (Verwoert)

Verwoert emphasizes the autobiographical content and the omnipresence of the mouth in her works. It is a mouth that at the same time fragments, cuts apart and through castings becomes itself a sculpture. The mouth is the creator and the created, both at the same time. To stress the double role of the mouth in Szapocznikow's work I am discussing *Petit Dessert I* (Fig. 15) and *Photosculptures* (Fig. 16).

In the *Dessert* series from 1970-71, Szapocznikow places plastic casts of breasts and lips, tinted with fleshy and appealing red colours, on glass bowls and dessert cups, "like scoops of exotically flavoured ice cream" (44). Lips and breast are compared to sweet desserts and function as a sensualized referent for the viewer. Szapocznikow contextualizes her casts using utilitarian objects, glass dishware and thus situates the body within a consumable, utilitarian realm, similar to Surrealist sculptural practices that problematize the everyday. In *Petit Dessert I (Small Dessert I)*, a cast of her mouth and chin is placed on a yellow shape of soft plastic that seems to flow out of the glass dish containing both. As a cast duplicate of her own body, the mouth is represented in a figurative way. The appealing look of the cast body part is combined with a shapeless, informal blob of bright yellow plastic. Both are made of the same industrial, artificial material but convey disparate connotations: pleasure and distaste, containment and excess.

This material has been removed for copyright restrictions. The image depicts the work *Petit Dessert I* by artist Alina Szapocznikow. It consists in a coloured polyester resin cast of a mouth and chin on a yellow polyester resin shape, both placed within a glass bowl. The image is sourced from the Hammer Museum in Los Angeles.

Online link to the image:  
[http://hammer.ucla.edu/exhibitions/detail/exhibition\\_id/212](http://hammer.ucla.edu/exhibitions/detail/exhibition_id/212)

Fig. 15. Alina Szapocznikow, *Petit Dessert I*, 1970-1971. Colored polyester resin and glass. 3 (8 x 11 x 13 cm). Kravis Collection.

In contrast to Szapocznikow's representation of her own body my art takes a less manifest eroticized position. In *Petit Dessert I* Szapocznikow depicts the body. I evoke the body. My work appeals to the sense of taste through a deliberate choice of materials, such as marshmallows, but remains in an indexical relationship to the body through the impression of traces. Like Szapocznikow, I use functional objects that relate to the female body. I choose to work with domestic objects such as spoons or bowls because they are reminiscent of the nourishing and containing function of the female body. But then I transform them and render them obsolete. The bitten *Spoon* for example bears the traces of its partial consumption and rejection.

In her work *Photosculptures* from 1971, Szapocznikow makes use of the sculptural capacities of the mouth. Her artwork consists in a series of 20 blown up black and white photographs of chewed gum. In a text from 1971, exhibited together with one of the photographs, she describes her process:

The other day, Saturday, tired from having spent hours polishing my Rolls-Royce in pink Portuguese marble, I sat in the sun and day-dreamed as I mechanically chewed a bit of gum. In shaping with my mouth odd-looking and bizarre forms, I suddenly realized what an extraordinary collection of abstract sculptures was moving between my teeth. One has only to photograph and enlarge my masticated creations in order to achieve a sculptural presence. Chew well then. Look around you. Creation lies just between dreams and daily work. (Szapocznikow)<sup>9</sup>

<sup>9</sup> The English translation of the original French document, published online in the Alina Szapocznikow Archive of the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw, is taken from Manuela Ammer " 'My American Dream': Alina Szapocznikow's take on Conceptual Art" published in Jakubowska, p. 158.

This material has been removed for copyright restrictions. The image depicts one black and white photograph of the *Photosculptures* series by artist Alina Szapocznikow: a chewed and stretched gum sticking partially to the edge of a thin shelf. The image is sourced from the Alina Szapocznikow Archive at the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw.

Online link to the image:  
<http://www.artmuseum.pl/archiwa.php?l=1&a=1&skrot=515>

Fig. 16. Alina Szapocznikow, *Photosculptures*, 1971.  
B/w photographs, 21 parts: 24 x 30 cm each.

Szapocznikow describes the mouth as a transitional place, such as described in chapter three, where forms and shapes are constantly moving, appearing and disappearing, through the repetitive work of jaw and teeth. The mouth becomes a creator of abstract sculptures. In her text “My American Dream: Alina Szapocznikow’s take on conceptual art” writer and curator Manuela Ammer comments that “instead of passively lending its shape and texture to the material imprinted upon, however, the mouth took on the active role of the ‘unconscious, gustatory, and sensual executor’<sup>10</sup> of a process the hands no longer wish to be accountable for” (153). Ammer emphasizes the sensory aspect of the mouth that, as described in the section “The mouth as mold”, becomes the symbol of a surrender of control. Szapocznikow creates the sculptural aspect of the pieces of gum through the photographic medium and the change in scale. Through scaling up, she removes the direct reference to the body and transforms it, distances it, to enhance the formal and material qualities of the gum-sculpture. In my work, I directly reference the scale of the mouth and work within the constraints of its limitations in size. The mouth, its containment and its spillings, become the subject of my work and its sensual perception my guide.

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<sup>10</sup> Quote from Urszula Czaratoryska, “The Cruel Clarity” in *Alina Szapocznikow. 1926-1973*, Warsaw: Galeria Zacheta, 1998, p. 21.

#### 4.3.2 Louise Bourgeois *The Destruction of the Father*

Working in different mediums, from drawings to large scale sculpture and installations, artist Louise Bourgeois's work is strongly autobiographic and refers amongst others to childhood memories, emotions and the female body. In her work *The Destruction of the Father* from 1974 (Fig. 17), Bourgeois transformed a fantasy description of eating her father into a sculptural installation. Bourgeois created a mouth-like environment, with protruding teeth-like shapes, stool sized placed around and above a table-like horizontal surface covered with organic objects cast from animal limbs. Wrapped with fabric the installation resembles a large cave and is lit by a hidden red light.

This material has been removed for copyright restrictions. The image depicts Louise Bourgeois' work *The Destruction of the Father*, an installation of round protruding stool-like shapes, wrapped with fabric and placed around and above a table covered with organic forms and lit by a hidden red lamp. The image is sourced from the Hermitage Museum.

Online link to the image:

[http://www.hermitagemuseum.org/html\\_En/13/hm13\\_2\\_001\\_6.html](http://www.hermitagemuseum.org/html_En/13/hm13_2_001_6.html)

Fig. 17. Louise Bourgeois, *The Destruction of the Father*, 1974. Plaster, latex, wood, fabric, red light. 93 5/8 x 142 5/8 x 97 7/8 in. (237.8 x 362.3 x 248.6 cm).

Bourgeois recalls the childhood fantasy behind the work with the following words:

What frightened me was that at the dinner table, my father would go on and on, showing off, aggrandizing himself. And the more he showed off, the smaller we felt. Suddenly there was a terrific tension, and we grabbed him and pulled him onto the table and pulled his legs and arms apart – dismembered him, right? And we were so successful in beating him up that we ate him up. Finished. It is a fantasy. (Bourgeois 158)

This mise-en-scène of the fantasy represents the mouth in a quite literal but oversized way. In the fantasy biting and eating are seen as violent and destructive actions that are at the origin of sculptural work. In her essay “Bad Enough Mother” art historian Mignon Nixon states that “the desire to eat the father and to eat his words is (...) turned into the desire for sculptural solutions or, we could say, for object solutions” (75). A sculptural solution being in

Bourgeois' terms "one that performs an aggressive or desiring operation on an object" (Nixon 75).

In this daydream, eating and biting happen as a reaction to the heightening words spoken by the father figure. The reply to the father is a bite rather than another set of words. Nixon states that "in this fantasy of devouring the father, eating takes the place of naming in a substitution of oral sadism for speech" (74). She relates this act back to psychoanalytic theories developed by Melanie Klein around oral sadism and its role in subjectivity formation. "Performed under the title *The Destruction of the Father*, this critique of Lacan through Klein, framed as an attack on language through biting, on Oedipal naming through pre-Oedipal sadism, stages an assault on patriarchy from the infantile position" (75). The act of biting is framed as an attack on language and through that generates an inversion of hierarchies that adds another layer of meaning to the bite in relation to existing structures.

Bourgeois' room-filling installation also recreates a ritualistic space that exposes an act of transformation. The work itself had a transforming effect on Bourgeois, similar to the transforming action of the bite. She writes that "with *The Destruction of the Father*, the recall was so strong, and it was such a lot of work, that I felt a different person. I felt as if it had existed. It really changed me" (Bourgeois 158). The transformative quality of the creative process that I described in chapter two appears in Bourgeois' sculpture through a psychological, confrontational process.

In my work *Spoon* the violent aspect of the bite can be interpreted as a similar silent revolution that crosses a boundary and affects beyond its limits. Bourgeois describes the act of biting in a fantasy, but I use it directly on an object. In my work biting is a constantly repeated gesture, framed as research to materialize sensed experiences. Contextualized within table-like structures the chewed objects are parts of sculptural constructs that embody the unstable, shifting and transformative quality of sensations.

#### 4.3.3 Janine Antoni *Gnaw*

Janine Antoni is a contemporary artist whose work focuses mostly on the transformation of everyday activities into process-based artworks that involve the use of her own body or singular parts of it such as her eyelashes, hair and mouth. In her work *Gnaw* from 1992 (Fig. 18 and 19) Janine Antoni uses the biting as a sculptural gesture and refers to representations of aggression and destruction as well as feminine desire and consumption. Antoni's work consists of two cubes, one made of 600 pounds of chocolate and the other one made of the same amount of lard as well as a display of heart shaped, chocolate candy boxes and lipsticks.



Fig. 18. Janine Antoni, *Gnaw*, 1992. 600 lbs. of chocolate gnawed by the artist (24 x 24 x 24 inches); 600 lbs. of lard, gnawed by the artist (24 X 24 X 24 inches); 45 heart-shaped packages for chocolate made from chewed chocolate removed from the chocolate cube and 400 lipsticks made with pigment, beeswax and chewed lard removed from the lard cube. Dimensions variable. Installation shot (LA MOCA). Courtesy of the artist and Luhring Augustine, New York.

Each of the cubes has been chiselled by the artist's mouth<sup>11</sup> in the privacy of her studio. Antoni carved the cubes with her teeth, gnawing and biting, and spitting the bitten parts out. The material removed in the sculpting process was then recast: the left over chocolate was formed into 45 heart shaped chocolate boxes and the rest of lard was transformed with added pigment and beeswax into 400 lipsticks. Those "objects of conventionalized feminine desire" were then displayed in a room at the front of the gallery (Nixon 78).

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<sup>11</sup> See the e-mail of a representative of the Luhring-Augustine Gallery in the appendices.

The gnawed sculptures strongly relate to an internal, obsessive or even destructive consumption due to the use of chocolate and lard, the traces of teeth on the cubes and the sheer amount of material. The heart shaped chocolate boxes and the lipsticks refer to consumer desire, excess, packaging and according to art historian Mignon Nixon their process of creation mirrors “the struggle to suppress aggression or to repair its perceived effects” (78). The clear separation in the installation of the work between the bitten cubes and the transformed consumer objects, suggests a binary interpretation of opposing forces at work between inside and outside, aggression and make up. But both underscore the “idea of artificially induced desire”, chocolate through “phenylethylamine, a chemical produced by the brain when one falls in love”, and lipstick through its use as feminine beauty product (Iannacci).

To contextualize my practice I am focusing on the gnawed cubes in Antoni’s work because they relate to the use of the bite in ways that are present in my own works. Antoni describes her interest in the bite in the following terms:

I call the piece *Gnaw* because I’m interested in the bite as a kind of primal urge. I love to look at a little baby when they put everything in their mouth in order to know it, and through that process, they destroy it. I was interested in the bite because it was both intimate and destructive. It summed up my relationship to art history. I feel attached to my artistic heritage and I want to destroy it. It defined me as an artist, and it excludes me as a woman, both at the same time. (Antoni, *MoMA*)

This quote lays out the push and pull inherent in the bite between intimacy, attachment and destruction. The tension apparent in the ambiguity of the bite is what interests me. In *Gnaw* the traces of teeth on the cubes are so detailed and intimate that the viewer can imagine the sensation of the bite and the saturation through the amount of chocolate and lard in his/her own mouth. Antoni’s use of chocolate and lard as materials emphasizes the suggestion of the body and the sensations both of pleasure and disgust in relation to food. Carving and biting the chocolate cube for hours exceeds what one could bear, and what tasted sweet at first becomes an enduring and destructive task.



Fig. 19. Janine Antoni, *Gnaw*, 1992. 600 lbs. of chocolate gnawed by the artist (24 x 24 x 24 inches). Installation shot (LA MOCA). Courtesy of the artist and Luhring Augustine, New York.

To shape the cubes Antoni used her mouth to sculpt in a way a traditional sculptor would carve a figure out of a stone or wood block. In her work it is both, the carved shape that is of importance, but primarily the process itself, the traces of the mouth-tool on the material. Antoni describes the different steps of the creation of the work with the following words: “So, my cubes are poured, chewed, spit out, melted down and recast. They've really been in intimate contact with my body and really carry the traces of my body on them” (Antoni, *MoMA*). The everyday gestures of chewing and spitting become part of an intimate formative process. Listed among other traditional sculpting techniques, such as pouring and casting, they become part of them. In that sense Antoni integrates the acts of chewing and spitting within a traditional artistic realm. Placed on marble pedestals, the gnawed cubes are elevated in the way a traditional sculpture is poised on a plinth. On the other hand Antoni uses the destructive aspect of biting and spitting to attack the cube, a stable geometric form that in my eyes represents art history through referencing Minimalist sculpture for example.

The simultaneously destructive and intimate process, the biting, mastication and spitting-out, present in each of these cubes, can be seen as an attack upon the intransigent geometry and rationality of [M]inimalism. Antoni underlines the fact that while her [M]inimalist forefathers strived to attain a mute or language-less aura around their work meant to invoke a transcendent, universal experience, she literally fills her mouth with the artificiality of the cube to redirect our attention to her body with this activity. (Iannacci)



In my work *Spoon* I refer to a similar tension. I juxtapose a traditional, universal artistic material, bronze, and a personal, intimate, and destructive gesture, the bite. In *Spoon*, an everyday gesture is fixed and elevated into an art historical realm, without losing its destructive effect.

I find important to point out that after a certain time in the exhibition the lard cube was further transformed and gave in to heat and gravity to collapse into a heap. The material lost its cast shape and the started destruction through the bite continued. A moment of unexpectedness entered the work that could even be considered a failure that relates to Post-Minimalist sculptural explorations described in section 4.1.

In my work I would like to capture such moments of potential disintegration or failure. In *Chewing and Spitting* the bowls that contain the chewed marshmallows are partially collapsing. I developed their shape through technical failure. I took them out of their molds too early, to let them fall and collapse.

In contrast to Antoni's work, the shapes I chew and transform are taken from the every-day, they are existing objects that I encounter and associate with the mouth. In relation to scale, my sculptures stay in a constant close relationship to the mouth. I sculpt the chewed pieces with my mouth and spit them out for observation. While Antoni chews on cubes of the size of 24 by 24 by 24 inches, the mouthful, or potential bolus, as volume and measure of the real scale of the body is a permanent concept in my work.

The mouth is as sculptural tool inherently limited in its capacity of giving shape - be it either through casting, biting, chewing or licking. There is only so much it can do and only a specific volume that can be treated. Similar to an experimental laboratory setting the same basic parameters with changing materials, colours or shapes are reused, re-tested and re-experimented. Using those constraints as meaningful constituents means that the repetition, the search for difference, is engrained in my work. I utilize molding and casting techniques to generate difference rather than a multiplicity of the same. I relate to Helen Molesworth, chief curator at The Wexner Center for the Arts, as she describes artist's approaches to the sculptural works that were part of the *Part Object Part Sculpture* exhibition from 2005: "[the artist's works offer] a series of imperfect vessels, cast objects filled with the matter of their own making, surfaces resistant to words" (Molesworth 25).

The cast objects I produce are imperfect in the way that they are hand made, or rather 'mouth made', they have been in contact with my body. The potential to produce a divergent multiplicity, drives the reproduction, the repetition. The objects are vessels in the way that they contain a materiality, and the traces of their making - the traces of teeth are engrained in their shape. The chewed objects expose an experience that language can not articulate, but that can be sensed by the body. Spat out the chewed objects contain the traces of their creation. They are affected and affect in return.

## 5. Spitting

*Spitting is externalizing. The inside experience is transferred to the outside. Splash.*

In 1929 French writer Georges Bataille published an entry in his *Critical Dictionary*<sup>12</sup> on the "Informe" [formless], relating it to spit.

Thus formless is not only an adjective with a given meaning but a term which declassifies, generally requiring that each thing take on a form. [...] To declare [...] that the universe is not like anything, and is simply formless, is tantamount to saying the universe is something like a spider or spittle. (Bataille)

In his dictionary, Bataille intended to invert and question the hierarchical position of 'form' and 'content' in modernist thought and provide not the meaning of words, but what they do (Bois 28). I agree with Bataille's concept of considering the operating potential of terms. The term formless brings things down, in the same way as spit can be perceived as something low, due to its loss of form. I consider the use of chewing and spitting in my artistic process as transforming the disintegrating action of those gestures into a formative potential. It is in a way expanding the boundaries of the concept of form or annihilating it.

Bataille's article was followed by two entries on "Spittle": "Spittle Soul" by Marcel Giraule and "Mouth Water" by Michel Leiris (Bois 25 and Faccini 29-30). In his entry on spittle as "Mouth Water" ethnographer and Surrealist writer Michel Leiris points out the functions of the mouth traditionally conceived in terms of high and low.

Just below the eyes, the mouth occupies a privileged position because it is both locus of speech and respiratory orifice. It is considered the cave where the pact of the kiss

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<sup>12</sup> Bataille published his *Critical Dictionary* in the journal *Documents* edited by himself from 1929 to 1930.

is sealed rather than the oily factory of mastication. [...] Spittle, on the other hand, casts the mouth in one fell swoop down to the last rung of the organic ladder, lending it a function of ejection even more repugnant than its role as gate through which one stuffs food. (Leiris)

Leiris points to the common origin of spoken words and spit writing about the ambivalence of the mouth. Evoking the “incongruous image of a spluttering orator” Leiris brushes against the established hierarchies of his time. I compare my artwork to those little drops of spit that sputter out of the mouth while speaking and bring back spoken words to a bodily realm. Further I consider spitting as an action of transfer and contextualization that in my sculptural process is a continuation of the biting and chewing gestures. While eating, the mouth has the potential to either accept and swallow or reject and spit out. The question of what causes rejection or assimilation, of what shifts affection into action, remains open for each individual as we have seen in De Beauvoir’s quotes. It also remains open to the viewer of my work to create their own associations of pleasure or revulsion, while observing the bodily traces on the chewed objects. Essential to me is the formative moment that happens when affection shifts to action and action to affection. Spitting is a gesture that makes the formative moment that happens inside the mouth visible. Spitting transfers the object, shape or material from the inside out. It is a shifting from one context to another.

In her essay “Happy Objects” Sara Ahmed discusses the contagious aspect of affect or feelings and points out that “to be affected by another does not mean that affect simply passes or ‘leaps’ from one body to another. The affect becomes an object only given the contingency of how we are affected” (Ahmed 36). In my sculptures I am trying to transfer the potential or the possibility of shifting affecting moments. To contextualize the bitten parts within my sculptures I use notions of instability and imbalance, of fragility and chance. In my work *Chewing and Spitting* for example the bowls that are supposed to contain the chewed marshmallows are rounded at the bottom, they are unstable; some tip over, others collapse. The irregularity of the heaped fabric on the table enhances this effect, but at the same time provides a soft support. A multiplicity of nuanced interactions between the bowls, the cloth and the chewed marshmallows takes place. The bowls seem nicely tucked in or are they squeezed or even crushed by the weight of the fabric material? Some fall, when I install the work; there is always a certain amount of breakage. Imbalanced, some bowls just roll down the table. Further the heaped cover on the tea table engulfs the whole table surface, it disappears under this excessively spread out material. Just the legs stand out.

Curved towards the inside they come together in the center and seem to be squeezed together. This adds to the feeling of imbalance between the different forces that are at work in the sculpture.

Constructed from different elements that contextualize each other, such as the marshmallows, bowls, the soft fabric and the table in *Chewing and Spitting*, my works also refer to the important art historical discourse concerning sculpture and its support. Sculptor Constantin Brancusi (1876 – 1957) made this complex relationship a consistent theme in his work; one that still challenges sculptors, and myself as an artist, today. In her essay “Sculpture in the Expanded Field” art historian, theorist and critic Rosalind Krauss discusses the nomadic characteristic of modernist sculpture and its detachment from a site specific context, by using Brancusi’s art as an example. “Through its fetishization of the base, the sculpture reaches downward to absorb the pedestal into itself and away from actual place; and through the representation of its own materials or the process of its construction, the sculpture depicts its own autonomy” (Krauss, *Expanded* 34). Krauss describes for example how in Brancusi’s work *Cock* the base becomes “the morphological generator of the figurative part of the object” or how in *Endless Column* “the sculpture is all base” (34). Often constructing the base of the figurative part with piled and stacked modular forms Brancusi considers the interaction of all the elements through contrasts of texture, shape and colour (Krauss, *Passages* 99 and Temkin).

Choosing to work with table-like structures to contextualize the bitten objects I create I am experimenting with different variations within my sculptures. To me it is a challenging process of trials and failures until the different components enter a relationship that enhances their respective qualities. The chewed spheres of *Jawbreaker* for example are placed on a glass surface that highlights the balancing effect of the spheres. It’s thinness in comparison to the height of the stilt metal structure accentuates their fragility.



Fig. 20. Patricia Huijnen, *Jawbreaker*, 2011-2012. Steel, wood, glass, pigmented wax. 20x16x45 inch. Installation at studio. Photo: Patricia Huijnen. Used by permission of the artist.

Through this research project undertaken in the past two years I have come to understand the suggestive power of my work and its relationship to sculptural practice. In the future I am interested in refining the potential of my work's poetic and expressive impact. New directions include the exploration of different ways to contextualize my work outside of conventional art gallery spaces by, for example, creating sculptures that respond to, and inform social-history related museological settings, such as in works by Susan Hiller, Mark Dion and Fred Wilson. I am envisioning works that could be situated amongst historical artefacts to intervene in or subvert this environment, as a way to bring the body and its unstable, indefinite sensations into contexts that seem void of it and integrate concepts of personal and situated ways of knowing within seemingly universal ones.

The mouth and its gestures of biting, chewing and spitting related to sculpture's provocative and sensual potential remains an ongoing investigation for relating the body to creation of form and exploring its expressive possibilities.

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## Appendices

Excerpt of e-mail correspondence with Luhring-Augustine representative Caroline Burghardt:

Caroline Burghardt <caroline@luhringaugustine.com> a écrit :

Dear Patricia,

Thank you for sending the excerpts of your thesis. Janine has looked at them and said they look fine except the following line:

"Each cube has been chiselled in a private performance..." should

read, "Each cube has been chiseled in her studio..." It wasn't a performance.

I am happy to send you images of the work as you requested. The files may be downloaded from our ftp with the login and links below. The full details for the work precedes the link and our reproduction guidelines with crediting informatin follow. If you need further assistance or have questions please don't hesitate to contact me.