

# Spatial Entrails: themes from Surrealism and Psychoanalysis in the interiors of Sugar Suite

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## ABSTRACT

*This paper looks at theoretical perspectives that emerge in a recent hair and beauty interior in Newcastle by the design practice herd. The clean white curvilinear interiors of Sugar Suite, cloaked by transparent images of fashion, engage a number of ideas relating to early avant-garde experiments with interiors, and particularly Surrealism. Demonstrating an ancestry with the work of Kiesler, Dali and Maar, this paper will use key ideas drawn from Surrealism and Psychoanalysis to decode the sensual interiors and the theoretical frameworks that support them.*

Then, by remote and pathless ways, through rocky country thickly overgrown with rough woods, he reached the Gorgon's home. Everywhere, all through the fields and along the roadways he saw statues of men and beasts, whom the sight of the Gorgon had changed from their true selves into stone. But he himself looked at dreaded Medusa's form as it was reflected in the bronze of the shield which he carried on his left arm. While she and her snakes were wrapped in deep slumber, he severed her head from her shoulders. The fleet-winged Pegasus and his brother were born then, children of the Gorgon's blood – Ovid<sup>1</sup>

The myth of Medusa, relayed through a number of classical texts, operates as a key motif for framing historical ideas related to vision, seduction, fragmentation and reflection. Through its resurrection in psychoanalysis, feminism and art theory in the Twentieth Century, the myth has become a pervasive theoretical backdrop to creative practice that, through an array of discursive readings, has reinstated the primacy of myth and its continuing centrality to the cultural, social and psychosexual structures of contemporary life.

The bones of the myth are well known. The only mortal of three 'Gorgon' sisters, Medusa, in the telling of Ovid, is punished by Athena for her rape by Uranus in the Temple of Minerva. The goddess replaces her hair with serpents such that any man that looks at her will be immediately turned to stone.<sup>2</sup> Perseus, having attained a bag, sword<sup>3</sup> and reflective shield from the Graiai sisters (the literal embodiment of age and youthful beauty), slays the Gorgon by averting her gaze through the reflective shield and decapitating the monstrous head with his sword. Through the bloody act, the winged horses Pegasus and Chrysaor were born from Medusa's blood. Triumphant, Perseus

returns the head of Medusa to Athene.<sup>4</sup> The head, which retains its frightening and ossifying qualities, is emblazoned into Athena's shield (becoming the Gorgoneion) and, eventually, through its embodiment in Greek and later Western culture, into buildings, temples and defensive ramparts. The once deadly visual artefact is transformed into a restorative and protective shield or screen to be used against enemies. The multiple roles of vision – stolen from the sisters, subverted in the conquest of Medusa, deployed as intimidation in the Gorgoneion – function as a reification of the myth and the visual and spatial representation of the mythical imagination.

A recent commercial interior for a hair and beauty salon in the revitalised Honeysuckle precinct of Newcastle, New South Wales, serves as a point of departure for examining a number of these themes relating to the myth of Medusa and its relationship towards aspects of the 'interior' as an agent of both fantasy and critique. Completed by Chris Tucker, and his independent design practice *herd*, the interior of the Sugar Suite salon is characterised by the seamless, folding curves of its interior walls, the conspicuous patterning of transparency at the edges and windows, and the extent to which it distinguishes itself from the repetitive and homogenous commercial landscape of the area. The work of *herd* is not well known outside of Newcastle, despite practicing for over fifteen years and producing a number of high-quality residential, commercial and urban projects in Newcastle and surrounding areas in that time. The Sugar Suite interior, as a prominent spatial insertion into a highly trafficked part of the city, is an innovative project in the Newcastle context, asking direct questions of the viewer and the surrounding architecture.

Sugar Suite deals critically with architectural ideas relating to hair,<sup>5</sup> reflection, fragmentation and the screen interweaving, whether consciously or not, a number of elements from the myth of Medusa and its interpretation through psychoanalysis and surrealism.<sup>6</sup> In this sense the salon provokes psychical and theoretical readings of the interior space and its context and, through the spatial connections with the broader urban environment, tacitly demands them. The building's entrails provide a network of unexplored strands that fold outwards into the city, questioning the historical narratives that it is built upon.

It is perhaps unusual to resurrect figures such as Medusa in the context of architectural theory and, in particular, interiors. While myth is an important and continuing theme in the production and analysis of art, it has been less successfully integrated into the field of architecture. This is at the heart of complications that have existed between the artistic principles of movements such as Surrealism and their perceived lack of execution in architectural space. The two major injections into the scholarship of architecture and surrealism – Dalibor Veseley's special issue of *Architectural Design*<sup>7</sup> dedicated to the subject *Surrealism and Architecture*, published at the end of 1978, and Thomas Mical's *Surrealism and Architecture* published in 2005<sup>8</sup> – have both stressed the inability of surrealism to assimilate ideas relating to architecture into their work, and demonstrated a broader indifference to architectural space that has characterised the analysis of the period. For Veseley,

'the Surrealists were not particularly interested in architecture, except occasionally and then only in a very personal and rather indirect way.'<sup>9</sup> In the same volume, Frampton had conceded 'it may be argued that the surreal in architecture does not exist, or at least does not present itself in the same way as the manifestations of the movement.'<sup>10</sup> Similarly, more than twenty-five years later, Thomas Mical referred to architecture as a 'blind spot' in Surrealist theory and argued 'it is only architecture that remains as the unfulfilled promise of Surrealist thought.'<sup>11</sup>

Despite the widespread scepticism towards connecting architecture and surrealism, there is an important and recurring legacy of Surrealist thought in contemporary aesthetic practices, and this can be helpful as a mechanism for repositioning interiors such as Sugar Suite. Outwardly surveying the immediate context of Newcastle and inwardly concealing its infinite interior behind a clandestine series of masks, the Sugar Suite interior connects the viewer, whether outside or inside, with a continuing legacy of thinking about space that was first promoted in surrealism and functioned, both symbolically and programmatically, throughout the duration of its active period. The salon has a clearly antagonistic relationship to the city and its surrounding context, cloaked behind suspended screens, revealing torn fragments of feet and hair to passing pedestrians, mounting eyes across transparent surfaces that stare eerily down long traffic corridors or blankly into characterless public spaces. These are all established Surrealist strategies and, when distilled through the myth of Medusa, can provide new models for rethinking vision and space which are, whether intuitive or theoretical, still pervasive in contemporary urban landscapes. Opposing the expanse of empty shopfronts that stretch along Hunter Street in Newcastle, and the bland commercial developments that tower above it, the Sugar Suite interior provides a 'critical' architecture through which the space of the interior can be rethought.

Drawing theoretical ideas from surrealism and psychoanalysis, a detailed analysis of the Sugar Suite interior engages ideas relating to vision, mythology and the fragmentation of desire. The analysis will focus on two key aspects of the space: firstly, the

role of reflection and doubling in the sinuous organisation of the labyrinthine internal space and; secondly, the role of the window (and image) and its interaction with the street and surrounding spaces. Within these two areas, the paper will demonstrate the way that ideas relating to surrealism and psychoanalysis are reworked in the Sugar Suite salon as agents of architectural and spatial critique. This positions 'interior' as an active and instrumental voice in the construction of the built environment and the junction between commercial and psychosexual themes and drives.

## LABYRINTHS AND MASKS IN THE INTERIORS OF SUGAR SUITE

The newly created Honeysuckle area of Newcastle occupies a piece of land bounded by the train line to the south and the harbour to the north, and extending west from the civic precinct for around a kilometre. The area has been characterised by recent large-scale residential and commercial development that, in the period since 2004, has dramatically transformed the industrial edge of Newcastle Harbour into a space of recreation, restaurants and urban living. Opening up to views of the working inner-harbour of Newcastle, including the grain-silos, tug-boat births and dry-dock, the new harbour foreshore has transformed the relationship between the city and the harbour but, at the same time, depleted the commercial viability of the historical Hunter Street commercial area to the immediate south of the train line. The architectural language of Honeysuckle, built in a short period by a relatively small number of practices, is one of repetition where commercial leasable space is provided at ground floor, and residential and commercial office space organised into the levels above. A network of public plazas, squares and the foreshore itself knit together the ground floor retail spaces, which are overwhelmingly filled with restaurants and cafes or, in a number of instances, still for lease.

Sugar Suite is a hair and beauty salon that sits in the ground floor of one of the large residential buildings in Honeysuckle and was completed in 2007. The salon faces onto a large green area to the

east, the historic wool sheds to the south and a secluded public square to the west. The commercial glazing and door systems, used repetitively throughout the Honeysuckle precinct, comprise all three walls of the salon, punctuated, in various instances by fire escapes and lift entries. Within this landscape of generic commercial finishes, Sugar Suite is characterised by its explicit use of graphic imagery, the seductive choreography of architectural space and interiors and, most importantly, the veiled model of architectural critique that operates at the level of an embedded theorising of space. In each of these cases the use of Surrealist imagery is conspicuous, not only as part of the sensual and haptic experience of the space but a broader strategy for mobilising ideas relating to commodification, the body and systems of visual and cultural exchange.

The architecture of the salon deliberately erodes the commercial logic of the building envelope through a number of deliberate gestures. The floor plan for Sugar Suite creates a liquefied space where the rigid edges of the commercial exterior are filled with curving, folding and accelerating architectural surfaces which are squeezed into the corners of the space and, in the process, dissolve the boundaries of figure and ground. The disorienting aspects of the interior are further exaggerated through the use of mirrors, located asymmetrically so that a network of reflected perspective views is constantly leading the eye into hidden and often unlocatable chambers of the space. As well as disorienting the body, this also fuels paranoia, where the mirrors glare back from different edges of the space giving the constant perception that the individual at the centre is being watched. The glazed exterior walls of the building, more part of the external architecture than the internal space, are transformed into seductive screens where images culled from fashion and advertising (specifically the model photos of Kerastase) are applied transparently to the glass surface, maintaining the reflective capacities of the glass but also moderating the flow of light into the interior. These faces function at an urban level, staring down the street at approaching cars or silently policing the adjacent public spaces that they look on to.

A number of ideas relating to the organisation of the salon and its expression as surfaces at the edges align strongly with 'Medusan' schemas of visual control and seduction. Two aspects of the myth in particular help to structure this argument: Perseus' use of reflection to confront and behead Medusa and the eventual grafting of the image of Medusa onto the shield of Athena. The use of reflection, explicit in the interior organisation of Sugar Suite, serves to highlight the disorienting but visually empowering use of the mirror as a strategy of internal fragmentation.

Hal Foster has read in Canova's *Perseus with the Head of Medusa* (1804 - 1806) a unification of visual systems that, thematically at least, are organised around the Nietzschean categories of the Apollonian and the Dionysian.<sup>12</sup> In Foster's reading, the decapitated head of the Gorgon, held aloft by Perseus after the act, is symbolic of the triumph of Apollonian systems of beauty over the Dionysian impulses that have been subdued. For Foster, the guarding of the main stair and the collection of Metropolitan Museum of Art by the statue had a symbolic role in organising the interior and demarcating its experience to the viewer.

There is a strong thematic oscillation in both art and theory between the edifying instincts of the Apollonian and the sensual interiors of the Dionysian evoked, in a number of instances, by the myth of Medusa.<sup>13</sup> Central to the dialogue that exists between Dionysus and Apollo is the confluence of two competing forces of vision; in the first case, a vision directed at an ideal form radiating outwards from a fixed point and, in the second case, a vision of the collective; concentric and democratic extending from the circumference to the centre (as in the Dionysian theatre). Barthes labelled these poles in his essay on the Eiffel Tower as the two 'sexes of sight' (the masculine emits and the feminine receives), already pointing to the possibility of a hermaphroditism of vision.<sup>14</sup> If the first model of vision is central to the Vitruvian tradition of architectural objectification, then the Dionysian model is the space of the interior, which has its model in the theatre, but its resting place in the labyrinth.

These co-dependant schemas of vision and space operate independently in the interior of Sugar Suite, constructing the

visual logic that underpins the interior. Recreating the surrealist (and Freudian) obsession with 'intrauterine' space, and fuelling paranoia and spatial anxiety through the roaming use of reflection and the complex doubling of mirrors make aspects of the interior either concealed, reproduced or impossible to locate in physical space. These spatial games locate the viewer at the centre of an 'infinite' interior where the connection with the outside world is barely discernible. The insides of this space are continually expanding through the manipulation and appropriation of vision. It sets up a labyrinthine interior where, through reflection, the entire space is given over to the interior and, as in the definition of Hubert Damisch, it is almost impossible to imagine an exterior:<sup>15</sup>

The external edge, engaging the protective veil of the Medusan shield, acts as a visual 'defence' against the exterior and equally as a screen for the reflection of life and the commodification of desire. Masked by a series of visual screens, as well as reflecting the outside world, the outer edge of the salon transforms the homogenous aluminium curtain wall into a dynamic filter through which the interior is both glimpsed and concealed. The psychoanalytical aspects of these images, and their role in 'shielding' the interior from the banality outside is reinforced through the use of cut hair as an architectural 'ground' cover, particularly as it is invoked in a fetishistic way and through its connection with the commercial ground and the window. The organisation of these objects removes the identity of the person sitting behind the screen and reveals only their feet and displaced hair to the outside. These elements are read through the dissipated screen of the glamorous image that is reproduced on the surface of the glass. Often these feet – the only part of the façade where penetrating vision is tolerated – are floating above a sea of freshly cut hair.

## MIMESIS, REFLECTION AND INTRAUTERINE FANTASY

The surfaces that frame the interior of Sugar Suite are, in every instance, curving, accelerating surfaces that disappear into space and wrap themselves into infinity. The interior is divided into a number of sinuous chambers that not only subdivide the space but place the individual in an environment of disorientation and spatial uncertainty. The edges of these curving, accelerating surfaces are lined with mirrors so that, as the curve unfolds, the mirrors reveal changing, and often unsettling spaces in reflection beyond as other mirrors are reflected asymmetrically in the original frame. In the interior of Sugar Suite, vision is mobilised, as it continually bounces off surfaces and accelerates along the radiating lines of reflection that the mirrors set up. This hyperactive vision roams around the interior space, without destination or origin. It relocates the individual in a panoptic sea of discreet gazes.

The tactic aligns strongly with aspects of the Medusan myth, where a reflected and clandestine vision (in this case stolen) is used to reposition and ultimately trap the body in physical space. Foster's reading of the Medusan myth in the sculpture of Canova,<sup>16</sup> establishes a kind of triumph of vision that begins to circulate when the Gorgon head is removed. As well as the snakes and winged

horses that grow from the Gorgon's blood, there is an emancipatory liberating of vision and its dissemination through the decapitation: a validation of the power of Apollo and the objectified gazes of Greek beauty. Its location on the primary axis of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York is, for Foster, a subtle expression of this triumph of visual logic, and the subjugation of Dionysan and non-visual systems of expression.

However vision in Sugar Suite operates in a much more destabilising way, exaggerating the labyrinthine chambers of the space and further dismantling the systems of orientation that vision is usually appended to. The mirrors serve not only to circulate vision but, equally, to explode the interior so that entry points and spaces are identified in reflected surfaces that are, in a surreal way, difficult to locate in the physical boundaries of the space. Like the thread of Ariadne weaving an exit from the interior of the labyrinth, the continually reflected visual trajectories unfold outwards from the centre as vision is projected and cast further and further from its origin. These visual entrails lead endlessly outwards, operating with no clear origin and no discernible destination.

The nomadic nature of reflection was a favourite tactic for the artists of surrealism and, in particular, the figurative paintings of Magritte and Dali, and the documentary photography of Brassai. Magritte's *The Pleasure Principle (Portrait of Edward James)* from 1937 is representative of the surreal nature of mirrors, but also the spatial structure that connects painter and subject or, in the case of Sugar Suite, patron and hairdresser. Magritte's canvas shows a man staring into the mirror where, instead of reflecting the front of the figure, the mirror bounces back the image of the man's back.<sup>17</sup> This Medusan structure, where the mirror is used to prevent looking into the face of the Gorgon, is deployed in a characteristically witty way by Magritte, and extended critically into the architectural chambers of the interior of Sugar Suite.

The labyrinth, often depicted as a space of terror and anxiety, has a lot in common with the Freudian notion of intrauterine space: the primal space of the womb that, in Freud's work, functions as a continual fantasy throughout adult life. First explored in his now famous essay on the uncanny,<sup>18</sup> the return to the womb is, for Freud, inherently related to the notion of homesickness and was theorised widely by the surrealists, and in particular in the architectural treatises of Matta, Dali and Kiesler.<sup>19</sup> In Sugar Suite the feminised interior, adorned with mirrors at its edges and cut hair on its floor, corresponds stylistically with the grotto typology revered by the Surrealists and finding representation in the canonical Surrealist spaces of the 1930s and 1940s. Salvador Dali's *Dream of Venus* installation at the World Fair in New York in 1945 is one of the most eccentric examples, blending psychosexual themes, fetishism and perversion with Dali's own lifelong insecurity and paranoia.<sup>20</sup>

The Surrealist articulation of these spaces followed a formulaic model, whether in the work of Kiesler, Dali or Duchamp.<sup>21</sup> Characterised by the primacy given to the interior, at the expense

of any external representation, the Surrealist grottos use highly textured and sensual ground floor coverings and gravity-defying objects (suspending sculpture, coal sacks, twisting and organic roof forms) to set up a relationship between the haptic experience of the body (through its sensual connection with the ground) and visual complexity and drama, expressed through the structural gymnastics of the suspended elements. These grottos provide a powerful lens through which the interior of Sugar Suite can be recast. The salon develops the spatial structure by ensuring that all of the walls, cabinetry and screens are hung dramatically from the ceiling and only the body (and the cut hair that tumbles from it) comes into contact with the ground.

### THE WINDOW, THE SCREEN AND THE FRAGMENTED BODY

If the internal spaces of Sugar Suite are characterised by flowing and reflective surfaces that mobilise vision and guide it into the deepest recesses of the space, then the exterior is characterised by the use of cropped images which truncate vision and prevent its penetrative instincts. These images function, in a Medusan sense, as a kind of shield, promoting the collapse of distinctions between inside and out, figure and ground but at the same time, are coldly repellent in both substance and style. The images are all drawn from hair advertising and, plastered across the commercial glazed shopfront that adorns three of the four sides of the salon, they take on an urban scale and context as they can be read over vast distances and from cars travelling through the area.

There is a strong stylistic connection between the images chosen to adorn the salon and the aesthetic language of surrealism. Hair and eyes entwine in the salon facades to evoke the classic images of Man Ray and Raoul Ubac, where the truncated Medusa aggressively returns the gaze of the camera through a sea of cascading hair.<sup>22</sup> Describing Man Ray's classic series of nudes of Lee Miller, draped in the shadows of the lace curtains that adorn the window where she is standing, Hal Foster writes:

[t]his nude is cropped at neck and navel, and posed in the near dark by a window hung with lace; she is also turned in such a way that a veil of refracted light and shadow striates her body almost to the point of its dissolution into the liquescent space of the room (which is also the liquescent surface of the print: this slippage is a recurrent effect of surrealist photography).<sup>23</sup>

This passage, aptly identifying two prevalent strategies in Surrealist representation (cropping and flattening), shows the extent to which architecture permeates Surrealist photography as a central strategy for the articulation of the figure. In Sugar Suite, the stylistic elements of Man Ray's images are physically recreated, firstly with the pixellated, transparent photo of the model, then through the beaded curtain which sits behind it and, ultimately, with the physical flattening of these elements against the window which inadvertently turns the 'figure' into a kind of ossified ground.

In a number of ways the images seem entombed in the interior, staring blankly, helplessly out into the sea of homogenous commercial development, and at the same time preventing it from encroaching into the sheltered and idiosyncratic interiors that the images shield. In this visual screening, the gaze of the models functions as an intimidatory shield that can, in the context of the Medusan myth, be located within the visual schema of the Gorgoneion. The truncated head, stripped of its physical ossifying powers is deployed as a symbolic and outwardly radiating visual defence force.

The two main poles of the Surrealist depiction of women that emerge are the female body cropped and fragmented beyond recognition<sup>24</sup> or, equally paradigmatic, the terrifying woman returning the male gaze aggressively in a 'Medusan' stare (the obsessive depiction of the hair and the eyes are common themes in these portraits).<sup>25</sup> These images, at least in the hands of their Freudian interpreters, speak equally of the male anxiety towards the phallus and castration, as the erotic desire which is central to the more familiar, and it would seem more explicit, reading of the imagery.<sup>26</sup> The myth and its associations were famously

repositioned by Hélène Cixous in the mid-nineteen seventies and became a seminal text in the history of feminism.<sup>27</sup>

The images chosen for the screening of Sugar Suite, while commercial in nature, coalesce very strongly with iconic photographic images from surrealism. It is perhaps not surprising that a number of Surrealist photographers, Man Ray included, had worked as photographers for fashion magazines such as Vogue, and that the heavy, deep shadows that characterised Surrealist photography in the 1920s also embedded themselves in the consumer culture of fashion.<sup>28</sup> The Surrealists had an obsession with reconciling the unmapped internal unconscious



with the external realities of the industrialising modern world, in the process bridging the psychoanalysis of Freud with the social program of Marx. Eugene Atget's iconic photograph *Boulevard de Strasbourg* depicting a street window crammed with corsets, is one of the most explicitly architectural renderings of this framing of commodified desire, despite being nearly a decade earlier than the primary surrealist advancements in photography. The body in the window is replaced with its fetishistic fragments and the window, like the documentary photos that permeate Breton's novels, functions as a gateway bridging desire and contextual reality (Figure 1).

The images that articulate the edges of Sugar Suite conform to stylistic rhythms that structure Surrealist photography, particularly in regard to the use of hair, employed often in an extravagant, almost Medusan way, and vision, primarily through the eyes of the cropped models who either stare back aggressively or have their eyes closed. Hal Foster has commented on the Medusan qualities that underpin images such as Jacques-André Boiffard's *Untitled* portrait from 1929, where a woman stares angrily through a curtain of hair draped restrictively across her face.<sup>29</sup> In these images the distinctly 'male' gaze that is characteristic of Surrealist photography is returned, in the fearful (even fatal), face of the Gorgon, that seeks the disintegration of the gaze altogether. However the images of Sugar Suite contain an inherent seduction which stares passively in tandem with the more aggressive and catastrophic Medusan variety.

In Surrealist photography there is a continual play between the body, the surface and the image. It can be contextualised equally as a kind of mimesis, as discussed earlier, where architecture and the body virtually coalesce. Freud often drew strong parallels between the fear of blindness and the fear of castration, which he linked, in a number of instances, to the myth of Medusa. Sulieman has demonstrated the conflation of ideas relating to Medusa with those of the biblical Eve, where her hair becomes 'thin moving snakes that produce music at each of her movements'<sup>30</sup> and motivates, in the work of a number of French feminists, a forceful critique of Freud's theory of castration.<sup>31</sup>

Above  
Figure 1: Eugene Atget, Boulevard de Strasbourg (1912)

A 1933 collage of Salvador Dali entitled *The Phenomenon of Ecstasy* serves to demarcate a number of critical markers in the complex relationship between surrealism, space and the architectural language of Sugar Suite. The collage is comprised of cropped images assembled haphazardly but obsessively across a page. The images are divided between male ears (of which there are 15), female heads with eyes closed (of which there are 25, at least two of which are sculptures), a tilted chair in an architectural space, and an organic Art Nouveau ornamental detail. In the context of this image Hal Foster describes a kind of 'reciprocal' seduction where the ecstasy depicted evokes 'its effects in others - in doctor or analyst, in artist or viewer.'<sup>32</sup> It has an obvious pairing with the image that adorned the first issue of *L' Revolution Surrealiste* by Rene Magritte, where all of the members of the movement are shown with eyes closed circling a Magritte nude. Equally famous photos, such as the entranced Robert Desnos with eyes folded disturbingly back into his head, were visual fodder for the early issues of *L' Revolution Surrealiste*, implying, in just one image, the escape from consciousness and the liberating access to non-visual worlds of experience and spatial embodiment that the surrealists revered.<sup>33</sup> The stylistic rhyming with the ecstatic and eyes-closed 'figures' that wrap Sugar Suite is clear.

This use of these flattened images can be read in the context of a Lacanian conceptualisation of the picture plane, which as the visual bridge that connects (or separates) the viewer with reality, has been connected on a number of occasions with the visual logic of the myth of Medusa.<sup>34</sup> The tendency of masculine schemas of vision to position women as objects of desire, enframed in the fantasy of the picture plane, has been well documented in the history of art, and reaches its cathartic moment in the photography of Surrealism where female forms either passively receive the masculine gaze or aggressively return it (the model for this is Medusa, linked intrinsically to Dionysus, who freezes objects in her sight.)<sup>35</sup> The picture plane, as the psychological landscape where this transaction is mediated, is central to the exchange between representation and reality and is hinged on the intellectual and physical relationship between the viewer, and the work of art. In Sugar Suite these layered and highly manufactured picture planes

are sandwiched into the window itself, protecting the interior while at the same time corrupting its visual interpretation.

## CONCLUSION

Drawing from a vast network of possible interpretive lenses, Sugar Suite is an idiosyncratic building in the context of Newcastle, refuting critical readings at the same time as it provokes them. The building buries itself within the monotonous fabric of the city and, through a complex series of visual transactions, carves out a space for itself. The interior, divided horizontally between haptic experience and visual drama, is inoculated from the pragmatic realities of the external world by the continually accelerating gazes that roam around the interior and lead the eye of the individual to every chamber without ever reaching the exterior. The exterior, in contrast, functions as a visual repellent that, unlike the interior, freezes vision at its surface and, in the process, reflects the banal and ossified reality back to the city. These giant faces stare into the city, daring the viewer to return the gaze.

These two strategies, embedded in the myth of Medusa and its various labyrinthine entrails, begin to position a role for the interior that is more complex than the more traditional 'shop window' that the Surrealists revered as the collision of commodity and sexual fetishism. The shop windows of Sugar Suite are not passive reproductions of commercial forces, but active facades engaged in the critique of commercialisation itself. The shiny grotto, wrapped in a glamorous curtain of hair, transcends the created and inherited homogeneity of the area and uses the interior as a motivating element for restructuring exterior space. In both the interior and exterior representation, vision, as in the myth of Medusa, is controlled, dispensed and problematised.

Whether deliberately or not, the salon provides a powerful filter through which ideas of surrealism and psychoanalysis can be distilled. The mobilisation of vision, let loose in the interior and carefully controlled at the edges, is a reification of the pervasive themes at work in the myth of Medusa, activating important ideas relating to vision and enabling, in the process, a detailed

re-examination of the visual language of Newcastle. In this sense, the building functions in a way to resurrect myth as a motivating force, constructing its own inward labyrinths and entrails at the same time as it dismantles alternative ones. Buried in complexity, the blinding interior of Sugar Suite implicates the body within an infinite network of accelerating visual tangents and introverted shields from which the shadowy traces of Medusa are always directly entwined: the masks, shields and reflected glory of an architecture constructed from the decapitated and resurrected entrails of the Gorgon.

## NOTES

1. Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. Mary M. Innes (Baltimore: Penguin, 1955), 115.
2. The myth is recounted by Perseus in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. According to her assassin, Medusa was once renowned for her loveliness, and roused jealous hopes in the hearts of many suitors. Of all the beauties she possessed, none was more striking than her lovely hair: I have met someone who claimed to have seen her in those days. But, so they say, the lord of the sea robbed her of her virginity in the temple of Minerva. Jove's daughter turned her back, hiding her modest face behind her aegis: and to punish the Gorgon for her deed, she changed her hair into revolting snakes. Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. Mary M. Innes (Baltimore: Penguin, 1955), 115.
3. As Hal Foster points out, the sword supplied by the Graiai sisters to Perseus for the decapitation is identical to the one used to castrate Ouranos, reinforcing Freud's connection of the myth with primal castration anxiety. See Hal Foster, *Prosthetic Gods* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2004): 261.
4. On the journey home across Lybia the drops of blood from the head grow into the snakes that proliferate the region. See: Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 115.
5. Hair is a recurring theme in Surrealism, deployed in a fetishistic way in a number of formative artworks and drawings from the period. George Baker has pointed to the polemical absence of hair in Francis Picabia's bizarre group portrait *L'oeil cacodylate* (The cacodylic eye) from 1921 where all of the depicted members are, through various devices, cropped of hair reinforcing, in the process, the violence of the cut that was central to the operation of Dada method of collage. See: George Baker, *The Artwork Caught by the Tail: Francis Picabia and Dada in Paris* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2007), 97. Likewise Marcel Duchamp, at around the same time while living in Argentina had shaved his head completely. In the argument of T.J. Demos (See: T.J. Demos, *The Exiles of Marcel Duchamp* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2007) this was a gesture lamenting the drama of relocation and the dislocating forces of exile, replicated, as a symbol of sexual identity, in the wigs of Rrose Salevy (Duchamp's feminine alter-ego) or the shaving cream "horns" of his 1924 *Monte Carlo Bond*. His mannequin for the *Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme* in Paris in 1938 was distinguished by its complete lack of hair. Dali, likewise, returned to hair on a number of occasions, most directly in the *Object Functioning Symbolically* where human hair was stuck to the side of a sugar cube and dunked in a glass of warm milk, in turn housed in a woman's shoe. This work, more than any other from Surrealism, seems to sum up the twin unification of hair and shoes that are characteristic of the Sugar Suite diagram and confirmed by the ironic occurrence of "sugar" in both works. What is central to all of these readings of Surrealist work is that hair functions, in its cropped form, not as a discarded extension of the human body, but as a psychological trope that, in its cropping, engenders distinct notions of sexual identity, desire and the commodification of the human body. For an image of Duchamp and the Monte Carlo Bond as well as a detailed discussion of this work see: David Joselit, *Infinite Regress: Marcel Duchamp 1910-1941* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1998), 100.
6. Critical texts in the recent reevaluation of Surrealism in the context of Freud's later works are: Hal Foster, *Compulsive Beauty* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1995); Hal Foster, *Prosthetic Gods* (New York: MIT Press, 2004) 24; Rosalind Krauss and Jane Livingston, *L'Amour Fou: Photography and Surrealism* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1985); Rosalind Krauss, *The Optical Unconscious* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1994); For the implications for Dada see: George Baker, *The Artwork Caught by the Tail: Francis Picabia and Dada in Paris* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2007), 15.
7. Dalibor Veselý (ed), *Architectural Design: Surrealism and Architecture*, 2-3 (1978): 138.

8. Thomas Mical (ed.), *Surrealism and Architecture* (London: Routledge, 2005).
9. Veseley, "Salvador Dali: On Architecture" in Veseley (ed), *Surrealism and Architecture*, 138.
10. Kenneth Frampton, "Has the Proletariat No Use for a Glider" in Veseley (ed), *Surrealism and Architecture*, 138.
11. Mical, "Introduction", in Mical (ed.), *Surrealism and Architecture*, 2.
12. The sculpture is central to an important essay from 1996 by the American art theorist Hal Foster entitled "Obscene, Abject, Traumatic". Throughout the essay Foster interweaves notions of Greek mythology (read in part through Nietzsche's Apolline/Dionysian dualism), Lacan's model of the picture screen and a general schema of the sexuality of sight. Structured on the myth of Medusa, Foster argues that gaze is related to the labyrinthine model of Dionysus as a hostile radiating force which destroys or in Medusa's case, freezes objects in its sight. This radicalised notion of vision exists in opposition to the more traditional model of aesthetic beauty and was embodied and celebrated in the androgyne symbols of Surrealist photography such as those presented by Man Ray and Boiffard. Hal Foster, "Obscene, Abject, Traumatic," *October* 78 (Autumn 1996): 106-24; The essay was later published in an extended form as "Torn Screens" in Hal Foster, *Prosthetic Gods* Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press.
13. See: Foster, *Prosthetic Gods*, p. 257-258; Anthony Vidler, "The Mask and the Labyrinth" in Alexandre Kostka and Irving Wohlfarth eds., *Nietzsche and an Architecture of Our Minds* (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute for the History of Art and the Humanities, 1999).
14. Barthes writes "[t]he Tower (and this is one of its mythic powers) transgresses this separation, this habitual divorce of seeing and being seen; it achieves a sovereign circulation between the two functions; it is a complete object which has, if one may say so, both sexes of sight." Roland Barthes, *The Eiffel Tower and Other Mythologies* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1979), p. 4.
15. See Hubert Damisch, *Skyline: The Narcissistic City*, trans. John Goodman (California: Stanford University Press, 2001).
16. See Foster, *Prosthetic Gods*, pp. 257-258.
17. This was a structure that occurred frequently also in the canvasses of Salvador Dali, especially in his later work. A well-known example is *Dali from the Back Painting Gala from the Back Eternalized by Six Virtual Corneas Provisionally Reflected in Six Real Mirrors* from 1972-73. It is reproduced in Dawn Ades and Michael R. Taylor, *Dali*, New York: Rizzoli, 2004. Mirrors were used in a number of other ways, outside of their convenient manipulation in painting, to dismantle objective reality in space. While not strictly a member of the surrealist movement, the play of vision, and its corruption through mirrors was a favourite game of Marcel Duchamp, evoked, for example in his *Why Not Sneeze Rose Salevy* where a mirror at the base of an enigmatic bird cage (filled with chunks of white marble) is used to reveal the title of the piece, buried (and in reverse) on the underside of the cage. Equally the photo, constructed with mirrors, of five Duchamp's playing poker with each other is representative of Duchamp's intellectual games as well as the disorienting corruption of reality that mirrors are capable of.
18. See: Sigmund Freud, *The Uncanny*, trans. David McLintock (London: Penguin, 2003): 121-161.
19. Writing a review of Kiesler's Endless House in 1943, Hans Arp had written: "[I]n his egg, in these spheroid egg-shaped structures, a human being can now take shelter and live as in his mother's womb." Jean (Hans) Arp quoted in Veseley, "Surrealism, Myth and Modernity", p. 94. The connection between psychoanalysis, architecture and intrauterine fantasy is made by Beatriz Colomina, Anthony Vidler and numerous other recent authors. See: Anthony Vidler, *The Architectural Uncanny* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1992), p. 153; Beatriz Colomina, "De psyche van het bouwen: Frederick Kiesler's Space House," *Archis* (November; 1996), p. 74; Stephen Phillips, "Introjection and Projection: Frederick Kiesler and his dream machine", in Mical (ed.), *Surrealism and Architecture*, p. 140-155.
20. In the pavilion, Dali envisaged a space of curving, damp, and oddly hairy interiors which, as well as blending seamlessly with the garish theme park aesthetic of its surrounds, were equally designed to undermine and destabilise it. For a description of this see: Ingrid Schaffner, *Salvador Dali's Dream of Venus: The Surrealist Funhouse from the 1939 World's Fair* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2002).
21. Similar tactics to Dali's operated in Marcel Duchamp's curatorial exploits at the *Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme* in Paris in 1938 where the central interior space was transformed into a grotto, with coal sacks hung from the ceiling and furry branches strewn across the floor. Frederick Kiesler's *Endless House*, where the sumptuous interior frames a biological exterior is equally related to this model of grotto, a typology that he explored on a number of other occasions throughout his creative life. There are numerous other examples. See: Lewis Kachur, *Displaying the Marvellous: Marcel Duchamp, Salvador Dali and Surrealist Exhibition Installations* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2001).
22. A classic example is Raoul Ubac's *Portrait in a Mirror* (1938) which adorns the cover of: Rosalind Krauss, *The Optical Unconscious* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1994). An argument linking the work with ideas of Medusa

is contained in Krauss's essay. See: Rosalind Krauss, "Corpus Delecti", *October* 33 (Summer, 1985): 31-72. The essay is reproduced in Rosalind Krauss and Jane Livingston, *L'Amour Fou: Photography and Surrealism* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1985).

23. Foster, *Prosthetic Gods* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2004): 242.
24. For the primary critique of the "headless and footless" woman of Surrealist photography see: Mary Ann Caws, "Seeing the Surrealist Woman: We Are a Problem," *Surrealism and Women*, edited by Mary Ann Caws, Rudolf Kuenzli and Gwen Raaberg, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1991): 11-16.
25. Amongst the numerous feminist critiques of the Surrealist depiction of women, see: Rudolf E. Kuenzli, "Surrealism and Misogyny," *Surrealism and Women*, pp. 17-31; Rosalind Krauss, "Photography in the Service of Surrealism," *L'Amour Fou: Photography and Surrealism*, edited by Rosalind Krauss and Jane Livingston (New York: Abbeville Press, 1985): p. 24.
26. See, for instance: Hal Foster, "Obscene, Abject, Traumatic," *October* 78 (1996): 106-24.
27. See: Helene Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa," *Signs* 1, 4 (Summer 1976): 875-893.
28. An iconic image of Dora Maar shows a hairclip shaped as a boat and floating on a sea of hair that is among a number of photos from her oeuvre that collapses the boundaries between art and popular culture. This rare image is published in: Mary Ann Caws, *Dora Maar: With and Without Picasso* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2000).
29. The image can be found, among other places, in Foster, *Prosthetic Gods*, 224.
30. Suleiman, Susan Rubin. "(Re)Writing the Body: The Politics of Female Eroticism," *Poetics Today* 6, no. 1/2 (1985): 56.
31. In particular see: Helene Cixous, *The Laugh of the Medusa* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1991); Helene Cixous, "Castration or Decapitation?," *Signs*, 7, 1 (Autumn, 1981): 41-55.
32. Hal Foster, *Compulsive Beauty* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1995), p. 50.
33. For this image see: Gérard Durozoi, *History of the Surrealist Movement*, trans. Alison Anderson (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1997.)
34. See: Anthony Vidler, "The Mask and the Labyrinth" in Alexandre Kostka and Irving Wohlfarth eds., *Nietzsche and an Architecture of Our Minds* (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute for the History of Art and the Humanities, 1999).
35. This argument is explored in Foster, *Prosthetic Gods*, 201.



**Top left to right**

Figure 2: Exterior glass screen facing Merewether Street. (herd, Sugar Suite (2007)). Image: Roger Hanley/herd  
 Figure 3: Use of mirrors within the interior. (herd, Sugar Suite (2007)). Image: Roger Hanley/herd  
 Figure 4: Interior of Salon (herd, Sugar Suite (2007)). Image: Roger Hanley/herd

**Bottom left to right**

Figure 5: Interior of Salon (herd, Sugar Suite (2007)). Image: Roger Hanley/herd  
 Figure 6: Exterior glass screen facing public space (herd, Sugar Suite (2007)). Image: Michael Chapman  
 Figure 7: Interior of Salon (herd, Sugar Suite (2007)). Image: Roger Hanley/herd  
 Figure 8: Interior of Salon (herd, Sugar Suite (2007)). Image: Roger Hanley/herd