

Anyone

PALLADIO'S SOUL

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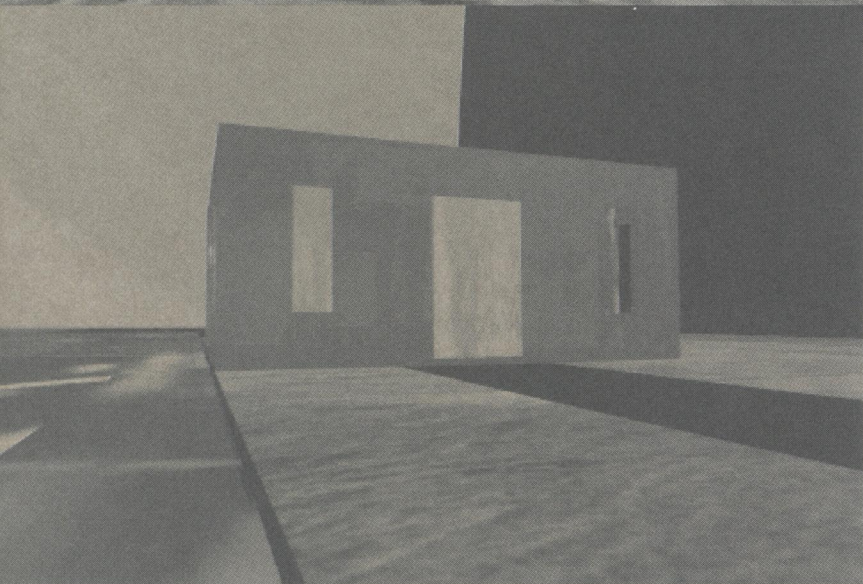
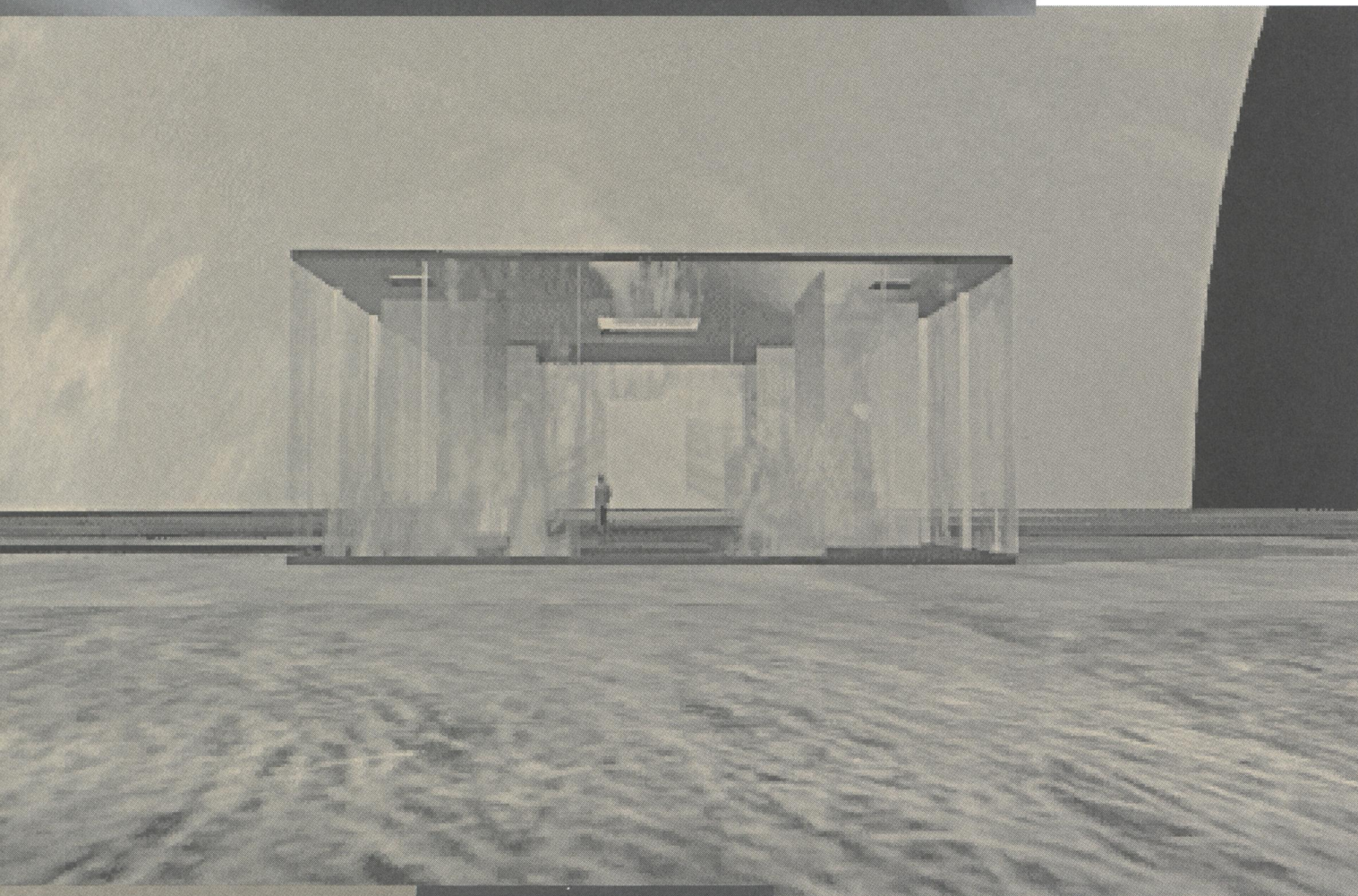
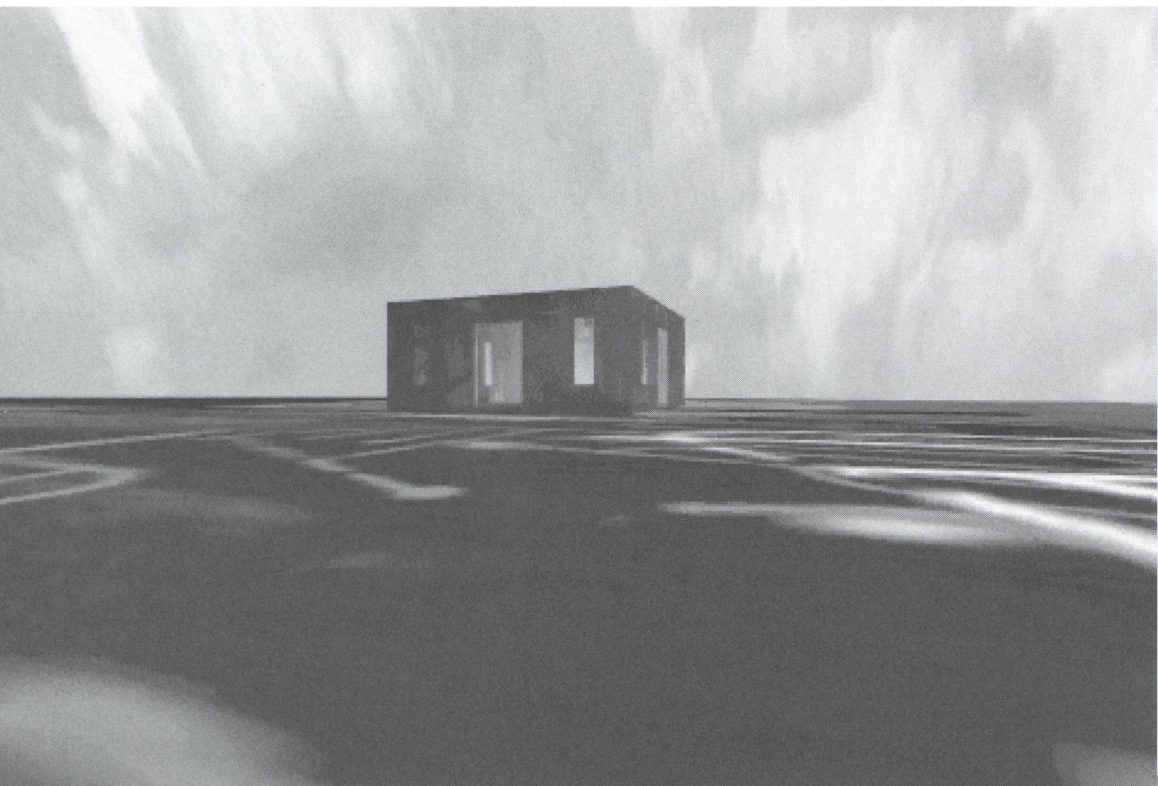
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Jean PALLADIO'S

Nouvel

SOUL





interests me in relation to reality. What would a virtual architecture be without t

his virtual/real

opposition? The simple pronouncement of a spatio-temporal concept? A handful of so-called virtual images (for the image itself is indeed real) of a total utopia? I respectfully leave such approaches to the writers, poets, and artists who adopt architecture as their theme. Instead I will focus on the optimal influence of the virtual on real architecture.

I will qualify the virtual house as that which is characterized by the total elimination of material, of constructed texture, of the expression of contingent techniques, of thickness, of structures, of equipment – a house miraculous in its domination of materiality, in its infinitesimal use of material. Computers aid our imagination – the luminous plans, without depth, the superimpositions, the reflections. I want to create the incredible, I want to see these plans escape the screen, I want to see them become part of our world, free them of their box, let them live.

To devote myself to essentials, to not lose this thread, I have chosen the plan of an archetypal house, an Italian villa by Palladio. Where would he be without material? The material of the Villa Malcontenta, for example, is effaced by frescoes, surface work. Fundamentally, in this case, the thickness of the walls matters little.

Hence this square plan, punctuated at the corners by four square rooms, the large doors on axis, the windows symmetrically aligned with the doors, the perforations that echo from floor to ceiling. The ensemble of this parallelepiped full of holes makes me think of the abstract mathematical (virtual) model of Menger's sponge, in which plan, section, and elevations are alike.

The perforations in the ceiling frame the sky, yet there is no

frame, it's an open hole like that of the Pantheon. The perforations in the floor reveal a cryptic space of water and occasionally of fire.

Of the four doors, one is the entry; the one directly opposite is a plasma screen programmed in a permanent yet diverse manner; of the two side doors, one creates a view of the natural exterior countryside, the other a view of the artificial interior landscape: a mirror.

The walls are matte black steel. The glass is the same thickness as the walls, approximately five centimeters, without frame, without transition. The interior walls are made of glass that is irregularly translucent or that offers the luminous effect of an untinted mirror.

The four corner rooms are the bedroom, covered with gold and silver padding on the walls and floor; the bathroom, with water on all surfaces, the bathtub just above the floor, and a rainlike shower spouting water out of the walls; the kitchen, made completely of glass, showing products floating in space; the office, its library descending into the cryptic space beneath the house.

The floor and ceiling are also of black steel, and the ceiling contains minute acoustical perforations.

The house sits on the water, its quasi-invisible access hidden, its reflection creating a virtual cube.

All of this is executed with minimum and maximum thicknesses and formats (50-millimeter walls), glass of unique sizes, and integrated fiber optics. The ability to construct this today, the ability to modify a fragment of the real with the virtual, to advance, here and now, is one more step in this Darwinian course of dematerialization, of miniaturization, that began with the dolmen and will end, perhaps, with nothing more than magnetic fields.

Translated from the French by Lois Nesbitt

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JEAN NOUVEL IS AN ARCHITECT IN PARIS. His recent projects include the Cartier Foundation in Paris, a congress hall in Tours, the Opera of Lyon, and the Galeries Lafayette in Berlin.