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## Love's labour's lost: Alberto Pérez-Gómez's *Polyphilo*

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Alberto Pérez-Gómez's *Polyphilo, or The Dark Forest revisited, An Erotic Epiphany of Architecture* (1992), is a curious text in the context of architectural theory, and in particular, when considered against that from the last thirty years.<sup>1</sup> Overtly it is a commentary and emendation on the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* (1499, 1999) attributed to Francis Colonna, a Renaissance text that describes a sequence of experiences of a mythical character, Poliphilo.<sup>2</sup> The original text describes the picaresque adventures of a Renaissance figure who, having fallen asleep at the edge of a forest, wakes to experience a procession of architectural spectacles that function as allegories of the role of architecture as a scene for human experience. Pérez-Gómez's text emulates the journey of the hero in the original, but relocates it into the context of the liminal zone of an airport and the procedural and alienating experiences of travelling by air. In doing so, Pérez-Gómez is able to comment on the simultaneously desirable and repelling aspects of machinic alienation and the consequences for empathic approaches to architecture in general. While the contemporary text is perhaps not as well known as its Renaissance model, it is evident from the numerous references to it in the work of Pérez-Gómez, culminating in both the *Polyphilo* book and the more critical *Built Upon Love, Architectural Longing After Ethics and Aesthetics* (2006), that the older work exercises a unique and pivotal influence on Pérez-Gómez's general program to identify and expound on the idea of *poiesis* in architecture, or what may be thought of as 'poetic' aesthetic responses to the effects architecture on an individual.

Unquestionably, for the community of scholars that have emerged around the History and Theory Program at McGill University—where Pérez-Gómez has been a professor for 37 years—and more generally for the interpretive critical material published in the volumes of *Chora*, the journal he co-edited, the examination of architectural texts from history has been a foundational practice. In this respect, and in response to the consistent messaging from Pérez-Gómez that a form of 'love' should be present in architecture, it is appropriate to examine both the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*, and Pérez-Gómez's *Polyphilo* and *Built Upon Love*, to better understand what his concept of 'love' means ethically and sensually for architectural design.