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## I.

*There is a needle*

*Pulling a thread through your veins,*

*A needle pulling the sap*

*From the root to the bole...*

—Phillis Levin

*The Chinese medical therapy that is probably best understood in the West is acupuncture, the insertion of very fine needles into specific superficial locations on the surface of the body. Described in Chinese medical literature as harmonizing qì and xuè, acupuncture has been used for centuries to treat a variety of disorders by restoring harmony of yīn and yang, qì and xuè.*

—American College of Traditional Chinese Medicine  
at California Institute of Integral Studies



# INTO THE SKIN

From everything I understood:

*Je vous suis*, volevo dire. Languages

entwined in me, the braided

trunk of a tree begun in delicacy.

My body was still speaking into—

speaking against his fingers.

This is what I understood of long,

long pain within the body.

The true pain of longing—

of *yearning*, an archaic word:

*No one yearns anymore*, I'd heard

an ancient woman say. The cloud

and sunbeam of acute

verbal memory.

*Love looks not with the eyes, but with the mind. And therefore is winged Cupid painted blind.*

He would visit her body every night: *listen feel*: don't see.

She was not allowed to look at him, but underneath

his wing she was a blue morpho grazing.

Then she knew the colors not in nature,

psyche so sweet in the embedding.

You worked in a room with no windows.

In another room, called *Preservation*,

a woman named Africa

was sewing the ragged spine of a codex.

In a room made of windows, glass is the skin.

Every pin is a tender path.

Every arrow begins to sew.

The skin, not the mind, creates the soul.

All the nerve passageways crowd

Into a finger's whorl.

A nexus: metropolitan.

A city in a palm.



Her hand moved slowly            tectonically across my trunk

The other hand beneath my back            was cradled            an asymptote

West-East, east-west            a lower            premonition

*Breathe with this* I told myself            the wind

have done

As it is with the sun courting miles, or dimmest starshine—

Right ankle: left wrist. Tundra in between.

*Epidermis* it's skylike

A name to harbor galaxies

I know no nomenclature

for skin that sheathes an ankle,

how it differs (if it does)

from the skin that drapes

a shoulder's larger circle

but skin is the portal

the laminate the barrier

the reef against the system

or lesser systematic churn

What it may conduct I know

a harp amid the tremors