

The Nowhere That Is

*"...in emptiness there is ... no eye, ear, nose,
tongue, body, mind; no form, sound, color,
taste, touch, objects..."*

from The Shingyo Sutra

In the beginning there was danger
in brilliant blue and lemon-colored shocks.
Electricity was really just like tables
and beermugs, something you could touch
if you were a daredevil.

Later I was shocked to hear that it took,
of all people, Ben Franklin to discover it.
The key was lightning—it really almost killed him,
which they do not emphasize in the eighth grade.

Then it got stranger. I learned
there were really two kinds of electricity,
Positive and Negative, but different countries
had different opinions about which was which.
Different countries? Opinions? What is this?
When water swirls down the sink backwards
you know you're up North.

And then I found out that people knew for a long time
about something called Static electricity.
Some of them pointed out with great authority
that Static electricity wasn't like regular electricity,
but it was something you could see
if you rubbed fur and silk together.
Fur—and silk? What are we talking about here?

When this whatever we're talking about goes inside a wire,
it doesn't really go inside the wire, instead—
I know you won't believe this—there's a field
around the wire. *A field? Of what, exactly?*

It's a field around the nothing where the
something else is supposed to be and you
can tell it's there since if it isn't things
that could happen, don't.

Finally, what a relief, a few remarkable scientists said
we do not know what electricity is
we do not know its nature
we have only James Clerk Maxwell's elegant equations
based on a blacksmith's son who, confounding
most of the physicists of his time,
conducted his experiments with rubber bands,
pieces of metal and some other scraps
he found around the lab.

(cont'd)

Later, this genuinely humble experimenter,
after a brilliant lecture on Science
in the House of Lords, was asked:
What's the point?, a typical question by politicians
after some science is elucidated for them.
Faraday untypically replied:
I don't know, but you'll be taxing it.

Electricity is everywhere running
almost everything, but the fact is
no one can see, hear, smell, taste, or touch it.
Now isn't that something!

In all our running around apparently making things happen,
perhaps we are only partially real,
like shifting characters in someone's larger story.
And these invisible giants, Electricity and Love,
and the force that tells us they're here,

are presences that are totally real
these nothings that are
somewhere in the
nowhere
that
is