

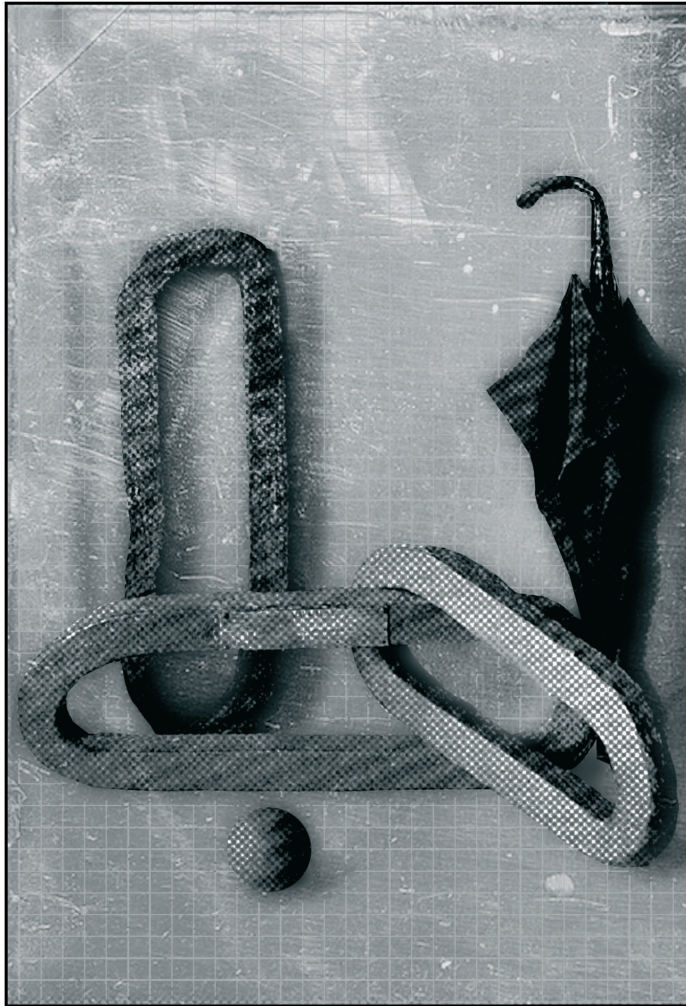
## Numinous Objects and Their Manufacture

“The eagerness of objects to  
be what we are afraid to do  
Cannot help but move us Is  
this willingness to be a motive  
in us what we reject?”

—from ‘Interior (With Jane)’, Frank O’Hara (1951)

Objects proliferate as never before, but they are mostly dead husks, the shells of things, wherein no *daemon*<sup>2</sup> resides. We own them merely, or covet them, we are not nourished. Meanwhile, the fundamental appetite for numinous<sup>3</sup> objects grows ravenous. Never mind that it remains unconscious in most citizens and unacknowledged by the authorities. Only *numinous objects* can make possible the communication between people and so-called ‘dead matter’<sup>4</sup> which must be established if we wish to avert calamity.

I am not here referring to fetishes, which are a means to evoke a system of belief and not properly ends in themselves. Nor am I referring to fantasy-constructs like, for example, the ship made of fingernail parings described in Norse mythology. This ship is a fine thing, but it is only feebly numinous compared to a block of sodium in a meadow, its edges mollified by the tongues of cows into a lopsided loaf like snow. And, while my more sceptical readers may scoff, it is a fact that if this salt-lick be removed from the meadow and placed in a confined enclosure or, better still, sealed into a lead container, its numinous charge will be boosted many fold.<sup>5</sup>



Like a ladder and its rungs, a chain and its links<sup>1</sup> may be used to illustrate the difference between ‘dependent’ and ‘independent’ parts. Remove a link from its chain and the whole becomes a part, the part a whole. A chain is only as strong as its weakest link, but its weakest link, considered separately, may be more powerfully numinous than the chain as a whole.

1 The ‘Great Chain’ across the Hudson was cast at the Stirling Iron Works in Newburgh, New York, near where Peale exhumed the mastodon(s). 1,700 feet long, each link a 2½-inch iron bar, 30 inches long, it was stretched upon a boom from West Point to Constitution Island with the object of preventing ascent of British war vessels up the Hudson. Placing it in position began 16 April and on 30 April 1778 it was secured at the two ends.

2 Daemon—the animating spirit of a place or thing. cf. the painter Giorgio de Chirico’s diktat: “One must discover the daemon in everything.”

3 Numinous—invested with power or spirit.

4 Guy Davenport: “...science and poetry from the Renaissance forward have been trying to discover what is alive and what isn’t. In science the discovery spanned three centuries, from Gassendi to Niels Bohr, and the answer is that everything is alive.”

Davenport also quotes Einstein: “...every clod of earth, every feather, every speck of dust is a prodigious reservoir of entrapped energy.” From ‘Olson’, in *The Geography of the Imagination* (1981).

5 cf. Leonora Carrington: “The explosion... had momentarily dispersed the powers that always gathered around the Cup in enclosed areas. This is a magic law and true for nearly all charged objects.” From *The Hearing Trumpet* (1976).