



"Seaweed Picture No. 22," a photograph by Alyson Denny, whose work was exhibited in December at Alan Klotz Gallery, in New York City.

Carlos Williams, who insists too much on a modesty of American speech, whereas poetry is not only concerned with the modesty of speech, no more than it is concerned only with the rhetorical attitude to speech.

What is wrong with that verb "vagues" to me here is, if I looked hard enough at it, this is what happens: Here we have three chunks. The blocks are "afternoon," "vagues," "indigo"—in which the last stroke, like a Degas, should be a blur, right? And should not be a reality. If it were a truth, a metaphorical syllogism, what would happen is you could reverse it: "indigo vagues afternoon." Whereas if the sentence can work in both directions, what is happening is the verb itself is calling attention to itself. The verb is magnetic and it's a little overmagnetic here, because the extra touch of saying "indigo" somehow hits a note that's a little too affected for me. It's pitched a little too high.

Now you can say, with all due respect and gratitude for liking the line, if it were only possible for the "vagues" not to have an *s*—and *v-a-g-u-e* could melt into *i-n-d-i-g-o* and you'd have a *v-a-g i-g-o*. Then you would not have the

action of the verb drawing attention to what it was doing. You want to scramble as in paint, you want to erase really. The *s* is doing something that is not visual but assonantal—and there is no assonantal quality in "vaguing."

I'm being tough on myself. Let me just make another point here. *Vago* is the Latin, "to wander." But at the back of my head there's a stronger word, which is a French word, *vague*, which is agitation of the water. *Vague* is a very strange word. There's another poem in which I was exultant after I got it, and I went up to a friend and I said, "Jesus, you know, I just got it: 'the vague sea.'" Again, the idea of blur and mist and melting. Because you have *vague*, which is the wind and sea, then you have "vague," which is a sea itself being blurred, right? And what may work for it is within the tonal quality of the two words. "Vague sea." It's like one word "vague sea," one stroke almost, a small stroke.

All I'm saying about that line is, what we do, why we make ourselves mercilessly victims of our own judgments—rightly so—is that when we develop some domination of technique, the higher you climb, the better the view looks,