Allan Sekula / Prayer for the Americans

> Exposition : June 12-July 24, 2004
> Vernissage : June 11, 7-9 pm

The germ for this exhibition comes from an earlier text written in the more "innocent" early summer of 2001, when it seemed that the modest foreign policy ambition of George Bush and his advisors was to provoke a confrontation with China and the remilitarization of Japan. Just as I was able somewhat later to imagine a purely hypothetical opera (*Black Tide*, 2002-2003) so then it was possible to imagine a purely hypothetical prayer, written in the aftermath of the disastrous collision of frolicking American nuclear submarine and a Japanese fisheries training ship:

Prayer for the Americans and Their Allies 16/06/01

The sky will be our shield
The market will never fall
The icecaps will never melt
The sea will never be exhausted

Prayer is a compelling ironic exercise for the irreligious, as Mark Twain demonstrated with his mostly forgotten "War Prayer". But when does materialist pessimism yield to hope, and desperate hope to spiritualistic longing? Why add the private prayers of an unbeliever to the veritable Babel of prayers emanating from a religious nation? The torturer in chief prays loudly for the troops and the troops in turn are asked to pray for the torturer in chief. Behind the curtain Pentagon lawyers fabricate exceptions to international law.

Can a deliberate sequence or involuntary overlay of photographs constitute a prayer? A psalm? Or "merely" this: a record of a pilgrimage to the hometown of the old Mississipi river pilot and America's original anti-imperialist, conveniently mis-remembered as a "humorist" and chronicler of lost boyhood. Or this: the melding of Time Square anonymity and cheap carnival just beyond the grip of Disney, a Hollywood "art event" of some indeterminate sort, and a mother and grandmother's eightieth birthday dinner? She, at least, is praying for my soul, and for the world.

Allan Sekula