



Artists' Television Access is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, all-volunteer, artist-run, experimental media arts gallery that has been in operation since 1984. ATA hosts a series of film and video screenings, exhibitions and performances by emerging and established artists and a weekly cable access television program.

Saturday, October 4, 2008. Doors 7:30pm, Films 8pm, \$10

## ATA Film & Video Festival 2008: Program 2

Co-presented with [Other Cinema](#)

### What for What

John Davis, in person – 2008, 9', Super8, Napa, CA

---

This short film emphasizes the notion that life is an unalienable human right, and lawful murder a fallacy. Utilizing the US State of Georgia's death chamber audio recording from the botched execution of Alpha Otis O'Daniel Stevens, the film encourages continued debate over the practice of capital punishment. Using color and black and white super8 images, the film questions the notion that two wrongs make a right, as it simultaneously explores the final minutes of a condemned man's existence.

#### *Questions with John Davis*

**Elizabeth Wing:** Was it difficult to gain access to the recording of the execution? How did you come to hear about it?

**John Davis:** The execution recording comes from a website called Sound Portraits in a section called The Execution Tapes. All the sound material on the site is in the public domain so anyone can access it.

I ran across it while looking for testimonials for another project, basically a link to a link. When I first heard the recording I was pretty floored. It definitely reinforced the inhumanity of capital punishment, but also yielded impressions of what the experience might have been like from Alpha Stephens' point of view. In particular, his final moments of life giving over to death, and the potential suffering by means of a faulty and primitive killing device.

**EW:** Much of the visual footage looks like it may be old or found. Did you shoot any or all of it, and if so, was it shot with this project in mind?

**JD:** Although I often work with found or archival footage, I shot all the film for this piece over a few years time, and not with this project in mind. I generally use an improvisational approach to shooting, and sounds or recorded music will often drive a project, providing conceptual cues for image selection.

**EW:** Can you describe for us the way your training as an anthropologist influences the way you see and approach things?

**JD:** I would use the term training loosely... but my studies in cultural anthropology formalized my interest in diversity, and the ways culture informs human behavior and visa versa. It influenced my thinking not so much in a formal scientific way, but rather an impressionistic one. I chose to practice art instead of anthropology because it became clear to me that there is way more authority, truth, and beauty in the subjective/personal voice than in any objective scientific one.

John Davis is an artist living in the Bay Area experimenting with sound and image, exhibiting both internationally and in the US. His sound works stem from a desire to supplement his films and videos with original music, and has become an integral part of his process. He has recorded music for the Root Strata label in San Francisco, and has upcoming releases on the Students of Decay label in Cincinnati and Digitalis Ltd. in Tulsa. John has a BS in Anthropology from Loyola University in Chicago, and an MFA from the San Francisco Art Institute.

