Tales from the South
A Visual Essay

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1
A story

With no beginning and no end

A displacement

An uncovering of spaces

Existing within the one

I momentarily inhabit

2
I come from a place often described as long and narrow

("Like a sword", we were told)

Yet for me it was circular and chaotic ("Like a trail", I replied)

I’d find myself on dry Northern sands

After crossing a river in the rain of the South

Or after falling asleep on a hot city afternoon

I’d wake up shivering on a frozen island

When I thought life was beginning, they killed me

When I smiled, they hit me

And when I was loved, I hit back

1 Text and images from Tales from the South (experimental video, writer & director Antonio Traverso, 1997, Australia/Chile, 21 mins); dedicated to the victims of the dictatorship, Chile, 1973-1990
I don’t know for how long I ran
I found myself in a prehistoric landscape
My location shifted independently of my wishes
I thought of Cortazar’s characters
Passing from one city to another
As they step down from trams or walk through bridges
Such is this story, I don’t know where or when it began
But it circulates between “there” and “here”
Between “then” and “now”

In her dream Magdalena saw herself walk
In a place that both frightened and inspired her
She sensed eyes everywhere looking at her
She felt something open to let her through
And then close behind her
A soundless voice summoned her:
“I am your aleph, Magdalena, come closer
Don’t look, you may lose your mind
Come closer and fuse with me”
I was followed on the street one night and kidnapped in a car  
I was isolated for 3 months, interrogated, tortured and raped

Electricity and hot cigarettes were applied to my body
I was forced to sign false statements
I was drugged and filmed pleading guilty to false charges

A call from the shore, a light too bright to be looked at  
It was Pincoya, bringer of abundance and fertility
Magdalena didn’t know of Pincoya’s lethal look
But her eyes were not burnt by this fire
Nor was her skin consumed like burning coal

Magdalena, the silent one
Saw in her mind the image of two mirrors
One in front of the other
Reproducing her own image ad infinitum

The surroundings bend around themselves
Space becomes distorted
At times it’s friendly, at times threatening
It becomes a labyrinth
Protecting a beast chasing you in dreams
This is my story

You may enter but please be careful

Everything here is distorted

Time and space interwoven

There are no visions, only fleeting glances

To that which is and is not

That could have been but was not

That could possibly be

This story is my struggle, my travail

My daily defeat, my Sunday’s victory

This story burns, crushes, interrogates me

It rapes, plunders and conquers me

Then it finds my missing body when I had given up the search

Yet this story is also my self-defence, my liberation

My self-encounter, my cleansing

This story is my intimate rebellion

My invisible revolution

My returning, my moving on