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Narco-violence, femicide and gore capitalism: Teresa Margolles's piercing textile works

Teresa Margolles was born in Culiacán, Sinaloa, in northern Mexico, a location often referred to as Mexico's 'Narco Capital', in 1963.[1] She began her artistic career as one of the founding members of the SEMEFO collective in 1990, and has been working as an independent artist since 1998.[2] She won the Artes Mundi prize in Cardiff in 2012, three years after being selected to represent Mexico at the Venice Biennale.[3] In this chapter, I examine Margolles's textile works in the context of what Sayak Valencia has called 'gore capitalism', in order to demonstrate what the artist's textiles unveil: namely, that women are being murdered daily because of intersecting fears of women's economic independence and women's material freedoms, such as the freedom to travel, work and access abortions (depending on the locale), in the ongoing age of global capitalism.[4] In this phase of globalization, money is more important than life. Valencia employs the term 'gore capitalism' to refer to 'the reinterpretation of the hegemonic global economy in (geographic) border spaces'. She continues:

> We take the term 'gore' from a genre of films characterized by extreme, brutal violence. Thus, 'gore capitalism' refers to the undisguised and unjustified bloodshed that is the price the Third World pays for adhering to the increasingly demanding logic of capitalism. It also refers to the many instances of dismembering and disembowelment, often tied up with organized crime, gender and the predatory uses of bodies. In general, this term posits these incredibly brutal kinds of violence as tools of necroempowerment.[5]

Some of Margolles's textiles, specifically those produced for her Venice biennale exhibition at the Mexican pavilion in 2009, are concerned with so-called narco-violence, which often involves 'collateral damage', that is, the murder of civilians, particularly women. Other textile works, such as *Tela bordada (Embroidered*

Fabric) (2012, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa)[6] and the collaborative textiles created for the 2015 exhibition *We Have a Common Thread*, are primarily (though not exclusively) concerned with the murder of women of colour. Importantly, Valencia writes that she is 'interested in following the multiple threads that give rise to the capitalist practices underpinned by the extreme and ultra-specialized forms of violence – practices that in certain geopolitical locales have become established as everyday forms of violence used to obtain recognition and economic legitimacy'.[7] I propose that like Valencia, who sets out to develop 'a discourse with the explanatory power to help us interpret the reality produced by gore capitalism' in order to unveil 'the vulnerability of the human body … in how it is mutilated and desecrated',[8] Margolles desires to illuminate, if not explain, the material realities of gore capitalism that are being wreaked upon the bodies of women. The artist very deliberately employs textiles to demonstrate the vulnerability of the human body, particularly the bodies of women of colour, who are the prime objects of violence globally. I argue, with Valencia, that gore capitalism is not restricted to the 'Third World',[9] by which Valencia means the 'global South' or 'non-Western' locales such as Latin America, but rather that gore capitalism has taken root around the world (including in the 'global North') as the logical and brutal extension of global capitalism, and that capitalism cannibalizes on marginalized subjects, particularly women and people of colour, in order to keep churning out profits.[10]

Thinking about skin

In her book-length study of Margolles's body of work, Julia Banwell has previously demonstrated how skin as material and metaphor is woven throughout the Mexican artist's photographs and installations, even when (perhaps especially when) the body is absent. I want to begin this chapter with a series of passages from Banwell's text as a foundation for my subsequent discussion. Of Margolles's 2006 installation *127 cuerpos (127 Corpses)*, for which the artist took 127 autopsy threads from corpses' post-mortem surgeries and knotted them together, creating a thirty-five-metre-long string that stretches across gallery spaces, Banwell notes that each thread fragment signifies one dead individual from different morgues in Mexico. She remarks that the threads

> are stained to varying degrees with dried blood and other bodily residues that also provide material evidence of the bodies they have stitched. The human body

> is absent, but brought into close proximity to the spectator by this material with which s/he has come into contact. There is a greater level of violence implicit in using this particular material than, for example, the water used to wash corpses: the thread has been attached to a needle which pierced and altered dead skin, aggressively modifying its form to close the violated skin cavity, and is stained with blood and other bodily-traces.[11]

As Banwell astutely observes,

> Although the threads have been used as part of post-mortem processes of investigation, their act of violation of the *fragile skin boundary* shadows the damage that can be done by bullets or blades whose consequence is the ending of life. Knotted together, they symbolically connect individual human bodies via their metaphorical substitution of these absent forms.[12]

Although this work is not, strictly speaking, a textile, it is comprised of the basic materials (threads) that could be made into a textile. Margolles's *127 Corpses* and her related work *36 Corpses* (2010) function as material evidence of the reduction of a person's life to a single blood-stained thread that has pierced the person's dead body in a post-mortem autopsy. As anthropologist Nina Joblonski has observed, 'In addition to providing a boundary layer between the body and the environment, the skin has taken on the new roles of social canvas and embodied metaphor in our recent evolutionary past. Our skin reflects our age, our ancestry, our state of health, our cultural identity.'[13] Importantly for my purposes here, Joblonski adds that skin metaphors are so common because they 'so closely associate our skin with the essence of our being. They induce empathy because of the unambiguous association of the skin with a vulnerable self.'[14] Marc Lafrance has argued in his article 'Skin Studies: Past, Present and Future' (2018) that skin is a suggestive site of investigation because of its simultaneous resilience and vulnerability.[15] I argue throughout *Skin Crafts* that insights from the field of skin studies are useful for art historians who are concerned with violence and the vulnerable subject in art and visual culture. More specifically, I am arguing that contemporary artists employing textiles and other craft materials are drawing on the specific capabilities of these media to signify the vulnerability and resilience of skin, with an emphasis in this chapter on vulnerability, violation and the failure to recover from material violence to the skin.

The autopsy suture threads that Margolles used in *127 Corpses* and *36 Corpses* bring to mind the body of Frankenstein's monster, with his 'sutured skin'.[16] In their book *Skin Shows: Gothic Horror and the Technology of Monsters* (1995), Jack Halberstam examines Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1816) for what it says

about skin and female monstrosity, both themes that are central to my present discussion. Indeed, scholarship that demonstrates how women – particularly women of colour and sex workers – have been rendered monstrous through discourse, including visual culture, is crucial for *Skin Crafts* as a whole, as one strategy of gore capitalism *and* witch-hunting is to turn women into monsters so that they are perceived as threats that must be obliterated. According to Claudette Lauzon,

> The historical construction of non-normative female bodies as sites of contamination and containment has been usefully theorized by Margrit Shildrick through the deployment of the trope of the 'monstrous body'. For Shildrick, monstrous bodies – women (particularly pregnant women), racialized others, and the sick or disabled – pose a risk to 'the normative construct of the self's clean and proper body', a risk that is constituted by 'the failure of the monstrous body to observe a material and metaphorical *cordon sanitaire*, its failure to wholly occupy the place of the other'.[17]

According to this framework, those individuals who are most vulnerable to violence are discursively framed as dangerous (i.e. monstrous) in order to justify that violence. Readers will know that trans women, and particularly trans women of colour who are sex workers, are also extremely vulnerable to discursive violence that renders them monstrous and the material violence that is inextricably bound up with the discourse of feminine monstrosity.[18] In *Skin Shows*, Halberstam considers the ways that *Frankenstein*, as a Gothic novel, speaks to fears about, among other things, femininity, the female body and 'feminine sexual response'.[19] Of the moment when Victor Frankenstein destroys the female monster, Halberstam writes,

> The reduction of the female monster to pulp gives us a very literal metaphor for the threat of female monstrosity as opposed to the threat figured by male monstrosity. The pulp that Frankenstein scatters about his laboratory floor is the female monster, is female monstrosity. … The power of the male monster is that it does precisely become human and so it makes humanity intrinsic to a particular kind of monstrosity and vice versa. The female monster cannot be human because it is always only an object, a thing, 'unfinished'.[20]

Halberstam's reference to the 'pulp that Frankenstein scatters on his laboratory floor' loses its fictional distance when we consider how horrifyingly close this description is to how the remains of female murder victims are discarded in Mexico and other locales around the world. Often dismembered, disfigured and rendered anonymous by the destruction of face and body, the victims of femicide

are frequently reduced to literal pulp, functioning as material evidence of how those very women were objectified and dehumanized in life and again through violent death. My objective in bringing *Frankenstein* into the fray is not only to underscore the material consequences (violent death) that occur when women are rendered monstrous but also to note that in this chapter I am working with the following metaphors: if Frankenstein is globalization, then Frankenstein's monster (who also murders a woman in Shelley's novel) is gore capitalism. Within this framework, the suture threads of Margolles's *127 Corpses* function not only as metonymic stand-ins for dead individuals; they also symbolize the ways that gore capitalism grinds women down to pulp, leaving only bloody threads behind.

Banwell has analysed Margolles's artworks and their relationship to not only skin but also textiles, borders and boundaries, which are related to the *cordon sanitaire* noted by Shildrick in the above quotation. As Banwell has written, 'The pattern left in the skin by the lines of stitches [on a post-autopsy corpse] visually resembles the spikes of barbed wire that mark the border line that divides political territories', and this border has been described as

> 'una herida abierta' (*an open wound*). The Mexico-US border parallels with the skin as corporeal boundary. Both *geopolitical and skin borders are permeable*. In the case of geopolitical borders, the human transit from one side to the other moves through the space marking the crossing which, depending on the level of security, may be indicated by a wall, a fence, a roadside checkpoint. *The border of the skin may also be transcended*, for example by autopsy or surgical needle and thread, by absorption or leaking of substances, or by a tattooist's needle and ink.[21]

In the remainder of this chapter, I build on Banwell's insights about skin, wounds and boundaries to analyse Margolles's textile works through the lens of critical craft studies on the one hand, and skin studies on the other, in order to argue for the affective and political power of these particular works. Although I discuss narco-violence (violence in Mexico related to the drug trade), I am primarily concerned in this chapter with *femicide*, the murder of women *because they are women*. Mexican feminist politician Marcela Lagarde y de los Ríos prefers the term 'feminicide' to describe all kinds of violence towards women, but I will be using the term 'femicide' here to highlight Margolles's focus on violent death.[22] With Marxist feminist scholar Silvia Federici, I beg other feminists to continue fighting femicide with whatever tools are at hand with a renewed sense of urgency. In her crucial text *Witches, Witch-Hunting and Women* (2018), Federici argues,

> While violence against women has been normalized as a structural aspect of familial and gender relations, what has developed during the past several decades exceeds the norm. Exemplary is the case of the murders of Ciudad Juarez, a city across the Mexican border from El, Paso, Texas, where in the last twenty years hundreds of women have disappeared, their tortured bodies often found abandoned in public spaces. This is not an isolated case. Kidnappings and murders of women are a daily reality today in Latin America.[23]

Like Federici, I believe that the epidemic of femicide in Mexico, Canada, the United States and other global contexts in our contemporary moment is a modern-day witch-hunt informed by unbridled misogyny, misogynoire, racism and transphobia, which are the symptoms of rage, hatred and fear felt towards women in the context of globalization, global capitalism and women's increased financial independence.[24]

Re-thinking excess

Although Margolles's death-related artworks have usually been described as either minimalist or post-minimalist because of how her spare installations employing materials such as vapour, cement and string encourage a phenomenological approach to embodied spectatorship, in this chapter I consider Margolles's textile works through the lens of excess. I am not the first to discuss Margolles's work in terms of excess. In the exhibition catalogue for *What Else Could We Talk About?*, Margolles's contribution to the 2009 Venice Biennale, Mariana Botey labels works that Margolles produced as part of the anarchist art collective SEMEFO in the 1990s as 'extreme and excessive'. The work she is specifically referring to here is *Dermis* (1996), which was comprised of a set of couches and sofas covered in horse's entrails. Amy Sara Carroll, on the other hand, has remarked that 'Death and femininity, in Margolles's solo transitional pieces [after leaving the art collective SEMEFO], operate as *excesses* that haunt the expanding circles that constitute the works' publics'.[25] Where my analysis departs from Botey's and Carroll's is my concern with the specificities of textiles and the ways that textiles have been discursively constructed as excessive in the context of Western art history. I also want to engage more critically with the concept of 'excess' than either Botey or Carroll do in their respective texts. Excess is culturally contingent; it is constructed. In what follows, I want to think through what the concept of 'excess' unveils in and around Margolles's works that employ thread and cloth.

In Margolles's piercing textile works, the softness of fabric comes into tension with the brutality of violence against vulnerable bodies. As feminist scholars such as Janice Helland and Bridget Elliott (2002) have shown, textiles have long been denigrated and marginalized, dismissed not only as 'feminine' but also as excessive or 'in excess' according to the gendered hierarchies of Western art history.[26] The use of textiles in art related to violence is therefore symbolically powerful on multiple levels. Textiles have historically been denigrated as 'women's work', but they have also functioned as sites of community, coping and self-care in a range of geographical and cultural contexts. In her art practice, Margolles often uses textiles to bear material traces of violence, whether drug-related violence, suicide or femicide. Margolles's first engagement with textiles appears to have been *Dermis* (1995), a hospital sheet bearing the bloody silhouettes of two human figures. (She also produced a series entitled *Dermis/Derm* in 1996 while she was still collaborating with the art collective SEMEFO.)[27] According to Rubén Gallo, the silhouettes of *Dermis* belong to two gay men who had died by suicide together.[28] Like much of her early work, Margolles collected the sheet from the morgue in Mexico City. Her work *Lienzo (The Shroud)* (1999–2000) consists of a blanket that is nine metres long and has the imprint of the bodily fluids of nine corpses.[29] Margolles's 2009 exhibition for the Venice Biennale, *What Else Could We Talk About?*, is, significantly, comprised of many textiles, all of which Margolles and groups of volunteers used to clean up scenes of narco-violence.

I propose to consider violence as touch in excess or excessive touch: I am particularly concerned with touch that erases and obliterates the bodies of vulnerable women, specifically Indigenous women and other women of colour. In Margolles's video *Women Embroidering Next to Lake Atitlàn* (2012), a group of Mayan female activists are shown embroidering brightly coloured images onto a stained white sheet.[30] The names of the Indigenous women who participated are Lucy Andrea Lopez, Silvia Menchu, Bonifacia Cocom Tambriz, Maria Josefina Tuy Churunel, Marcelina Cumes, Rosamelia Cocolajay, Alba Cocolajay and Cristina Lopez. The sheet is stained with blood that resulted from a man murdering his female partner in Guatemala City. A high percentage of women who experience intimate violence, including murder, in Guatemala are of Indigenous heritage and live in rural areas or on the urban periphery.[31] The Indigenous artists embroidered a range of symbols, including birds, flowers and candles, on the stained sheet, and there are small women of colour in the top two corners (one in the upper left and two in the upper right) and the bottom left corner. In the bottom right corner of the cloth there is a yellow candle and

dark blue flower. There are also a sun and a waxing crescent (or sickle) moon in the upper row of symbols. A dark candle was chosen as the symbol for the very centre of the cloth.

It is possible to read the textile with the iconographical methodology developed by Erwin Panofsky, considering the meaning of the symbols in Latin American visual culture, and then reading them in relation to each other in order to arrive at a hidden or buried meaning that may or may not correspond with what the Indigenous female artists intended.[32] As my frequent use of words such as 'signify' and 'index' indicates, I believe that semiotics can be a useful methodology for analysing textiles; iconography can also be very productive in reading textile artworks for meaning in relation to materials. The flowers are traditional symbols of femininity, while birds symbolize flight of the soul after death.[33] The candles can be seen as votive candles burning at an altar or at a vigil in memory of the woman who was murdered.[34] These are symbols related not only to mourning and grief but also to rebirth, transcendence and transformation. If I look at the sheet as a Rorschach Test, the symmetrical blood stain – the result of folding the cloth in half – becomes a butterfly, or perhaps a moth, with the tips of its wings almost touching the upper edge of the cloth and exceeding the bottom edge. There is also a small head above embroidered symbols and a section of abdomen below the embroideries, where the rest of the thorax would be. The blood-stain butterfly – a well-known symbol of metamorphosis, resurrection and, in some cultures, the soul – when put in dialogue with the embroidered symbols, results in an artwork that tells a story about women of colour who are murdered, mourned, memorialized and who live on in art and memory. The textile is thus an artwork that speaks not only of violence but also of grief, endurance and transformation. Once it was embroidered, the bloody cloth was titled *Tela bordada*; when it is displayed, it is hung on the wall like a painting or tapestry. In the video, while the Indigenous women embroider, they discuss domestic violence in Guatemala and around the world, pointing to the intersubjective nature of collective crafting and the potential for radical social change when women speak openly about intimate violence.

The collaborative crafting that resulted in *Tela bordada* anticipated the 2015 exhibition *We Have a Common Thread*, which was organized by Neuberger Museum of Art Purchase College, State University of New York, and curated by Patrice Giasson (Figures 1.1, 1.2 and 1.3). For that exhibition, Margolles collaborated with embroiderers from Guatemala, Panama, Nicaragua, Brazil, Mexico and the United States, who shared her concerns about violence, particularly against women, although the Harlem embroiderers (who are

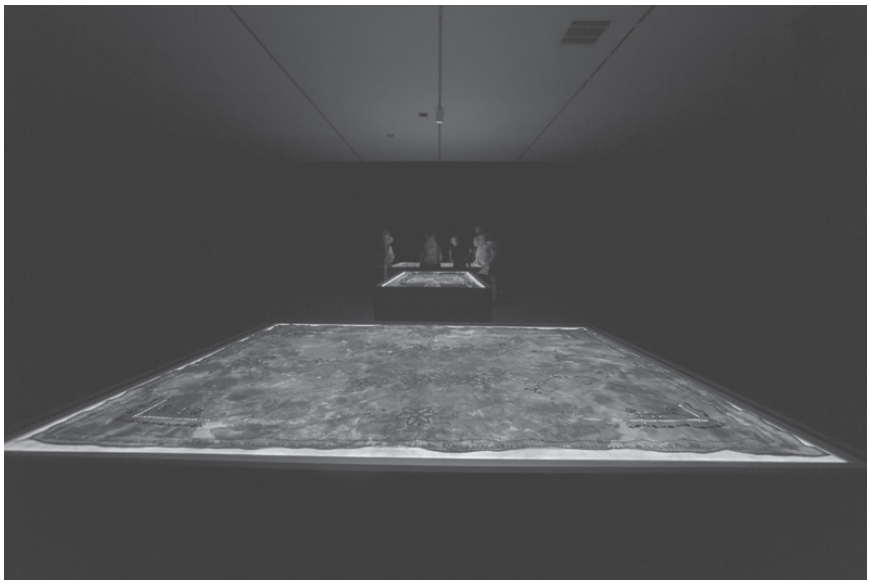

Figure 1.1 Installation view of *Teresa Margolles: We Have a Common Thread,* curated by Patrice Giasson. Neuberger Museum of Art, 11 July to 11 October 2015. The textile was previously stained with blood from the body of a woman murdered in Managua, Nicaragua, and it was embroidered by Atlántida Espinoza, Conny Gutiérrez, Xiomara Gutiérrez and Susana Pérez. The title of the artwork is *When Most of Us Were Sandinistas*, 2014. 59 × 41 inches. Photo: Rafael Burillo.

associated with the Harlem Needle Arts Cultural Arts Institute) produced a textile specifically to memorialize Eric Garner, an African American man who was murdered with a chokehold by police (Figure 1.3).[35] Following discussions with the embroiderers, whose words about the project are transcribed in the exhibition catalogue for *We Have a Common Thread*, Margolles provided each group with fabrics that had been stained with the micro-debris of sites where people had suffered violent deaths. With the exception of Eric Garner, the embroiderers were not given a great deal of information about the victims who inspired the textile works. This speaks, perhaps, to the anonymity of many victims of violence in Mexico and other parts of the world.

Giasson describes these collaborative embroideries as 'stained screens', an interesting phrase[36] that might be illuminated by Amelia Jones's comment that 'the televisual delivers bodies and subjects, through the tangible texture of its intimate screen – *collapsing* the very distance through which, paradoxically, the cinematic imaginary signifier does its suturing work'.[37] The television screen and the textile might seem like they exist on opposite ends of the material spectrum;

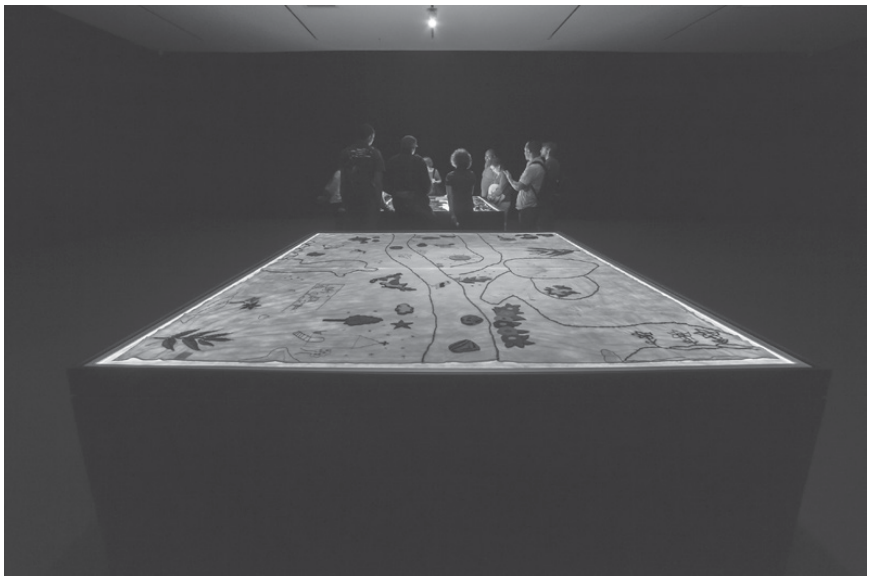

Figure 1.2 Installation view of *Teresa Margolles: We Have a Common Thread,* curated by Patrice Giasson. Neuberger Museum of Art, 11 July to 11 October 2015. The fabric was previously stained with blood from the body of a woman murdered in Recife, Brazil. It was created with the participation of women from the Social Center Dom João Costa: Marluce Pedro de Araujo, Maria Gracas Guimares de Lima, Edinai Maria da Silva, Ezilda Rodrigues da Silva, Josefa Helena da Silva, Josilene Maria da Silva, Zumeira Deca da Silva, Rositania da Silva Santos and Jocileide Benedita de Souza. The title of the artwork is *Gerlaine GG Om Pào Com Molho: Unknown Identities*, 2014. 89 × 96 inches. Photo: Rafael Burillo.

however, both have their own textures, their own weaves, their own modes of storytelling. Significantly, Giasson incorporated screens into the installation of *We Have a Common Thread*, so viewers could watch the embroiderers work. Note also Jones's use of the term 'suturing' here to discuss the televisual screen. This textile, but also surgical, metaphor is highly significant for Margolles's work, particularly her works that employ threads that have been used to suture the skin of post-autopsy corpses in the morgue, such as *127 Corpses*. Giasson notes that during a conversation he had with Margolles in Harlem in 2015, Margolles noted that 'the art of closing up bodies after an autopsy was reminiscent of the practice and ritual of sewing'.[38] Further to this, Margolles's body of work has repeatedly been described as 'collapsing' the distance between living subject and death via material traces of dead bodies.[39] In fact, Giasson has observed, 'While talking about the display, Margolles expressed her desire that the visitors have the freedom to touch the work, as the weavers touched it while working on it.

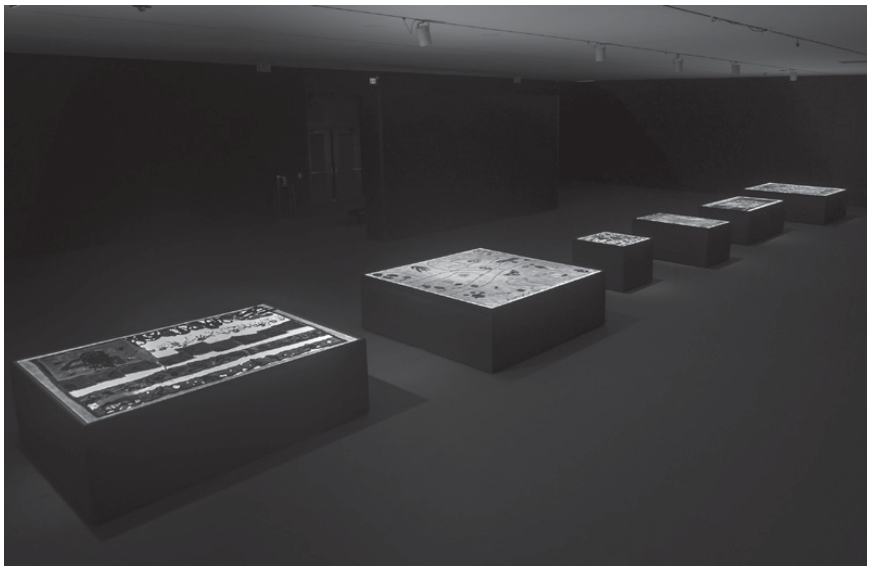

Figure 1.3 Installation view of *Teresa Margolles: We Have a Common Thread*, curated by Patrice Giasson. Neuberger Museum of Art, 11 July to 11 October 2015. In the foreground is a mixed media on stained textile produced by an imprint technique on the spot in Staten Island where Eric Garner was murdered by police. Created by members of the Harlem Needle Arts cultural arts institute: Sahara Briscoe, Laura R. Gadson and Jerry Grant, under the direction of Michelle Bishop. The title of the artwork is *american Juju for the Tapestry of Truth*, 2015. 66 × 98 inches. Photo: Rafael Burillo.

Her request was meant to *reduce the distance between the viewer and the textile*, and to initiate the possibility of a relational identification.'[40]

In working with dirty and blood-soaked textiles, Margolles illuminates the powerful and contradictory symbolism of textiles: not simply 'excessive', nor safely 'domestic', textiles reveal a range of different affects and a range of different kinds of touch. It is not insignificant that of all her materials, Margolles's textiles are the works that have, to date, received the least extended scholarly attention. Furthermore, Amy Sara Carroll has noted that the 'gendered dimensions of Margolles's work' is rarely if ever considered, despite the fact that in an interview with Carroll in 2000 Margolles stated, 'Of course, my status as a woman in relation to what's been termed an all-male aesthetic [that is, post-minimalism] has affected my artistic practice. Of course, my status as a woman in the world affects the ways in which I work.'[41] The truth that textiles have been, and continue to be, gendered as feminine is surely related to the fact that both Margolles's gender and her use of textiles have not been centred in most of the scholarship written about her art.

Margolles's textile works unveil the material violence of everyday life for women of colour. To be more specific, the physical, material, murderous violence that is enacted upon women of colour is what Margolles's textiles soak up and index. Her textile works are *always* collaborative. Sometimes, as with the textile works that were included in her 2009 Venice Biennale show, *What Else Could We Talk About?*, Margolles went to scenes of drug-related violence with groups of volunteers and cleaned up the sites, soaking up blood and mud and other debris from the streets of northern Mexico. These textiles were then exhibited and deployed in a number of different ways in Venice; for example, in *Recovered Blood* (2009), textiles were steamed and the violence-related fluids were turned into vapour, thus touching the skin and entering the bodies of viewers, and subsequently hung in the Mexican Pavilion.[42]

In her exhibition *We Have a Common Thread* (2015), Margolles, who had previously been known for works that centred upon the corpse, using the morgue of Mexico City as a source of her materials, commissioned groups of embroiderers in six different global contexts to embroider stained fabrics.[43] Although when these textiles were exhibited it was Margolles's name that was front and centre, the exhibition catalogue names the embroiderers, quotes them and reproduces photographs of them creating the artworks. These collaborative textiles are, I suggest, part of a project associated with both violence and the use of textiles to demonstrate radical care. As craft scholar Janis Jefferies has remarked, 'To craft is to care.'[44] Further to this, to think about murdered women (and men) of colour, to grieve, to talk about, to lament, to feel anger, to be willing to do what one can to lean on to the power of good in the face of ongoing human evil: these are all acts of affective labour. Craft historians have demonstrated again and again how textiles have intersected with affective labour, usually through the hands of women. Quilting bees, slave quilts, suffrage banners, funeral shrouds: textiles have served affective and political purposes, and Margolles's collaborative textiles are part of this legacy.[45]

According to Valentina Locatelli, 'In the first half of the twentieth century, national art institutions and academies throughout Latin America were often not accessible to women, and women's participation in the arts was long limited to the field of popular and folk arts and crafts, that is, to "hobbies" which were considered compatible with domestic work.'[46] One of the remarkable things about Margolles's textile works is that she herself is not the primary embroiderer; she is usually using 'found' textiles like sheets from the morgue or cloths to clean up crime scenes. For the Venice textiles, she employed large pieces of cloth to absorb blood from the streets of Mexico, but the traces on the cloth signify not

the 'hand of the artist' but the death of an unnamed victim. This distances her, one could argue, from the criticism and art history that would locate her as a 'craft artist' or a 'textile artist'. Yet it is significant that she uses textiles in so many of her violence-related works. The textiles signify skin and absorb skin fragments at the same time. Margolles uses textiles to remind us of the vulnerability of bodies, of skin, of people, of lives lost. Instead of literally representing violent crimes and dead bodies in her textile works, she uses threads and cloth as stand-ins for violated bodies, forcing viewers to acknowledge the material realities for women of colour living inside gore capitalism.

What Else Could We Talk About? (2009): Narco-violence, excess and dirty textiles

Margolles is part of what has been called the globalization of Mexican art that has been occurring in the post-1994, post-NAFTA art world.[47] Her work was included in the 2006–7 exhibition *Frontera 450+* at the Station Museum of Contemporary Art; her installation employed clothing of victims of violent death, and could be considered part of her textile oeuvre. As Caroline A. Jones has demonstrated, annual biennials have played a central role in the so-called globalization of contemporary art.[48] In 2009 Cuauhtémoc Medina curated a show of Margolles's work for the 53rd Venice Biennale, a show that represented Margolles's artistic transition from the morgue to public space, as much of the exhibit involved blood, mud, glass and other debris found at crime scenes. Like many of her earlier works, the works included in Margolles's exhibit at the Mexican Pavilion were concerned with the drug trade and so-called 'narco-violence' in Mexico.[49]

The textile works included in *What Else Could We Talk About?* are not textile artworks in the traditional sense.[50] That is, unlike the textiles produced for the 2015 exhibition *We Have a Common Thread*, the textiles in the Venice show were, for the most part, not embroidered. The exception was *Narcomessages*, which I discuss below. It is worth pausing here to query: What, if anything, is excessive about the textile works included in *What Else Could We Talk About?* Although the curators of Margolles's Venice exhibition frequently refer to excess in their catalogue essays, her textile works do not prove the modernist accusation that textiles are innately excessive.[51] Rather, Margolles's textiles, her 'impregnated fabrics', show the excessiveness of violence, the excessiveness of violent touch, that literally ruptures the skin of human beings so that blood overflows the

boundaries of the body and runs in the streets. Feminist art historian Rosemary Betterton has noted the discursive relationship between 'sexualized femininity, murderous pathology' and 'bodily excess',[52] and in her book *Over Her Dead Body: Death, Femininity and the Aesthetic* (1992), Elisabeth Bronfen shows the relationship that has been constructed historically between women, death and excess.[53] Although the textiles in the Venice show were primarily soaking up the blood of victims of drug violence (some of whom were surely women), Margolles's later collaborative textiles of 2012 and 2015 contain blood stains that resulted from acts of femicide. Blood is not only abject (as per Kristeva), it is excessive, and it is (or at least can be) material evidence of excessive, violent touch. Margolles's textile works, then, are excessive not only in Bataille's sense of 'base materiality'[54] (referring to bodily fluids rather than fabric) but also in exposing the excessiveness of touch that breaks skin.

In the Venice exhibition, Margolles was concerned with the idea of contagion: not simply the threat of disease but the threat of moral taint, the transfer of violence and death and foreignness via miasma containing mud and bodily fluids. Medina discusses this aspect of Margolles's work and the threat of the 'unclean'. Dirty textiles are particularly associated with the threat of the dirty or unruly woman. As architecture scholar Gülsüm Baydar has written about British artist Tracey Emin's controversial work *My Bed* (1998), 'Disgust is one of the most obvious feelings evoked at the sight of dirty stockings and underwear, stained sheets, and cigarette butts. These are objects of excess, which the clean body needs to get rid of in order to maintain a sense of "I".' She adds that fear of excess and dirt is 'an obvious manifestation of society's intolerance for dirt and disorder as threats to the imagined integrity of the self'.[55] The dirty sheets in Emin's *My Bed* signify very differently than the stained sheet of *Tela bordada* and the muddy cloths of Margolles's Venice exhibition. Emin's soiled bedclothes fit what Jenni Sorkin calls the 'self-stain', a term that does not apply to any of Margolles's textile works.[56] However, I would argue that in both the global South and the global North, unruly women are discursively re-presented as dirty, and thus are perceived as threatening to the social order. Thus the 'unclean' or 'dirty' individual, because they are seen as threatening, is also vulnerable to violence that is meant to erase them and thereby restore a kind of hegemonic social order.[57]

In the exhibition catalogue for *What Else Could We Talk About?*, the fabrics are repeatedly described as being 'impregnated' with blood, a discursive gesture that not only feminizes the muddy, bloody textiles but also frames them in relation to the pregnant body, which Margrit Shildrick has considered in terms of the monstrous body and Mary Russo has discussed as an archetype of the

'female grotesque'.[58] Prior to the Venice Biennale, Margolles and her team of volunteers used textiles to clean up sites of narco-violence in northern Mexico in the spring and summer of 2009; the cloths were subsequently soaked and steamed in Venice, releasing the material traces of drug violence into the air and onto the skin of art lovers in Italy, a kind of narco-violence miasma. The performance work *Cleaning* (2009) involved individuals hired for the purpose of cleaning the floors of the Mexican Pavilion with a mixture of water and blood collected at crime scenes in Mexico. The photographs in the exhibition catalogue show men cleaning the floors with mops; the action took place at least once a day during the biennale. For *Narcomessages* (2009), Margolles took cloths that had been used to clean up execution sites at the northern border of Mexico and had 'narcomessages' embroidered into them with gold threads. The work was a 'joint activity', that is, a collaborative process, in which the fabrics were progressively embroidered during the biennale, involving people moving through the streets of Venice. The embroidered phrases were taken from warning messages that were left at scenes of drug violence to send a message. The phrases included 'See, hear and silence', 'Until all your children fall', 'Thus finish the rats' and 'So that they learn to respect'. These embroidered cloths were eventually hung on the walls of the Mexican Pavilion like valuable tapestries.

In Medina's contribution to the exhibition catalogue, 'Materialist Spectrality', he states, 'This invasion [of narco-violence], propelled by the commissions and invitations of the world cultural circuit, functioned as a debased analogy of the globalization process.'[59] He goes on to describe the process of Margolles's textile works:

> The blood and dirt, after drying into lengths of fabric, is re-humidified and thus brought back in [to] the exhibition room. … The phrases that buzz around the killings are 'tatooed' [sic] onto the walls or embroidered in gold thread over the blood-soaked fabrics, setting up a friction between luxury, greed and the peculiar moral code supposedly ratified by every assassination.[60]

Of the miasma, imagined or real, of these works, Medina remarks that we are left 'with trash under the skin'.[61] In a subsequent catalogue essay, 'Toward a Critique of Sacrificial Reason: Necropolitics and Radical Aesthetics in Mexico', Mariana Botey observes that some of Margolles's works

> appear to be arguing for a register of poetic production dispersed in the social body and woven through the threads – in the specific case of our examples – of an imaginary cathexis at work in the idea of Mexico, a manifestation of a figure of

> aesthetics that returns in fluctuations (rotations), and that exceeds and overflows the dichotomy of rationality-irrationality on which modernity grounds itself.[62]

Here Botey brings together various relevant thematic threads – the 'excessiveness' of Margolles's project, the materiality and rich metaphorical-ness of textiles and the need for a norm to exceed if something, or someone, is to be discursively framed as excessive.

Textiles, touch and violence

As Jessica Hemmings has observed,

> While touch is central to our understanding of textiles, writing and reading about textiles tend to be considered, in an academic context, to make a greater contribution to our understanding of cloth. 'Reading' the textile, rather than 'feeling' the textile, means the textile is judged against a value system that does not always respond to its strengths.[63]

Many textile scholars have identified the haptic nature of textiles as a strength. In Claire Pajaczkowska's chapter 'Tension, Time and Tenderness: Indexical Traces of Touch in Textiles' (2010), there is a glaring lack of engagement with violent touch. Nonetheless, her text is useful because she sets out to establish a semiotics of textiles, looking to this methodology to illuminate the affective work that textiles do.

Pajaczkowska proposes that semiotics is a useful methodology for examining textiles, because it can explain

> why the trace of the hand within representation is capable of signifying memories of profoundly affective states. The semiotics of 'the textile' is needed in order to show how the specifically material meaning in textiles is founded on embodied knowledge and affect, and that these exist as indexical traces of the touch, handling and holding that are the presence of an absence of the body.[64]

It is worth noting here that this could be said for both textiles and violence: bruises, cuts and other wounds on the skin are indexical traces of excessive, violent touch. It is also worth noting that Margolles has stated that she 'work[s] with emotion, not reason'. She goes on to explain that while the initial impact of much of her work is shock, what's important is that after death the works keep 'talking, even in different languages. [They] keep reminding

me: Death is not pretty, and it sucks to be dead'.[65] The language of textiles is one that is usually associated with domesticity, but Margolles's textile works undermine this association, finding and using her textiles in public spaces such as the morgue and the street. This concern with undermining the domestic has been identified by Marci R. McMahon as a characteristic of many female Mexican artists and writers. She argues that these authors and artists enact 'domestic negotiations' that both 'challenge and reinforce geographical, racial, gendered, and national borders'.[66] While McMahon does not discuss Margolles, her phrase 'domestic negotiations' illustrates the way that Margolles rejects the domestic associations of textiles, while employing blood-stained textiles to illuminate that the domestic is not always a safe space for women.

Pajaczkowska remarks, 'One reason for the relative absence of textiles from the semiotic field is the paradoxical status of cloth as simultaneously ubiquitous and invisible … I have suggested that cloth and its component element, thread, have a cultural position that has endowed them with both an excessive materiality and an almost irrational immateriality'.[67] As is often the case in discussions of textiles, Pajaczkowska does not elaborate here on the ostensible excessiveness of cloth. She does, however, note that 'the individual body is usually covered in cloth, which is for most of the time in contact with the surface of the skin', making explicit the almost constant touch between skin and textiles in our day-to-day lives.[68] There is, as mentioned, an interesting blind spot when it comes to violent touch in Pajaczkowska's text. This is apparent, for instance, when she writes,

> The absorbent quality of cloth is also part of its capacity to signify as iconic, seen in the way that stains which indicate the capillary action of fibres retain the meaning of mark-making. The body as topos of conflict between nature and culture is, traditionally, prevented from staining fabric. There are many examples of the capacity of textile to signify through its use as symbol. Because textile absorbs liquid, it can be dyed to hold colour.[69]

Despite a reference to the 'capillary action of fibres' and the 'body as topos of conflict', there is an erasure of violent touch and (blood) stains as indexes of violence.

Violence, theorized as excessive touch, is touch in excess, touch that bruises and breaks skin. Pajaczkowska notes the way that the 'stitch pierces, punctuates, penetrates, as it unites separate edges, and within a single gesture it combines both aspects of the paradox of destruction and creation'.[70] She also notes that

the 'temporality of the tactile, haptic quality of the textile as sign depends on a paradox of presence and absence'.[71] Margolles's textiles function as memories of violence; their stains index the presence, and then the absence, of the person who has been murdered. Near the end of her article, Pajaczkowska discusses tenderness as an affect that might productively be considered in relation to textiles, arguing that the 'meaning of tenderness is experienced as a property of the textile itself', and that this 'semiotic quality is responsible for the attribution of a protective agency to cloth and textiles'.[72] If we consider Margolles's textile works, the idea of cloth and textiles as having a 'protective agency' becomes an empty claim, even a dangerous and infuriating one, as cloth cannot protect vulnerable individuals from violence.

Margolles has identified Georges Bataille's writings on excess as a source of inspiration for her work.[73] This opens up another route for considering her textiles through the theoretical framework of excess. However, from the perspective of this feminist art historian, there is not much of value in Bataille's text *Visions of Excess*. He is clearly concerned with dirt (or filth), with the human body, death and base materialism, so that we might draw on him to theorize Margolles's artworks because of her use of bodily fluids such as blood and dirt and debris from crime scenes. His work is also full of references to violence, making at least some of his writings relevant for my purposes here.[74] Although Bataille was by trade a librarian, in 1929 he helped found an art review entitled *Documents* with a group of rebel surrealists and conservative art historians. In his essays he developed something like a theory of bodies and matter (or perhaps materiality), which led to Andre Breton calling him an 'excremental philosopher'. Breton accused Bataille of being not an intellectual but an obsessive, identifying his interests as pathological.

Bataille's 'theory of baseness' positioned filth (and stains) as something worth considering because of its centrality to human life; not something to be swept under the carpet, but that which illuminates lived realities, drives and desires.[75] In a discussion of Dali's *The Lugubrious Game* (1929), he singles out the shit-stained shorts of the man in the lower right corner, opening the text with the statement, 'Intellectual despair results in neither weakness nor dreams, but in violence. Thus abandoning certain investigations is out of the question. It is only a matter of knowing how to give vent to one's rage; whether one only wants to wander like madmen around prisons, or whether one wants to overturn them.'[76] What strikes me as relevant in this text is the intrusion of violence written onto the body of a young girl in Bataille's visual analysis of Dali's painting. As if out of the blue, Bataille introduces a 'charming little girl whose soul would be Dali's

abominable mirror'.[77] He goes on to state, 'The tongue of this little girl is not a tongue but a she-rat. And if she still appears admirably beautiful, it is, as they say, because black blood is beautiful, flowing on the hide of the cow or on the throat of a woman.'[78] This sudden, and unnecessary, turn to violence, and more specifically violence against a woman, is not, I argue, a case of clear inspiration for Margolles's work but rather evidence of the sheer ubiquity of violence against women in theory as well as in lived culture. This passage, then, serves to flesh out the theoretical framework I am employing to analyse Margolles's textile works. Rather than simplistically proposing that 'black blood is beautiful', and therefore functioning as nothing more than a kind of paint on cloth, Margolles uses blood-stained textiles to unveil the viciousness and misogyny of theory and culture, which has had serious material consequences for women, and particularly women of colour, around the globe, including violent death.

I propose that Margolles's own 'visions of excess' are specifically concerned with the absolute excessiveness of femicide in terms of both violence and numbers. Jill Bennett has argued in *Empathic Vision: Affect, Trauma, and Contemporary Art* (2005) that a politics of testimony 'requires of art *not* a faithful translation of testimony; rather, it calls upon art to exploit its own unique capacities to contribute actively to this politics'.[79] Building on Bennett, I argue that Margolles is embracing the 'unique capacities' of cloth – to absorb, to stain, to invite touch, to touch (or *move*, affectively speaking) – in order to contribute to a politics of testimony specifically concerned with violence against women.

Textiles as skin and skin as textiles run throughout Margolles's body of work. Anne Anlin Cheng has observed, 'The racial fetish, metonymized as animal or Papuan skin in Loos's work, provides the pivot on which Modernist aesthetic values turn: essence versus veneer, plainness versus excess, utility versus waste, taste versus vulgarity. Yet, as we have started to see, the pivot – the haunting skin – is itself already contaminated.'[80] I contend that when we look closely at Margolles's textiles, what we see is the 'haunting skin' of murdered women of colour. Margolles's textile works are stained/tainted by blood, but there are no bodies represented. In this way, her works can be compared to the feminist art of the 1980s and 1990s that eschewed the body in attempts to avoid accusations of essentialism on the one hand, while deliberately refusing the viewer's access to the female form, whether naked or clothed, on the other.[81] This strategy is remarkable precisely because Margolles was known for her use of dead bodies in her early work, whether those bodies were photographed or fragmented, as in *Lengua (Tongue)* (2000), an actual pierced tongue that Margolles had removed from the dead body of a male heroin addict.[82]

When I teach Margolles's work, many of my students are horrified – and often angry and/or in tears – when I show them Margolles's early death-works, such as the photograph *Self-Portrait in the Morgue* (1998), which depicts Margolles in a white lab coat, looking directly at the viewer, and holding a small, reddish-brown corpse, possibly the dead body of a child in her hands, which are covered in black, rubber gloves. Margolles seems to hold the corpse out to us in her outstretched arms, a kind of macabre and clinical *Pietà*, but my students always have a range of ethical questions: Whose body is that? How did they die? Why don't we know the name of the person? Who granted Margolles permission to re-present this individual in this way? They are visibly distressed by this work, which centres Margolles's agency and subjectivity (symbolically but also formally), while dehumanizing an individual who appears to have died prematurely and perhaps in a brutal way (perhaps by burning). This kind of work spectacularizes the dead body, which functions to de-humanize the individual who has died while also turning them into a site of, if not entertainment, then of visuality where the artist and viewer have power over them post-mortem. In her turn to textiles, Margolles not only ceased to represent dead bodies in her works (photographic or otherwise), she adopted a feminist strategy that refuses to give the viewer access to the violated female body.[83]

A significant rhetorical shift occurred in Margolles's work when she moved from photographs of dead bodies and fragmented body parts to works where she uses thread and cloth to stand in for, and signify, violated skin. Skin colour is erased with this gesture, as are any signs on the skin of life, violence, identity, gender and so on. In *Tela bordada*, the bloody sheet stands in for the murdered woman's skin. The colourful, embroidered designs function as decorative, symbolic tattoos on dead, violated, bloody, metonymic skin, recalling Julia Banwell's allusion to the way that the tattoo artist's needle pierces skin, thus pointing up the porousness and permeability of skin as a border or boundary.[84]

Lisa Newman has argued that 'the materiality of blood makes explicit the socio-cultural value of the body through an intersubjective corporeal exchange with the audience, in that they allow for the assertion of agency and validation of the marginalized social citizen through provoking a shared perception of the body in crisis'.[85] I want to complicate this point by noting once again that the blood absorbed by Margolles's textile works is from dead bodies, most often of women of colour, particularly vulnerable individuals whose lived experiences were vastly different from most of the gallery goers who view Margolles's work in cities such as Venice and Montreal. There is perhaps, then, not so much an

intersubjective exchange between anonymous victim and viewer, as a failure to occupy the subject position of the victims because of the gulf between lived experiences. Furthermore, Newman's point about blood in Margolles's work signifying the 'agency and validation of the marginalized social citizen' fails to hold up. These works do not illuminate the victims' agency, nor do they validate them. The victims are usually unnamed – a fact that Margolles has been criticized for – and these works do not offer closure. Rather, I want to argue in a more pragmatic fashion that the bloodied textiles in Margolles's oeuvre index violence as excessive touch and the extravagant vulnerability of skin that is not white, bringing awareness to the fact that there is an ongoing global epidemic of femicide.

As Rebecca Zorach has noted in her book on excess in the French Renaissance, 'Blood signifies both violent death and the continued life of generations – in warrior blood, menstrual blood, medical blood: it is characterized by purity and impurity.'[86] Zorach's observation that blood and its symbolism have always been central to European culture is not a straightforward corollary for Margolles's work. Nonetheless, the dual meaning of blood – death and also re-birth – is in fact relevant for the Mexican view of death. Janice Helland discusses this subject in an article about Frida Kahlo's work.[87] It is worth noting here, albeit briefly, that Kahlo, like Margolles, was well aware of violence towards women in her country. In fact, her painting *A Few Small Nips* (1935; Figure 1.4), which depicts the aftermath of a man murdering his female partner, might be said to be a direct antecedent to Margolles's *Tela bordada* (2012). Kahlo's painting was famously based on an actual event that she read about in a newspaper. A man murdered his wife or girlfriend, and in court, he stated that he had only given her 'a few small nips'. In Kahlo's work, a naked woman, wearing one black, high heel shoe on her right foot, has been violently stabbed with a knife. Her body is covered in slash marks and blood, and the blood also covers the white sheet that she is laying on, as well as the floor and the picture's frame. Margolles's *Tela bordada* also references, and indeed indexes, an actual act of femicide, with the white sheet itself becoming an artwork once the Indigenous activists in Guatemala had lovingly embroidered colourful images into the sheet and through the blood stains. The contemporary work of art removes the spectacle of a murdered woman's body, and centres the stained, embroidered textile object as not only a stand-in for the murdered woman's skin but also a symbol of Indigenous women's resistance against gender-based violence through the political acts of care, conversation and crafting.

Figure 1.4 Frida Kahlo, *A Few Small Nips (Unos cuantos piquetitos)*, 1935. © 2021 Banco de México Diego Rivera Frida Kahlo Museums Trust, Mexico, D.F./SOCAN. © ARS, NY. Photo credit: Schalkwijk/Art Resource, NY.

Conclusion: On impurity and impunity

As I have argued throughout this chapter, one of the threads that links all of Teresa Margolles's textile works is that they are dirty and stained. Anthropologist Mary Douglas describes dirt as 'matter out of place', and Margolles's textiles force us to think about those individuals who are deemed 'out of place' and therefore are vulnerable to violence and displacement.[88] I use the term 'force' throughout this chapter advisedly, because there is something forceful and aggressive about Margolles's textile artworks, despite the fact that textiles are usually associated with softness, gentleness, femininity and domesticity.[89] Margolles's textiles are affectively effective in large part because they undermine these associations: they draw attention to violent touch against female bodies; they index domestic violence rather than signifying safe domesticity. Their message, if that is the right word, is excessive in that it exceeds what textiles are 'supposed' to signify: docile femininity, unobtrusive materials, habits and hobbies and habitats. The textile-as-skin and skin-as-textile are both fragile

and resilient; as borders and boundaries they are permeable, changeable and vulnerable.

Margolles's collaborative textiles are stained and dirty and bloody. The dirt, blood and stains force viewers to face and acknowledge the lived realities of vulnerable individuals, particularly women of colour, sex workers, and trans women all of whom are frequently painted as 'dirty' in discourse. In her book *Against Purity: Living Ethically in Compromised Times* (2016), Alexis Shotwell writes,

> Concepts and practices of purity and impurity, in relation to dirt as well as other things understood as dirty, tell us something about how people understand the world they live in, and thus how they can imagine the world becoming. In other words, purity practices are also productive normative formulations – they make a claim that a certain way of being is aspired to, good, or to be pursued.[90]

The author adds, 'To be against purity is, again, not to be for pollution, harm, sickness, or premature death. It is to be against the rhetorical or conceptual attempt to delineate and delimit the world into something separable, disentangled, and homogenous.'[91] Discursively framing a woman as dirty is a particular kind of epistemic violence; actual dirt can be cleaned off, while discursive dirt is often impossible to scrub away. As I frequently tell my students, the term 'slut' originally referred to a woman who was bad at domestic cleaning.

Material violence results in wounds, scars and sometimes death. Wounds and scars on the skin may index excessive touch. Although scars are wounds that have healed, they also often signify affective, psychological wounds that may never heal. Excessive, violent touch, as Margolles's textile works show us, can destroy bodies, subjectivities and psyches. Margolles's 'textile turn' eschewed the murdered female body as spectacle, instead using craft materials to signify violated skin and violent death. In Margolles's gothic textile works, the threads, sutures, wounds, scars and blood, both material and metaphorical, function to unveil the fact that the monsters were never women of colour; rather, the monsters are globalization, gore capitalism and the men who murder women with impunity.[92]

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symposium at the Max Planck Institute in Florence where I presented parts of this chapter. I would also like to thank Patrice Giasson for generously providing installation shots of Margolles's 2015 exhibition *We Have a Common Thread*.

Notes

1 Amy Sara Carroll, *REMEX: Toward an Art History of the NAFTA Era* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2017), 132.

2 Julia Banwell, *Teresa Margolles and the Aesthetics of Death* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2015), 1.

3 Unfortunately, I was unable to obtain permission to reproduce photographs of Margolles's works in this chapter. Where possible, I will provide sources where the images can be viewed.

4 According to Alice Driver,

> Women [in Mexico] are confined to certain societal roles that also dictate how and when they should inhabit public space. The media and other cultural producers often turn to images of naked, raped, mutilated bodies, as if a confession could be extracted from the body in that manner. The demands placed on the female body in assessing and confining perceived sexuality in both life and death are evident in the discourse on feminicide.

Alice Driver, *More or Less Dead: Feminicide, Haunting, and the Ethics of Representation in Mexico* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2015), 9.

5 Sayak Valencia, *Gore Capitalism*, trans. John Pluecker (Cambridge: Semiotext[e], 2018), 19–20. This argument is closely aligned with Silvia Federica's discussion in her chapter 'Globalization, Capital Accumulation, and Violence Against Women: An International and Historical Perspective', in *Witches, Witch-Hunting and Women* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2018), 24–34. I do not think it is a coincidence that these books were both published in 2018, two years into Trump's presidency. As Federici writes, 'The attack on women comes above all from capital's need to destroy what it cannot control and degrade what it most needs for its reproduction. This is the body of women' (88).

6 A photograph of this work can be viewed in the following articles, both of which are available online: Julia Skelly, 'Translating Stained Fabrics into Conceptual Textile Art: The Globalization of Teresa Margolles', *Revista de Estudios Globales & Arte Contemporáneo* (2019): 319–41; and Julia Skelly, 'Hard Touch: Gore Capitalism and Teresa Margolles's Soft Interventions', *Revista De Historia, Teoría Y Critica De Arte*, vol. 6 (2020): 24–41.

7 Valencia, *Gore Capitalism*, 21–2.
8 Ibid., 21, 22.
9 Ibid., 19. Significantly, Valencia writes,

> In this book, we argue against positioning oneself in a *benevolent hierarchy* that would stereotype the Third World as a precarious and vulnerable reality exclusively found in the global South; the vulnerability and precarity are real to a large extent, but only insofar as they are a result of the demands and requirements exported from the economic centers and major world powers and distributed by globalization through media. To conceive of the Third World as a geopolitically immutable space – without any possibility for action, empowerment, or the creation of its own discursive frame – is a clear indication of the disdain implicit in a colonialist position. … Thus, without neglecting our differences, we seek the creation of our own discourses that nurture a transfeminism that confronts and questions our contemporary situation, a situation that is invariably circumscribed by the logic of gore capitalism. (10–12) Emphasis in the original.

10 Jack Halberstam has noted that cannibalism in horror movies has frequently been interpreted as exemplifying 'the practices associated with the capitalist family', and more broadly, the 'modes of production and consumption' that define capitalism as a system in which 'people have the right to live off other people'. Jack Halberstam, *Skin Shows: Gothic Horror and the Technology of Monsters* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995), 147. The last quotation belongs to horror critic Robin Wood, quoted in Halberstam. It is worth noting that both Halberstam and Valencia are using horror films to talk about material violence.
11 Banwell, *Teresa Margolles*, 91–2.
12 Ibid., 92. Emphasis added.
13 Nina G. Jablonski, *Skin: A Natural History* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2006), 9.
14 Ibid., 11.
15 Marc Lafrance, 'Skin Studies: Past, Present and Future', *Body & Society*, vol. 20, no. 10 (2018): 3–32.
16 Halberstam, *Skin Shows*, 29.
17 Claudette Lauzon, 'What the Body Remembers: Rebecca Belmore's Memorial to Missing Women', in Olivier Asselin, Johanne Lamoureux and Christine Ross (eds), *Precarious Visualities: New Perspectives on Identification in Contemporary Art and Visual Culture* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2008), 162. See also Margrit Shildrick, *Embodying the Monster: Encounters with the Vulnerable Self* (London: Sage, 2002).
18 I want to highlight one of Margolles's important 2016 photographic series, which was included in the 2017 *Mundos* exhibition. In the series *Pistas de Baile (Dance*

Floors) each colour photograph represents a trans woman sex worker standing on the remains of dance floors of demolished nightclubs in Ciudad Juárez, Mexico. The dance clubs had been destroyed as part of an urbanization project that resulted in the displacement of many sex workers, who were subsequently forced to find other spaces to work, often becoming more isolated and thus more vulnerable to violence. The women in these photographs are dressed-up and pose with evident confidence, taking up space with their bodies and returning the artist's/viewer's gaze. A woman named La Gata was one of the subjects of this series, and like the other women, she collaborated closely with Margolles. Late in 2016, a few months before the opening of *Mundos*, La Gata was murdered in Ciudad Juárez. As the curators of *Mundos* note in the exhibition catalogue, there is a high rate of hate crime towards trans women in Latin America, and 'death is a constant risk'. Emeren García and John Zeppetelli, *Teresa Margolles: Mundos* (Montreal: Musée d'art contemporain, 2017), 14, 79.

19 Halberstam, *Skin Shows*, 29.

20 Ibid., 51.

21 Banwell, *Teresa Margolles*, 89. Emphasis added.

22 Marcela Lagarde y de los Ríos, 'Preface: Feminist Keys for Understanding Femicide: Theoretical, Political, and Legal Construction', in Rosa-Linda Fregoso and Cynthia Bejarano (eds), *Terrorizing Women: Feminicide in the Americas* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), xv.

23 Federici, *Witches, Witch-Hunting and Women*, 49.

24 Many scholars writing about femicide in Mexico have highlighted the phenomenon of maquiladoras, factories where many Mexican women work, as a possible reason for the epidemic of gender-based violence. As Kate Bonansinga has observed,

> The maquiladoras enticed workers from all around Mexico to the border, many young women relocated to Juarez, primarily from rural communities. Because they were separated from their families and other systems of support and were unfamiliar with urban life, they were vulnerable to crime. Many were kidnapped, raped, and killed as they left work. These femicides continue at the time of this writing, though they no longer have the attention of the mass media, now dominated by the drug wars. Family members of the victims have posted pink crosses throughout the city as symbols of resistance.

Kate Bonansinga, *Curating at the Edge: Artists Respond to the U.S./Mexico Border* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2014), 124. See also Lisa Vinebaum, 'Performing Globalization in the Textile Industry: Anne Wilson and Mandy Cano Villalobos', in Janis Jefferies, Diana Wood Conroy and Hazel Clark (eds), *The Handbook of Textile Culture* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), 169–85. Regarding a pertinent textile artwork, Vinebaum writes,

> Initiated in 2008, Cano Villalobos's ongoing series of sewing performances, *Voces* (Voices) memorializes the hundreds of *feminicidios*, or murdered women in Ciudad Juarez, located in the border state of Chihuahua, Mexico, just south of El Paso, Texas. Many of the victims are garment workers who labour in northern Mexico's free trade zones, and *Voces* seeks to raise awareness about the violent impact of export and apparel manufacturing on those living in Mexico's border region. (176)

According to Vinebaum,

> Scholars and human rights advocates attribute *feminicidios* to a complex web of interconnected factors including misogyny, gender discrimination, and a backlash against changing socio-economic roles for Mexican women; drug trafficking and high crimes rates in the border region; and American immigration policy and the militarization of the border zone … numerous authors assert that the murders are inextricably connected to trade deregulation, and specifically, to the *maquiladora* industry in the free trade zones of Ciudad Juarez. (178)

25 Amy Sara Carroll, 'Muerte Sin Fin: Teresa Margolles's Gendered States of Exception', *TDR*, vol. 54, no. 2 (Summer 2010): 110. Emphasis added.

26 Bridget Elliott and Janice Helland, 'Introduction', in Bridget Elliott and Janice Helland (eds), *Women Artists and the Decorative Arts, 1880–1935: The Gender of Ornament* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2002), 5. See also Janis Jefferies, 'Contemporary Textiles: The Art Fabric', in Nadine Monem (ed.), *Contemporary Textiles: The Fabric of Fine Art* (London: Black Dog, 2008), 46. For more on textiles and excess, see Julia Skelly, *Radical Decadence: Excess in Contemporary Feminist Textiles and Craft* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017).

27 *Dermis/Derm* consisted of corpse imprints made by using a white sheet that would keep the bloody trace of a body part. The technique was later used to create imprints of a full body. The artist later proceeded with the making of 'collective imprints', where several bodies appeared in a single work. 'Her work *Lienzo (The Shroud)* (1999–2000) consists of a blanket nine meters long (nearly thirty feet) that holds the bodily fluids of nine corpses.' Patrice Giasson, 'Introduction: Images on Stains: Violence and Creation in Teresa Margolles's Textiles', in Patrice Giasson (ed.), *Teresa Margolles: We Have a Common Thread* (Purchase, NY: Neuberger Museum of Art, 2015), 14.

28 Rubén Gallo, *New Tendencies in Mexican Art: The 1990s* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 117.

> *Dermis* … consists of the impression left by corpses on white sheets. During one of her routine visits to the morgue, Margolles stumbled upon two young men, lying side by side, covered in blood: Gay lovers who had taken their lives in a double suicide. She put a white sheet over the bodies to create a ghostly imprint of the men's silhouettes, and then placed the imprint on a

> stretcher. The result is an eerie, *indexical* representation of the corpses, one that – like footprints or plaster casts – bears the physical trace of its referent. (122, Gallo's emphasis)

Gallo's use of the terms 'indexical' and 'referent' points to the possibility of reading textiles employing semiotics as a methodology, which Claire Pajaczkowska also discusses in her chapter 'Tension, Time and Tenderness: Indexical Traces of Touch in Textiles'.

29 Giasson, 'Introduction', 15.
30 García and Zeppetelli, *Mundos*, 30–1.
31 Giasson, 'Introduction', 12.
32 Luisa Elena Alcala and Jonathan Brown (eds), *Painting in Latin America 1550–1820* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014).
33 For a discussion of Latin American altar paintings, see Nancy Deffebach, 'Grain of Memory: Izquierdo's Paintings of Altars to the Virgin of Sorrows', in *Maria Izquierdo and Frida Kahlo, Challenging Visions in Modern Mexican Art* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2015), 149–60.
34 For more on vigils, see Chapters 4 and 5.
35 'United States: Testimonies from the Harlem Embroiderers, New York City, April 2015', in Patrice Giasson (ed.), *Teresa Margolles: We Have a Common Thread* (Purchase, NY: Neuberger Museum of Art, 2015), 86–7.
36 Giasson, 'Introduction', 11.
37 Amelia Jones, 'Televisual Flesh: The Body, the Screen, the Subject', in Olivier Asselin, Johanne Lamoureux and Christine Ross (eds), *Precarious Visualities: New Perspectives on Identification in Contemporary Art and Visual Culture* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2008), 314. Emphasis in the original.
38 Giasson, 'Introduction', 16.
39 See, for example, Edward Bacal, 'Pervasive Death: Teresa Margolles and the Space of the Corpse', *Human Remains & Violence*, vol. 4, no. 1 (2018): 25–40.
40 Giasson, 'Introduction', 15. Emphasis added.
41 Carroll, 'Muerte Sin Fin', 107 n.10.
42 For photographs of some of the Venice textiles, see https://bienaldevenecia.mx/en/biennale-arte/2009/
43 The textiles from this exhibition can be viewed here: https://wsimag.com/art/16643-we-have-a-common-thread
44 See Janis Jefferies, 'Loving Attention: An Outburst of Craft in Contemporary Art', in Maria Elena Buszek (ed.), *Extra/Ordinary: Craft and Contemporary Art* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 222–40.
45 On quilts in the context of slavery, see Jacqueline L. Tobin and Raymond G. Dobard, *Hidden in Plain View: A Secret History of Quilts and the Underground Railroad* (New York: Random House, 1999).

46 Valentina Locatelli, 'Contemporary Mexican Women Artists without Restraint', in *Without Restraint: Works by Mexican Women Artists from the Daros Latinamerica Collection* (Bern: Kunstmuseum Bern, 2016), 23.

47 Carroll, *REMEX*, 130.

48 Caroline A. Jones, *The Global Work of Art: World's Fairs, Biennials, and the Aesthetics of Experience* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017).

49 See Beto O'Rourke and Susie Byrd, *Dealing Death and Drugs: The Big Business of Dope in the U.S. and Mexico: An Argument for Ending the Prohibition of Marijuana* (El Paso, TX: Cinco Puntos Press, 2011); Miguel L. Rojas-Sotelo, 'Narcoaesthetics in Colombia, Mexico, and the United States: Death Narco, Narco Nations, Border States, Narcochingadazo?' *Latin American Perspectives*, vol. 41, no. 2 (March 2014): 215–31.

50 Ana Garduño has written about the reception of Margolles's exhibition in Venice in the context of anxieties about Mexican nationalism. Garduño is a curator and art historian at El Centro Nacional de Investigación, Documentación e Información de Artes Plásticas (CENIDIAP, part of Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes) in Mexico City. Her chapter 'Damage Control: Teresa Margolles, the Mexican Government, and the 2009 Venice Biennial Mexican Pavilion' is part of a proposed book project.

51 See Mariana Botey, 'Toward a Critique of Sacrificial Reason: Necropolitics and Radical Aesthetics in Mexico', in *Teresa Margolles: What Else Could We Talk About?* (Barcelona: RM Verlag, 2009), 136.

52 Rosemary Betterton, 'Body Horror? Food (and Sex and Death) in Women's Art', in *An Intimate Distance: Women, Artists and the Body* (London: Routledge, 1996), 132.

53 Elisabeth Bronfen, *Over Her Dead Body: Death, Femininity and the Aesthetic* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992), 183. Bronfen writes, 'Because "death" and "femininity" belong to the same paradigm, namely that of alterity, their rhetorical conjunction points to moments of excess as redundancy; i.e. to emphasis or precision in definition through the admission of superfluity.'

54 According to Jeremy Biles's reading of Bataille,

> Bataille's distinctive account [or theory] aligns the profane with the world of utility, order, and instrumental reason, all of which underwrite the durability of the individual subject. Indeed, the overriding interest in the world of the profane is the lastingness of the self, and the deferral (and even the denial) of death through labor and the social structures that check our most excessive passions and passionate excesses. The sacred, by contrast, is a realm of excess, surpassing and transgressing the prohibitions of everyday social order. Bataille ties the sacred to unreason, chaos, play, and sacrifice, unrestricted by the goal-oriented, self-preserving projects of the profane world.

Jeremy Biles, 'For the Love of God: Excess, Ambivalence, and Damien Hirst's Diamond Skull', in Julia Skelly (ed.), *The Uses of Excess in Visual and Material Culture, 1600–2010* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2014), 230. From a feminist perspective, Bataille's vision of excess is dangerously nonchalant about violence enacted upon the female body, and overlooks the material consequences of excess when it is physically written onto women's bodies.

55 Gülsüm Baydar, 'Bedrooms in Excess: Feminist Strategies Used by Tracey Emin and Semiha Berksoy', *Woman's Art Journal*, vol. 33, no. 2 (Fall/Winter 2012): 32.

56 '*Stains elicit shame:* … These are all examples of the staining one inflicts upon oneself – the self-stain. The self-stain renders the body uncontrollable: both capable and culpable of transmission, transgression and impurity, exceeding the acceptable, surpassing *the boundaries of the skin*'. Jenni Sorkin, 'Stain: On Cloth, Stigma, and Shame', in Jessica Hemmings (ed.), *The Textile Reader* (London: Berg, 2012), 60. Emphasis added.

57 For more on this see Julia Skelly, *Wasted Looks: Addiction and British Visual Culture, 1751–1919* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2014), and Skelly, *Radical Decadence*, especially chapter 3.

58 Mary Russo, *The Female Grotesque: Risk, Excess and Modernity* (London: Routledge, 1994), 1.

59 Cuauhtémoc Medina, 'Materialist Spectrality', in *Teresa Margoles: What Else Could We Talk About?* (Barcelona: RM Verlag, 2009), 19–20.

60 Ibid., 23.

61 Ibid., 25.

62 Botey, 'Toward a Critique of Sacrificial Reason', 132.

63 Jessica Hemmings, 'Introduction', in Jessica Hemmings (ed.), *The Textile Reader* (London: Berg, 2012), 3.

64 Claire Pajaczkowska, 'Tension, Time and Tenderness: Indexical Traces of Touch in Textiles', in Antony Bryant and Griselda Pollock (eds), *Digital and Other Virtualities: Renegotiating the Image* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2010), 134.

65 Teresa Margolles, 'Santiago Sierra', *Bomb*, issue no. 86 (Winter 2003/4): 64.

66 Marci R. McMahon, *Domestic Negotiations: Gender, Nation, and Self-Fashioning in US Mexicana and Chicana Literature and Art* (London: Rutgers University Press, 2013), 3.

67 Pajaczkowska, 'Tension, Time and Tenderness', 135.

68 Ibid.

69 Ibid., 141.

70 Pajaczkowska, 'Tension, Time and Tenderness', 143.

71 Ibid., 141.

72 Ibid., 144.

73 Carroll, 'Muerte Sin Fin', 104.

74 Georges Bataille, *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings, 1927–1939*, ed. and trans. Allan Stoekl, *Theory and History of Literature*, vol. 14. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985.
75 Ibid., xvi.
76 Ibid., 24.
77 Ibid.
78 Ibid.
79 Jill Bennett, *Empathic Vision: Affect, Trauma, and Contemporary Art* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005), 3.
80 Anne Anlin Cheng, *Second Skin: Josephine Baker and the Modern Surface* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 33.
81 See Christine Ross, 'The Paradoxical Bodies of Contemporary Art', in Amelia Jones (ed.), *A Companion to Contemporary Art since 1945* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 378–400.
82 Margolles apparently received permission from the young man's family to use his tongue in this fashion. The artist remunerated the family by paying for the man's funeral arrangements. For more on the problematic ethics of some of Margolles's works, see Julia Banwell, 'Agency and Otherness in Teresa Margolles's Aesthetic of Death', *Other Modernities*, vol. 10, no. 4 (2010): 49; and Carroll, *REMEX*, 130.
83 For an insightful discussion on the ethical dangers of showing the dead individual in photographs, see Andrea D. Fitzpatrick, 'Reconsidering the Dead in Andres Serrano's *The Morgue*: Identity, Agency, Subjectivity', *RACAR*, vol. 33, nos. 1/2 (2008): 28–42.
84 Banwell, *Teresa Margolles*, 89.
85 Lisa Newman, 'Blood for Money: The Value of the Bleeding Body in the Performances of Michael Mayhew, Ron Athey, and Teresa Margolles', *Theatre Annual*, vol. 66 (2013), 21.
86 Rebecca Zorach, *Blood, Milk, Ink, Gold: Abundance and Excess in the French Renaissance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 33.
87 Janice Helland, 'Culture, Politics, and Identity in the Paintings of Frida Kahlo', in Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard (eds), *The Expanding Discourse: Feminism and Art History* (New York: HarperCollins, 1992), 396–407.
88 See Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Routledge, [1966] 2001).
89 Baydar, 'Bedrooms in Excess', 30. See also Rozsika Parker, *The Subversive Stitch: Embroidery and the Making of the Feminine* (London: I.B. Tauris, [1984] 2010).
90 Alexis Shotwell, *Against Purity: Living Ethically in Compromised Times* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016), 13–14.
91 Ibid., 15.

92 According to Halberstam, 'Gothic, in a way, refers to an ornamental excess (think of Gothic architecture – gargoyles and crazy loops and spirals), a rhetorical extravagance that produces, quite simply, too much.' Halberstam, *Skin Shows*, 1. I use the term 'gothic' here in relation to Margolles's works not because of her use of ornamental excess but rather to evoke the sense of 'too much' violence and, perhaps, 'too much' affect as well.