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Native American dis/possessions: Postcolonial trauma in Hitchcock's *Vertigo*

Abstract

The Ohlone, the original settlers of the San Francisco region, were violently dispossessed by successive colonial regimes, first Spanish, then US American. The colonial trauma was written out of history, and by the 20th century, anthropologists pronounced the Ohlone to be “extinct.” In this article, I explore how the dispossession of the Ohlone haunt one of the greatest movies of all time: Alfred Hitchcock's *Vertigo* (1958). Although *Vertigo* is one of the most-analyzed films ever, no one noticed that Carlotta Valdes—the dispossessed woman that comes back from the dead to take possession of the living—would have been Native American. A hauntological reading reveals *Vertigo* as an unwitting witness of colonial dispossession.

"And where there is no vision, the people perish"

The “Portrait of Carlotta” shows a young white woman in an opulent dress. She holds a bouquet of flowers and wears a baroque necklace. Her blond

hair is combed into a whorl. The portrait hangs amidst European tapestries and oil paintings in San Francisco's Palace of the Legion of Honor. Carlotta was born in 1831 and died in 1857. She grew up in a Catholic mission south of San Francisco. In the 1840s, she married a rich white man and moved into a San Francisco mansion. They had a daughter together. In the 1850s, her husband abandoned her but kept the child. The separation drove Carlotta into madness, and she committed suicide at the age of 25.



"Carlotta Valdes" is the dead ancestor that haunts the living in Alfred Hitchcock's *Vertigo* (1958). The Portrait of Carlotta is a movie prop made in the 1950s, but the way that Hitchcock introduces it make it appear like a true 19th century artefact. The illusion of authenticity is so strong that, to this day, "visitors show up at the Legion asking to see the Portrait of Carlotta" (FAMSF 2020).

Vertigo is so successful in staging the Portrait as real that no one noticed that the movie unwittingly conspires in the erasure of California's traumatic past. Even commentators who find that *Vertigo* suppresses aspects of history (e.g., Corber 1993; Ben-Oni 2016; Spinks 2018) are unaware of what is actually suppressed: the colonial dispossession of California's Native Americans.

Vertigo's characters are fictional, but the spaces through which they move, and the things they handle, are historically authentic. An overwhelming presence of real things and places serves to authorize the fiction as real. *Vertigo* is set in 1950s San Francisco. The movie gives a grand tour of the city's landmarks: Mission Dolores, the Palace of the Legion of Honor, the Palace of Fine Arts, Fort Point and the Golden Gate Bridge. The movie also visits several real commercial sites (Podesta Baldocchi flowers, Ransohoff's clothes, Ernie's restaurant). Much of the first half of the movie consists in long drives through the city, with extensive footage of streets and shops. Beyond San Francisco, the movie visits Mission San Juan Bautista and Redwood State Park. Apart from a few small artistic liberties, all the places and props are historically real, except one: the Portrait of Carlotta. The picture of the dead ancestor hides, in plain sight, the historical trauma that haunts the movie. What the Portrait obscures—but other things reveal—is that a woman with Carlotta's biography would have been a Native American from the Ohlone people.

Vertigo is one of the most important movies ever made. In a poll of film critics and directors, the British Film Institute (BFI) crowned *Vertigo* the greatest movie of all time (Matthews 2018). When the National Film Registry was established by the US Congress in 1988, *Vertigo* was one of the first movies selected as "historically most significant." *Vertigo* was also among the first movies entered into the catalogue of the American Film Institute, founded by a Bill signed by President Lyndon B. Johnson in 1965. The Bill proclaimed that some movies are so important to national history that they must be preserved in perpetuity. Great art would make the US "empire and nation" last through time. Allowing national heritage to perish amounts to letting the nation perish: "Art is a nation's most precious heritage. For it is in our works of art that we reveal to ourselves, and to others, the inner vision which guides us as a Nation. And where there is no vision, the people perish" (cited in AFI 2020). *Vertigo* presents a vision of Californian history that perpetuates the hegemonic viewpoint of white settler colonialism.

Books on Hitchcock's movies could fill a library, and *Vertigo* is the most-analyzed of all Hitchcock movies (e.g., Wood 1989; Miller 2016; Pippin 2017). Indeed, *Vertigo* might be the most-analyzed movie of all time. Yet no one has recognized the successive colonial dispossessions that haunt the narrative. In this article, I analyze *Vertigo* as an archive of memory, both for what its narrative

reveals, and for what other archives reveal about *Vertigo's* historical setting. I want to understand how the movie's deceptions are produced both from without and from within the narrative. I conclude by showing that the erasure of Native Americans' colonial dispossessions was co-authored by first-generation American anthropologists who deemed the original settlers of the San Francisco region to have gone extinct.

Vertigo's plot is that the antagonist, Gavin Elster, kills his wife Madeleine to take possession of her wealth. Yearning for "power and freedom," Elster stages the murder as a suicide. Elster has to construct a whole edifice of historical and material truths to make the suicide plausible. In the letter to Scottie that Judy starts to write, she says that "the Carlotta story was part real, part invented." The part that is real must be much larger than the part that is invented so that the invention can work. To carry out his plan, Elster needs two others to play roles that he scripted for them. Judy Barton is knowingly part of Elster's scheme. Elster makes Madeleine play his wife for Scottie Ferguson, a retired police detective. Elster knows Scottie from college. He also knows that Scottie quit his job after nearly falling off a rooftop and seeing a fellow officer fall to his death. Elster knows that Scottie's trauma makes him unable to climb heights. This weakness makes him so valuable for Elster: he can get Scottie to witness Madeleine fall to

her death without being able to witness that Elster throws his wife off the bell tower.



Scottie is made to believe that Madeleine Elster dies because she gets possessed by Carlotta Valdes, her great-grandmother. A local historian called Pop Leibel recounts these events: "He kept the child and threw her away. Men could do that in those days. They had the power and the freedom. And she became the Sad Carlotta." Carlotta's malevolent possession forces Madeleine to take her own life: "There's someone inside me, there's somebody else, and she says I must die," she tells Scottie in the Redwoods. Her suicide is staged as a possessed repetition of Carlotta's suicide.

“Do you believe that someone out of the past, someone dead, can enter and take possession of a living being?” asks Elster. Scottie bluntly replies “no,” but goes on trying to possess Madeleine; becoming mad from losing her; and trying to repossess her through a violent make-over of Judy. This repetitive play with real and invented dis/possessions opens *Vertigo* to a hauntological analysis (e.g., Derrida 2012; del Pilar Blanco and Peeren 2013; Rahimi 2021). In *Vertigo*, the ontological, or rather hauntological, status of the entities taking possession of others—dead or alive—is not named: whether she is a ghost, spirit, spectre, or soul is undetermined. “Someone dead” is Elster’s description. *From Among the Dead* was the title of the movie before Hitchcock settled on *Vertigo*. Ultimately, Scottie debunks possession by dead ancestors as Elster’s fabrication. But a dizzying array of other dis/possessions drive the narrative.

From among different streams of hauntology, the psychoanalytic work by Abraham and Torok (1994) best captures what haunts *Vertigo*. Abraham and Torok were interested in the transgenerational transmission of trauma within families. They studied how past wounds can dys-appear in later generations, especially if the descendants are unaware that something bad had happened in the past. Drawing on folklore, Abraham and Torok (1994: 167) find that the dead who return are those who have been wronged: they were denied a proper burial; committed suicide; were outcasts; or suffered grave injustices. An ancestor

haunting the living is a “phantom.” In contrast to the “spectre” in Jacques Derrida’s hauntology (2012), Abraham and Torok’s “phantom” can and should be revealed, to seek healing and resolution (Davis 2005). Realizing phantoms has been used in therapy and in the analysis of fictional narratives (Rashkin 1994). On the surface, *Vertigo* is a story about a made-up intergenerational possession that is resolved by the revelation that it is a murderous lie. A hauntological analysis can go deeper, to show that the made-up possession by Carlotta Valdes is the phantom of the historical dispossession of Native Americans. Hitchcock made a movie about the dispossessed dead taking possession of the living amidst an abundance of historical sites and things, but without any awareness of the violence that actually occurred. Hitchcock and his audience misrecognize the phantom that haunts *Vertigo* because first-generation anthropologists co-authored a vision of history in which the Ohlone people nearly perished.

Neófitos: The Spanish dispossession

Mission San Juan Bautista is where both Madeleine Elster and Judy die. It is also where Carlotta Valdes is born. San Juan Bautista and San Francisco are both stops along the historic El Camino Real (“Royal Way”) which runs from the Mexican border to San Francisco. San Juan Bautista was founded in 1797, the 15th of 21 Californian missions. The missions were pioneer outposts of the

Spanish empire (Tutino 2011). In the late 18th century, Spain was expanding northwards, competing with other empires (Russian, French, and British). The missions expanded by converting Native Americans by deception and coercion. The area around Mission San Bautista was settled by the Ohlone tribe. The Spanish called the Native American converts *neófitos* (neophytes), literally "newly planted." The missions were agricultural estates run on the back of forced labor (Madley 2016). Living conditions were bad: "The Franciscans interned neophytes ... in sex-segregated, filthy barracks-type quarters" (Field 2013: 293). Many died of infectious diseases. Sexual abuse was rampant, perpetrated by priests, traders, and soldiers stationed in the missions. The Ohlone were kept like prisoners: "The missions resembled penal institutions ... with the practice of locking up some neophytes at night and restricting movements outside the mission grounds, the use of corporal punishment, and the relatively tight control of behavior" (Lightfoot 2004: 62). Once Native Americans were baptized, they became the property of the mission, and leaving was not allowed any longer (Guest 1979: 5). Like slaves, runaways from the mission were hunted down, brought back, and punished. Violent conflicts between Native Americans and the missions were frequent. The Spanish built their roofs with the iconic red tiles because attackers could not set them on fire. In the decades following the establishment of the missions, Native Americans lost more than half of their people (Bean 1994). Due

to disease and abuse, the number of neophytes in the California missions also dwindled, from more than 18,000 in 1800 to less than 1,000 in 1839 (Field 2013). In the wake of the Spanish missions, "natives faced an era of death" (Tutino 2011: 477).

On the first false trail, Madeleine/Judy leads Scottie to Carlotta's grave in Mission Dolores, another Spanish foundation. Built in 1776, it is San Francisco's oldest surviving building. The original graveyard around Mission Dolores was extensive. About five thousand Native American neophytes are buried in mass graves underneath the surrounding streets and buildings (Kitching 2012). When Madeleine/Judy and Scottie walk around Mission Dolores, they are walking on Ohlone graves.



The memory of the Native American neophytes haunts *Vertigo*. The Spanish dispossession creeps back into the narrative. The theme of the neophyte recurs several times. Madeleine/Judy is born again through a kind of baptism when Scottie brings her back from San Francisco Bay. The key reincarnation happens when Judy is reborn as Madeleine at the Empire Hotel. She emerges from a cloud of green misty light as if she had never died.

Where green symbolizes life, red tiles spell death. Scottie slips on a tiled roof, nearly dying and causing the death of another policeman. Madeleine Elster falls on a red tiled roof. At the end of the nightmare that causes Scottie's mental breakdown, he sees himself falling to death onto a tiled roof. In the finale, Judy dies by falling onto Mission San Bautista's tiled roof. The suppressed trauma of the mission era pierces Bernard Hermann's score: the Spanish theme with its clicking castanets expresses stress, confusion, and threat, especially in Scottie's nightmare scene. The mission trauma also helps to understand why Judy is so frightened by the nun in the final scene: the appearance of Catholic orders in the late 18th century literally brought death to the majority of California's Native Americans.

The history of the California missions punctuates the narrative. The idea of "mission," as a forward-facing, goal-reaching way of acting, is juxtaposed to

the wandering, meandering movement typical of post-traumatic Scottie. After his rooftop accident, Scottie has lost direction in life. In Midge's apartment, he is "wandering about," as the screenplay says three times, wondering about what to do with himself after his early retirement. In Elster's conspiracy, Madeleine/Judy also pretends to "wander." In their first meeting, Elster tells Scottie that "she wanders, God knows where she wanders." The first false trail sequence, which takes up 16 minutes of the movie's runtime, shows Madeleine/Judy wandering through San Francisco. The second false trail starts in the Palace of the Legion of Honor and ends with Madeleine/Judy's jump into the water. She tells Scottie that she is "wandering about" several times when he asks what she has been doing. She says it was lucky that Scottie was also "wandering about" when he rescued her from the San Francisco Bay. The third false trail is a drive starting at Scottie's apartment and moving on to the Redwoods. The fourth false trail is the drive to Mission San Bautista that ends in Madeleine Elster's death. The last time the screenplay uses the word "wandering" is at the beginning of the scene where Judy re-emerges as Madeleine at the Empire Hotel. Later, Scottie deceives Judy when suggesting that they could go on another wander, "somewhere out of town for dinner, drive down the peninsula, somewhere?" His first mission, getting back Madeleine, is fulfilled. His two other missions, to reveal the conspiracy and

be rid of vertigo, are about to be fulfilled. Each time Scottie sets out on a mission, someone dies.

The trauma of all the "missions" shown in *Vertigo* is that, at the end of the road, death awaits. Carlotta Valdes is buried in Mission Dolores, the northern end of El Camino Real. Madeleine Elster and Judy Barton both die in Mission San Bautista. What many critics describe as *Vertigo*'s "meandering" plot is, in fact, a central element of the narrative. When wandering becomes a mission, it drives towards death. When Scottie "knows exactly what he wants" after meeting Judy, he embarks on her violent make-over. *Vertigo* argues that setting out on ill-understood missions ends in death.

"Foreign, but sweet": The US dispossession

In the 1950s, the era when *Vertigo* is set, the history of the Spanish missions is largely forgotten. Scottie is able to identify Mission San Bautista but otherwise looks either puzzled or uninterested in all the Spanish-era landmarks that Madeleine/Judy leads him to. Scottie is firmly of his own time and he has no interest in Californian history, except for what is necessary for his detective work. The past, in all its forms, is threatening to him, and he wants to be rid of it. Driving Judy back to Mission San Bautista to confront her with the crime, he says there is "one final thing I have to do, and then I'll be free of the past, forever."

Most of *Vertigo's* characters share Scottie's oblivion of history. Judy has no interest in the 19th-century woman she is re-enacting. That she pays no attention to history will cost her life at the end. When Scottie quizzes the old lady in the McKittrick Hotel, she comments on Carlotta's name: "Sweet name, isn't it? Foreign, but sweet." California has been a US state only since 1850. The Spanish period lasted from 1769 to 1821, followed by a brief Mexican period from 1821 to 1848. That someone living in *San Francisco* could find Spanish names "foreign" shows a startling lack of historical awareness.



Vertigo conspires in erasing the historical memory of the traumatic dispossession of California's Native Americans, first by the Spanish, then by the

US. While this "conjugation of two colonialisms" (Field 2013: 290) is largely forgotten in 1950s San Francisco, it continues to haunt *Vertigo*. In the Redwood scene, Madeleine/Judy retraces the annual rings on the cross-section of a felled tree. The dates labelled are birth year (909 AD), Battle of Hastings (1066), Magna Carta Signed (1215), Discovery of America (1492), Declaration of Independence (1776), and when it was cut down in 1930. The calendar is Christian and the key events listed are Anglo-American. The dates are ordered from centre to upper left corner, retracing Europe's transatlantic expansion. Only the cutting of the tree occurred during United States history, in all other moments, the tree lived in other people's times. Native Americans had been living in the area for thousands of years. The Spanish first sailed into San Diego Bay in 1542. Madeleine, channelling Carlotta, says to the tree "you took no notice." But this "you" might as well be that of the US colonizers who take no notice of California's pre-US history.

The only two characters that have a genuine interest in history are Pop Leibel and Gavin Elster. The screenplay says this about Pop Leibel's shop: "it is filled with memorabilia of California pioneer days: ... framed old mining claims, posters describing outlaws wanted by the law, Wells Fargo Pony Express Posters; ... old whiskey bottles, gold-mining pans." In the 1950s, Californian history seems to be over, its vestiges are merely of antiquarian interest.

Vertigo's other historian is Gavin Elster. His interest in history is partly motivated by his murder conspiracy: he needs to know which parts of the past are real so he can hide his inventions behind them. But when we first encounter Elster, his professed love for old California seems genuine. Like Pop Leibel's shop, Gavin Elster's office is full of prints and memorabilia of the city's past. "I'd like to have lived here then," he tells Scottie: "Color, excitement, power, freedom." The golden past that Elster loves is that of the 1840s.



While Elster rhapsodizes about the old days, Scottie looks at a large panorama entitled "San Francisco in July 1848." The California Gold Rush started in January 1848. In the first five years of the Gold Rush, miners extracted around

350,000 kilos of gold. The Gold Rush turned San Francisco into a lawless and violent place, with whole districts for gambling and prostitution (Asbury 1933; McGrath 2003). The Gold Rush accelerated the genocidal dispossession of Native Americans that began in the Spanish period because they stood in the way of the violent wealth extraction (Madley 2016). In 1851, California's first US Governor, Peter Burnett, stated that "a war of extermination will continue to be waged between the two races until the Indian race becomes extinct" (cited in Field 2013: 303). The State of California paid millions of dollars in reward for the killing of Native Americans. Accession to the US entrenched a white supremacism that turned against both Native Americans and Hispanics (McKanna 2002). The US campaign led to drastic decline: "The extraordinary history of genocidal violence against California natives during the Spanish and American periods caused a demographic collapse throughout the region" (Field 1999: 196). Cutcha Risling Baldy, a scholar of Native American California and a member of the Hoopa tribe, was told by an elder: "Remember, Granddaughter, you are alive because some miner was a bad shot" (Baldy 2018: 52).

The expansion of the United States into Mexican territories in the 1840s was based on naval domination. The annexation of California proceeded by taking over the ports, starting with Monterey in 1846. Yerba Buena was occupied by the US navy in July 1846 and renamed "San Francisco" in 1847. California

joined the land of the free because of US naval power. Gavin Elster runs a shipbuilding yard. He may say to Scottie that the business is "dull," but he clearly admires majestic ships.



When we first meet Elster, he is framed by a large window looking onto ships and cranes. Behind him is a model of the USS *Portsmouth*. In 1846, Captain J. B. Montgomery arrived at Yerba Buena on the *Portsmouth* and raised the first US flag in California's history. The plaza where this flag stood was named Portsmouth Square in honour of the ship. The panorama of San Francisco in 1848 hangs over a meter-long model of a ship, Scottie moves around it for several minutes while Elster stands in front of another ship model and images of ships.

Navy personnel appear at crucial moments in the story. When Scottie first sees Madeleine/Judy at Ernie's restaurant, she sits back to back to a fleet admiral of the US Navy. When Scottie first sees Judy passing by Podesta Baldocchi flower shop, sailors walk through the frame. Fort Point, where Madeleine/Judy feigns suicide, was first built by the Spanish as a defense against naval encroachment. Dozens of frames show the Bay or the ocean. Foghorns punctuate the soundscape. Scottie's apartment looks onto Telegraph Hill, where non-Catholic seamen were buried in Spanish times and from where news of incoming ships were signalled since 1849.

The phrase "power and freedom" appears three times. Elster and Leibel use it to characterize the experience of living as a man of privilege in old San Francisco. For Elster, power and freedom are supreme values. For Leibel, power and freedom are questionable. Leibel uses these words to describe the abuse Carlotta Valdes suffered at the hand of the rich man who "threw her away": "Men could do that in those days. They had the power...and the freedom." The third time the phrase appears is when Scottie gets Judy's confession in the bell tower: "When he had all her money, and the freedom and the power...he ditched you? What a shame!" Just like Carlotta Valdes was thrown away by the rich man in the 1850s, so was Judy thrown away by Elster in the 1950s. Each of these dispossessions is inflicted on a woman: Carlotta, Madeleine, and Judy in turn.

“One shouldn’t keep souvenirs of a killing”: Ornament and crime

With Madeleine, Judy, and Carlotta, *Vertigo* compares three types of women's fashion along two dimensions: old-fashioned/modern and high/low class. Madeleine/Judy/Carlotta appear in three versions: an old-fashioned/high-class Carlotta in a lavish dress and baroque ornaments; the modern/high-class Madeleine in a strict grey suit or unadorned black dress; and the modern/low-class Judy with big earrings and lots of make-up. Elster designed a modern/high-class woman for Scottie, and this is the only version that Scottie desires. Scottie initially succeeds in recreating this modern/high-class persona by "making over" Judy. The recreation is almost perfect, except one loose end: Carlotta's baroque necklace from the Spanish mission era. The scene where Judy asks Scottie for help with the necklace ruptures the boundaries between the Spanish past and American modernity.

In *Ornament and Crime*, a manifesto for modernist design, Austrian architect Adolf Loos (2019 [1913]) argues that ornamentation violates the ethos of modernity. Exteriors should only reflect true inner function. All exterior ornamentation is deception. An authentic high/modern style demands pure function and pure form. On a high/modern body, ornamentation of any kind reflects degeneracy, derangement, and crime. In *Vertigo*, the reappearance of an

old-fashioned ornament on a high/modern body pierces Scottie's illusions. The reappearance of the thing from the past reveals the past crime.



When Judy puts on Carlotta's necklace at the Empire Hotel, Scottie realizes that she was Elster's accomplice in the murder. After forcing Judy to confess in the tower, he tells her that this "souvenir" gave her away: "One shouldn't keep souvenirs of a killing." *Subvenere*, from which the word souvenir is derived, literally means both "to occur" as well as "to assist." The assisting thing betrays the assisting accomplice.

How does it occur to Scottie that the necklace betrays Judy? The camera *never shows Madeleine wearing the necklace*, neither when we see the necklace in the

gallery painting, nor when the necklace appears in dream sequences or flashbacks. Scottie sees Carlotta's necklace for the first time in a painted representation, in the Portrait of Carlotta. Madeleine sits in front of the painting, we can only see the back of her head. Scottie's gaze focuses on the bouquet that Madeleine brought, then on the bouquet in the painting. Then Scottie looks at the whorl in Madeleine's hair, then he notices the whorl in Carlotta's hair. Then Scottie looks at Carlotta's upper body and then—he wanders off to ask the museum attendant who is shown in the Portrait. Retracing Scottie's gaze, the camera connects Madeleine's flowers with the flowers in the painting, and it connects her hair with the hair in the painting. Yet the necklace in the painting does not correspond to anything that Madeleine is wearing. The Spanish necklace is not shown on Madeleine/Judy until she puts it on at the Empire Hotel. The connection between the necklace and Madeleine/Judy only exists in Scottie's mind, and it only comes into focus in Scottie's nightmare (underscored by the Spanish orchestral theme). It is not part of Elster's plan that Scottie should recognize the necklace. He is meant to notice the hair and the flowers, but not the necklace.

Elster mentions to Scottie that his wife inherited "several pieces of jewellery that belonged to Carlotta." He says that Madeleine "never wore them, they were too old-fashioned," until the dead woman from the past took

possession of Madeleine and started to drive her mad. Elster recaptures Loos' radical devaluation of ornamentation in modernity. Loos believes moderns can "successfully ban archaic forces," but this has "merely made these forces invisible and has thus unwittingly expanded their hold on us" (Schiermer 2015: 146). The erasure of past things does not entirely extinguish them, but turns them into phantoms. The reappearance of the Spanish ornament becomes a symptom of the woman's derangement, and the vision of the necklace first occurs to Scottie in a moment when he descends into madness.

Elster never stages Madeleine/Judy with the necklace for Scottie. Judy believes that Elster "planned it so well; he made no mistakes." But Elster makes mistakes, and one of them is that he draws unnecessary attention to the jewellery as a phantom connection between Carlotta and Madeleine/Judy. The hair and the bouquet establish visual connections, whereas the necklace establishes both a visual *and* a tangible connection. "She looks at them, handles them, gently, curiously, puts them on and stares at herself in the mirror...and goes into that other world," Elster says. Scottie recognizes the necklace as a powerful connection between Carlotta and Madeleine, and yet it is not part of Elster's trail of false clues.

That Elster gives Carlotta's necklace to Judy is a mistake. How Judy comes into possession of the necklace is neither shown nor reported. We can guess that

Elster gave it to Judy as a gift when she was still his mistress. That Judy has Carlotta's necklace evidences that the necklace is real, that the affair between Elster and Judy is real, and that Elster's story about the kinship between Madeleine and Carlotta is real. In turn, the appearance of Carlotta's necklace among Judy's possessions authenticates the Portrait as a truthful depiction of Carlotta. There is no plausible reason that Judy's necklace could be a recreation of Carlotta's real necklace (Pippin 2017: 115), she would have had no reason to own such an object. That Elster might have created a duplicate of Carlotta's necklace as part of the murder conspiracy, but then never stages Madeleine/Judy with it for Scottie, is implausible. The necklace and the Portrait are a powerful example of "interobjectivity" (Latour 1996): one thing references another thing and back again, both mutually confirming that they are real and that they exist in a shared world.

Judy recognizes the grey suit as a souvenir of the murder and hides it from Scottie. Yet Judy has no worries about keeping the necklace, or about asking Scottie to put it on her, because *she does not recognize it as a souvenir of the killing*. When she asks "can't you see?" while looking at her own reflection in the mirror, she tells the truth about *herself* without recognizing it as the truth. When Scottie drives Judy back to Mission San Bautista, she draws no connection to her wearing the necklace. She goes up the bell tower because she thinks she is

helping Scottie to work through his traumatic loss of Madeleine. He tells her that her likeness to Madeleine is his "second chance," and she complies. Judy wants to assist Scottie in a Freudian "remembering, repeating, working-through" therapy—she accepted her whole make-over on these terms. Until Scottie reveals in the tower that it was the necklace that gave her away, Judy does not see the necklace as a souvenir of the murder. Despite her staring repeatedly at Carlotta's Portrait in the gallery, it does not occur to Judy that Scottie would establish a connection between the necklace in the Portrait and the necklace that Elster gave to her. Judy dies because she does not pay attention to what the things reveal. In turn, *Vertigo's* viewers never paid attention to how the necklace is a souvenir of the historical violence that haunts the narrative.

"The Costanoan group is extinct": Beyond the anthropological erasure

Vertigo references California's Spanish missions, the annexation by the US, the port, navy and shipping industry, the Gold Rush, 19th-century lawlessness and street violence, but never mentions Native Americans. Their existence remains entirely erased in the movie. Did Hitchcock know he was conspiring in the suppression of the genocide of Native Americans, or was he merely repeating a version of history that was hegemonic in the 1950s? From what we know about Hitchcock's stance towards his audience, he was devious without being

dishonest (Miller 2010: 114). From what we know about the US in the 1950s, it is likely that neither Hitchcock nor the screenwriters had any idea that a character with Carlotta Valdes' biography would have been Ohlone. The erasure of colonial violence that haunts *Vertigo* was co-authored by first-generation American anthropologists. In *Vertigo*, Hitchcock reinscribes a view on what happened in California in the 19th century that was dominant in the 1950s.

From the 1850s into the mid-20th century, American anthropology was deeply invested in studying US indigenous populations. The Boasian culture concept made them favour groups with clear boundaries and observable customs. Cultural adaptation or hybridity made this awkward. This conceptual stance blinded anthropologists to the tribes of central and southern California. Berkeley's Department of Anthropology was founded by Alfred Kroeber in 1901. Kroeber and colleagues were devoted to studying Native Americans. They were in an excellent position to study the Ohlone in the Bay Area. Yet they concluded that the Ohlone were "extinct." In his encyclopaedic *Handbook of the Indians of California* of 1925, Kroeber writes in detail about many other Californian groups. Only a few pages are devoted to the Costanoans ("people of the Coast"), the Spanish term for the Ohlone. Kroeber thought that acculturation during California's Spanish and Mexican period had erased all traits that might have once been distinctive of their culture: "The Costanoan group is extinct so far as all

practical purposes are concerned. A few scattered individuals survive, whose parents were attached to the missions of San Jose, San Juan Bautista, and San Carlos; but they are of mixed tribal ancestry and live almost lost among other Indians or obscure Mexicans ... The old habits of life have long since been abandoned. The larger part of a century has passed since the missions were abolished, and nearly a century and a half since they commenced to be founded. These periods have sufficed to efface even traditional recollections of the forefathers' habits" (Kroeber 1925: 464).

Kroeber's comparisons between Coastanoans and other Californian groups were extremely unfavorable. Citing the "universal testimony" of white American explorers of the region, Kroeber describes the Costanoans as "dark, dirty, squalid, and apathetic" (1925: 466). They never smiled and never looked one in the eye. Kroeber believes that these reports are correct, and attributes the Costanoans' "obvious paucity and rudeness" to the century-long influence of the Spanish missions: "The mission atmosphere at San Francisco may have accentuated these traits" (1925: 466). "Accentuated" meant that, for Kroeber, Ohlone culture was deficient even prior to contact with the Spanish missions.

Like his teacher Franz Boas (1858-1942), Kroeber was heavily invested in a fieldwork methodology that sought out "knowledgeable" elders for in-depth interviews (Lightfoot 2004). This "memory" methodology needed groups whose

culture was largely intact. The more acculturated groups were thought to have vanished. In the same era, the federal government was buying land to give to recognized Indian societies. All the Californian groups deemed "extinct" lost out in this allocation process: "The authoritative anthropological literature of the time minimized the cultural identities of many groups ... and even claimed that some of them had become culturally extinct, among them the numerous Ohlone peoples" (Field 1999: 198).

Elster's murder plot unravels because the woman Scottie knew as Madeleine continued to live. Kroeber's story of a Costanoan extinction unravels because the Ohlone continued to live—and to bear witness to the historical injustices centuries later. The Ohlone struggle for recognition has gained much momentum in recent years. Three recent events speak to the growing acknowledgment of genocidal dispossessions. In 2019, the City of Berkeley declared itself to be on "Ohlone Territory." In 2022, Bill SJR 13 was proposed to the California Legislature "to reaffirm and restore the Muwekma Ohlone Tribe as a federally recognized Indian tribe and include the Muwekma Ohlone Tribe in the Federal Register as a recognized tribe." In 2021, Kroeber Hall, home of Berkeley's Department of Anthropology, was officially "unnamed" because of Kroeber's depiction of Californian tribes. Students petitioning for the change argued that renaming Kroeber Hall should be part of a deeper reevaluation of

California's Native American history. Paul Fine, the Chair of the committee for unnamng Kroeber Hall, commented that this is about “moving forward to a decolonial future where Native Americans' land is returned, their voices are heard, and we stop denying and erasing the history of the genocide that occurred" (UCTV 2021). Recognizing that one of the most important movies of all time is haunted by the suppressed trauma of Ohlone dispossessions is part of this process.

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