

## Lessons from the Dodo

ANNA BOSWELL



Figure 1: Frederick Edward Maning, “[Dodo Fossil],” in *Letters, 1871-1879*, Auckland War Memorial Museum Tāmaki Paenga Hira. MS-419. Reproduced with permission.

In 1879, Auckland Institute and Museum received as a gift for its fledgling collections a photograph of a dodo fossil (see Figure 1). In the same manuscript file in which this image is archived, the Institute and Museum—now known as Auckland War Memorial Museum—also holds a letter dated 11 April 1879 and addressed to a single recipient, Judge Gillies.<sup>1</sup> The letter begins:

My Dear Sir,

I received with great pleasure your note of the 4th instant, the more so as it assured me of the safe arrival of the picture and *the Dodo*. The stony, rugged and impassive majesty of the critter, as a photo, is something tremendous, it is clearly a “critter,” and nothing else, and we shall see what the Philosophers will say to it. If they are gravelled, they will say nothing at all, but I can fancy some of them will be trying to make a short cut to wisdom by trying strong magnifying glasses on the label. That was a great idea of yours, making it indistinct; they will look holes through their spectacles *first*, and afterwards begin cogitating as to what the beast is. The Dodo will *do*.<sup>2</sup>

Frederick Edward Maning, the author of the letter and self-identified donor of the dodo fossil photograph, was an Irish-born immigrant recognised within his own lifetime as possessing “an extraordinary story.”<sup>3</sup> As a beachcomber or “Pākehā Māori,” Maning had married the daughter of a Hokianga chief and was the less-than-anonymous author of the widely circulated publications *History of the War in the North* (1862) and *Old New Zealand* (1863). He had also served as a judge in the Native Land Court and was an active and vocal—if “recalcitrant”—member of Auckland Institute and Museum, founded in 1867.<sup>4</sup> In its tone and preoccupation with truth, the 1879 letter to Gillies is vintage Maning. Proclaiming his own “great pleasure” and underlining key words for exclamatory emphasis, Maning perhaps sounds triumphant or sneering, or like a gleeful schoolboy—or, more deeply, he might be bitter, hurt, indignant or vituperative (or any or all of these things). As has been acknowledged in scholarly engagements with the *History* and *Old New Zealand*, Maning’s tone is characteristically tricky to stabilise.<sup>5</sup> Generalised anxieties associated with authentication and provenancing also permeate these few scant lines to Gillies, and Maning goes on in the letter to rebuke the public misrecognition of a painting he had gifted the museum. Again, this fits with the larger picture of Maning’s fixation with truth. Surviving letters written by Maning to two of the museum’s successive secretaries and curators, Thomas Kirk and Thomas Cheeseman, illustrate Maning’s combative determinedness to assert the authority of his views and the authenticity of the facts at his command.<sup>6</sup>

As well as corroborating established patterns of conduct and judgment, however, the 1879 letter to Gillies presents specific points of interest. First, Maning’s use of the verb “gravelled” stands out. “To be gravelled” is an archaism in the twenty-first century, but meanings historically associated with this expression include to run aground (as a ship on gravel or on a beach), or to be checked, annoyed, stopped, embarrassed, puzzled or perplexed.<sup>7</sup> In the context of Maning’s letter, then, this term might be understood to refer to a moment where ordinary cognition (or “cogitation,” to use Maning’s term) fails. Second, Maning’s letter confirms that the photograph of the dodo fossil amounts to a hoax. Coined in the late-eighteenth century and derived from the verb “hocus” (which means “to cheat,” “to impose upon,” or “to befuddle”), the term “hoax” denotes a falsehood made to masquerade as truth.<sup>8</sup> As a fabrication which is supposed to deceive, or a joke in bad faith, a hoax is played with the explicit intention of gravelling an audience. And third, Maning’s pun (“The Dodo will *do*”) ruptures the Enlightenment rationalisms of the nineteenth century, which understood non-human animals

and seemingly inanimate materials such as rocks and minerals to be inferior elements of a human-centred lifeworld, passive objects of a lower order than active human subjects. As he proclaims the photograph will do (that is, that the hoax has been sufficiently well-executed to fulfil its intended function of duping the men of the museum), Maning plays on the dodo's name as the doubled compound of the most ubiquitous action verb in the English language ("to do"), figuring the faked dodo fossil as an actor or agent in its own right.

Hoaxing was by no means an unknown practice in European intellectual circles in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. On examining the first platypus skin shipped from Australia in 1799, for instance, the keeper of natural history at the British Museum confessed it was "impossible not to entertain some doubts as to the genuine nature of the animal, and to surmise that there might have been practised some arts of deception in its structure"—taking to the skin with scissors to try to prove that it was the bill of a duck "engrafted" onto the body of a mole or a beaver.<sup>9</sup> Not all of the copies and fakes acquired by Auckland Institute and Museum in the nineteenth century were intended as hoaxes, either. Replica statues of ancient Greek heroes, for instance, were accessioned as prized elements of the museum's collections in late 1878, shortly before Maning's dodo fossil photograph entered the institution.<sup>10</sup> The museum retains no accession record for the photograph and it remains unclear whether Maning ever handed over the plaster cast featured in it—or, indeed, whether the photograph or letter have ever been displayed in the museum.<sup>11</sup> Indexing marks and an exhibition label held in the manuscript file do, however, evidence the fact that the photograph and letter have both been displayed (or intended for display) elsewhere.<sup>12</sup> At some point, then, Maning's hoax has been taken seriously. Judging by the date of the letter, a simple explanation might be that the photograph is the material trace of an April Fool prank played on the men of the museum. Yet even if this is partially the case, the faked dodo fossil resonates in ways that exceed such a scenario.

Beyond Maning's letter and the museum display label, the circumstances that prompted the photograph's appearance are, strictly speaking, unknown. The image survives as a fact shorn of knowledge, or as a wisdom awaiting its own truths. What follows in this article, then, is necessarily conjectural, circumstantial, fragmentary and pieced together, which—the article contends—is precisely the point of the photograph, or precisely the point made by it. Following Maning's lead, the article sets out to consider what the dodo *does*, and what it might reveal about truth effects and knowledge production in nineteenth-century New Zealand. The article approaches this through Maning's own writings and local scientific writings of his time, and through histories of environmental transformation, human-animal relationships and settler-indigenous engagements. Reworking the terms supplied by Maning, it imagines the faked dodo fossil might offer a "long cut" to alternate ways of knowing.

### **Correspondence/s**

A notional set of circumstances for the dodo hoax can be excavated by examining *Old New Zealand* in view of Maning's almost decade-long correspondence with Kirk and Cheeseman.<sup>13</sup> In the first of these letters, having acknowledged receipt of a volume of the published *Transactions and Proceedings of the New Zealand Institute*, and having agreed to renew his subscription with tongue-in-cheek reluctance, Maning launches into a startlingly animated and seemingly semi-serious rant. "I never was intended for a Philosopher," he declares:

I never in my life could get hold of, or discover, one single good, substantial, substantive fact, what are all these great truths which you of the Institute sometimes fancy you have fairly captured? Just shakey notions depending on contingencies as tottering as themselves. (44)

In the course of the correspondence, Maning derides ambitions associated with the local scientific community—punning on the risk of his being “drawn in and implicated in some *Transaction*” (44) and disparaging the “savant” status afforded by his subscription (45). A little over four months after playing the dodo hoax, in a letter to Cheeseman, Maning writes:

I am so fearfully unscientific in my propensities and inclinations that I scarcely even look at [the *Transactions*] and when I have done so once or twice I have found much that to me was quite uninteresting, much that I could not understand, and a good deal that I utterly contradict and dissent from, so now you see what a promising member I am and how unlikely I am ever to set the Thames, or Manukau, on fire, the books are just wasted on me and I think that you had better give them to somebody else. (47)

This self-deprecating complaint may be pseudo or serious—or both, or somewhere in between. In utterly contradicting and dissenting from the scientific work being published locally, however, it seems not-unlikely that Maning is referring, among other things, to William Colenso’s “On the Maori Races of New Zealand.” This essay had been produced for the New Zealand Exhibition held in Dunedin in 1865 and was subsequently reprinted with a great deal of fanfare in the first volume of the *Transactions* in 1868. It occupies almost one-fifth of the volume’s 490 pages and is described by its editor as a “very important” contribution which is “especially worthy of attention under the present circumstances of the colony”—a reference to ongoing conflicts between the settler government and tribes in Taranaki and in the Waikato in the 1860s.<sup>14</sup> Despite Colenso’s disclaimer that it was written in haste and that many of its passages are “rough and fragmentary” in appearance, his essay strives for comprehensive coverage of its subject.<sup>15</sup> It comes complete with its own two-page-long table of contents and is schematised into numbered sections and subsections: “physiological” characteristics, for example, are separated under the subheadings “colour,” “height,” “physiognomy,” “hair,” “frame,” “sensorial faculties” and so on. Maintaining an even tone and a detached perspective on its subject, the essay endeavours to formulate general rules through extensive use of evaluative adverbs (“usually,” “often,” “commonly,” “rarely,” “never”). Colenso’s diffidence is belied, too, in his stated pretext for writing:

Much has been said of late about the New Zealanders.... Not many, however, of those who have talked or written the most concerning them, have really understood them; and it is not wholly without hopes of making them to be a little better known, that the following brief Essay has been undertaken. (340)

Colenso was a missionary printer and amateur scientist, and like Maning, he had lived in close connection with Māori since arriving in New Zealand in the 1830s. It remains unclear whether he was deliberately reproaching or goading Maning, whose own very recently published *History* and *Old New Zealand* were also intended as guides of sorts to Māori ways of life. Colenso’s essay does, however, offer a form of ethnography methodologically and stylistically opposed to Maning’s own. *Old New Zealand* is described by Maning as being “ironical, satirical semipolitical with lots of fun, and many serious and striking scenes from old native life and habits and in a word shews indirectly without ostensibly [sic] pretending to do so what sort of creature this *Maori* is who we have to deal with.”<sup>16</sup> While the text does contain passages that adopt a would-be academic tone and attempt to moralise and generalise these are, as Stephen Turner has noted, its least successful aspects, and they are destabilised by its vivid anecdotes and its drama, hyperbole, humour and flashes of feeling.<sup>17</sup>

Presenting *Old New Zealand* as a first-person narrative, Maning registers the conditions of proximity and partisanship implicit in a settler-colonial place—the fact that there is no eye-of-

God vantage point, no means to get clear of the situation to tell it “straight.” His text repeatedly and self-consciously draws attention to the question of its own veracity (“my story is a true story, not ‘founded on fact’ but fact itself,” Maning’s narrator insists; 96), and to the strains that deform it. Whereas Colenso uses parentheses on rare occasions to insert information based on his own personal experience, the Pākehā Māori narrator of *Old New Zealand* notes that “by no effort that I can make can I hold fast to the thread of my story and I am conscious the whole affair is fast becoming one great parenthesis” (167). *Old New Zealand* schematises only in order to point up the absurdity of schematisations, explaining, for example, how the worth of a Pākehā might be evaluated in quantities of muskets or tomahawks or fishhooks (or as protein), and parodying the conventions of legal contracts to suggest that a person might become part-payment for a parcel of land. Colenso’s comprehensiveness and distance, then, contrast sharply with the difficulties enacted in Maning’s writing. In view of this, Colenso’s opening remark seems likely to have been taken as a personal slight by Maning—standing as a misrecognition of the pointedly problematising writings he had already published, and as a public endorsement of this misrecognition by members of the museum.

As the *Transactions* make plain, disputes over what counted as “knowledge” were not uncommon in nineteenth-century scientific circles. In a defence spanning two of the earliest volumes, for instance, Walter Buller refutes the findings of a publication which—Buller submits—“disallow” and “condemn” his own published ornithological discoveries.<sup>18</sup> Elucidating what Buller terms “doubtful or disputed points,” his rejoinder is carefully modulated in its politeness: “I beg to submit the following remarks on Dr. Finsch’s paper,” Buller begins.<sup>19</sup> Another disagreement is staked by Colenso in the 1877 volume of the *Transactions*, in relation to *kurī*, or “the ancient Dog of the New Zealanders,” as Colenso terms it:

For several years I have been aware of much error being commonly entertained concerning the original New Zealand dog, and I have been desirous of combatting it, as far as I could, by putting together what little I have learned respecting it, and the valuable testimonies yet extant of those of our earliest voyagers in these seas who frequently saw the animal. And this, I cannot help thinking, is the more needed just now; for, in the last volume of the “Transactions,” there is a paper by Dr. Hector “On the remains of a dog found near White Cliffs, Taranaki,” in which there are some statements and remarks concerning the New Zealand dog, which, I think, will be found incorrect.<sup>20</sup>

For Maning, “incorrectness” was both an aggravation and a *modus operandi*—something to disparage as a weakness or failing in others, yet also a powerful communicative vehicle. In his museum correspondence, Maning’s own “improper” or “erroneous” conduct (which finds expression in his unstable tone and disruptive humour) is counterpointed by his desire to be taken seriously as a truth-teller—as a member of the nascent intellectual community and as an authoritative commentator on local matters. In view of this, what was at stake for Maning would not simply have been frustration at being discredited by Colenso and by the museum. He also seems likely to have experienced deeper frustrations with what was passing for knowledge, with institutionalised expectations of how this knowledge would be packaged for public consumption, and with the rules of engagement for conducting disagreements about knowledge—which called for careful, fine-grained, gentlemanly refutations. As his writings characteristically show, Maning refuses established protocols, fracturing dominant knowledge practices and communicative modes in order to point up and re-value what it means to be “in error.” In some sense, then, Maning’s faked dodo fossil surfaces inside these partially submerged disputes.

## Running aground

As the activities of those associated with Auckland Institute and Museum attest, the nineteenth century was, for Europeans, pre-eminently an age of knowledge. In this age, knowledge was understood as being schematisable, collectable and pedagogically valuable, and the ability to speak with authority about an object or phenomenon—and to locate it in a categorised universe—were performances of one's own knowledge and the collective wisdom of the scientific community to which one subscribed. The nineteenth century was also an era of concerted settler colonial expansion. European interventions in so-called “new world” places—where early explorers’ “discoveries” enabled subsequent waves of settlers to occupy, take over and make over existing indigenous territories in order to produce new spaces of habitation—fuelled the rise of public institutions of knowledge. James Cook’s voyages, for example, yielded an array of objects and specimens—ethnographic artefacts, animal and bird carcasses, geological samples and plant tissues, as well as maps, voyage accounts, naturalists’ observations and so on—that were widely circulated in European contexts and accessioned by museums, libraries, zoological societies and scientific institutes. As a counterpart to this, in settler colonial places the establishment of museums, libraries, zoological societies and scientific institutes (with associated publication channels, such as the New Zealand Institute’s *Transactions*) was a task urgently undertaken by European newcomers. Seeking to make their new places of habitation feel like home, settlers furnished these with the institutions required to “prop up” their imported ways of thinking. At the same time, their activities served as an expression of civilising zeal, bringing the “light” of Enlightenment rationalism to the “darkest” corners of the globe.<sup>21</sup>

Taking issue with this history and its premises, Linda Tuhiwai Smith has challenged the institutionalised processes in and through which knowledge about indigenous peoples began to be “collected, classified and then represented in various ways back to the West, and then, through the eyes of the West, back to those who have been colonized.”<sup>22</sup> As Smith points out, such processes have directly impacted on indigenous peoples’ claims to existence, lands and territories; rights of self-determination; languages; forms of cultural knowledge; natural resources; and systems of living within environments. Given its provenance as an historical artefact dating from a relatively early phase of European settlement in New Zealand, what is striking about the faked dodo fossil is that Maning sets it up both as a prop for un-propping or dismantling European knowledge practices and as a mechanism for exposing non-knowledge, or what it means to not-know in a settler place. Maning’s stated intention is that the photograph will gravel the men of the museum, which is to say it will embarrass them by exposing the failure of their knowledge systems and thwarting their practices of seeking to compile wisdom. The Australian cultural historian Paul Carter has noted that European settlers are prone to becoming shipwrecked—figuratively speaking—on the coastlines of knowledge in so-called new world places.<sup>23</sup> Upon arrival, Carter explains, European settlers confidently chart and fix what they take to be actual coastlines—harbours, beaches, inlets and so on—using imported instruments of knowledge (material ones such as chronometers, telescopes, paper and ink, as well as conceptual ones such as recording practices, cartographic conventions, geological knowledges, inductive reasoning and so on). As they do so, however, they fundamentally misprise a coastline as a matter of truth or a knowable fact. In practice, a coastline might otherwise function as a perforation or time-space fold where imported knowledge practices encounter a place that is already accounted for by (and accountable to) indigenous ways of knowing. European thinking founders there, in the sense that settlers find that their knowledge practices, cognitive frameworks and ontological categories run aground. Whatever settlers might know in an indigenous place is both ungrounded and insufficient, and to claim to know

is to expose the shortfall of one's knowledge, or to find oneself washed up (or, more distressingly, smashed up) on the beach or ground of one's own insufficiency.

This very prospect is enacted in a sequence spanning the opening two chapters in *Old New Zealand*, where Maning's narrator founders on the threshold of a place that is unknown and unknowable to him. Performing the moment of "shipwreck" in pantomime mode, the narrator deploys a range of comically exaggerated tactics for dealing with (and prolonging) the vain business of "fairly" getting on shore—including throwing "all the straps and strings of civilization" (Caliban, Adam Smith, Jason's golden fleece, ostrich feathers and crinoline, the Emperor of Brazil, and so on) at the reader.<sup>24</sup> The narrator's ongoing misgivings about the improperness of his entrance and the inadequacy of his knowledge find expression in further warping of the text effected through the workings of tapu—a foundational Māori institution of knowledge which may be imperfectly translated as taboo or proscription. In "On the Maori Races of New Zealand," Colenso offers a carefully circumscribed discussion of tapu: "[t]heir quasi 'sacred' or taboo (*tapu*) duties (of which much could be written)," he explains, "could only be performed by a 'sacred' person; for although in some few cases, a person not 'sacred' might act, yet he sometimes most inconveniently became 'sacred' by his doing so!" (359). The "inconvenience" of this institution, by contrast, deforms *Old New Zealand*. Maning's narrator acknowledges partway through the text that he has been "tapu'd," and while he professes not to take the tapu seriously, he cannot dismiss it either. Its effect contorts his story ("If I could only get clear of this tapu I would 'try back,'" he says; 167). The unseen prior knowledges that are in play and the circumscribedness of European ways of thinking turn out to be the condition of the mistakes the narrator will make and the mishaps and misfortunes that befall him.

Maning translates this lesson about what it means for Europeans to not-know or to be in possession of a shortfall of knowledge, making this lesson material—if not exactly flesh—in the form of the faked dodo fossil. This is not to suggest that the dodo itself is tapu or conveys tapu. Rather, it is to note that the dodo's fabricatedness mimics and exaggerates the fabricatedness of European knowledges and knowledge systems, and the 'shakey' teachings and learnings to which these give rise.<sup>25</sup> The mock dodo acquires a more-than-mocking demeanour in this context, speaking to profoundly European paradigms of knowledge which determine that looking equates with knowing, that holotypical specimens are to be singled out as exemplars, that "authentic" objects will be prized over copies or fakes, that confident schematisation is possible and desirable, that fact can be distinguished from fiction, and so on. In so doing, it undoes these paradigms from within. As a hoax or "gravelling device," the dodo exposes the difference or differential between truth (whatever is real or right or honest in a situation, or what pertains), knowledge (whatever those with an interest in the situation grasp about it) and wisdom (whatever that knowledge is collectively distilled to). In part, the dodo's "truth," and the wisdom that it teaches, concern the prospects of running aground that will beset settlers who presume-to-know, and who presume their own paradigms are sufficient-to-know.

### **As dead as a dodo**

For European settlers in Maning's time, the spectre of the dodo as a bird-of-wisdom would have carried irony or comic pathos. In part, this is because such casting reverses the human-animal distinctions upon which European systems of knowledge were founded, undoing the notion of human exceptionalism. It is also because of the dodo's reputation for pathological naivety or ignorance. The dodo's name comes from the Portuguese term "doudo," meaning fool or simpleton—apparently a reference to the creature's awkward appearance, but also seemingly prophetic of its fate.<sup>26</sup> As a large, flightless bird endemic to the island of Mauritius, the dodo (*Raphus cucullatus*) became vulnerable once the island was settled by the Dutch East India

Company at the turn of the seventeenth century. The dodo had no prior knowledge of newly introduced threats (dogs, rats, hungry sailors) or how to resist these, and within 200 years the species had died out altogether. While the dodo possesses the dubious distinction of being the first species to have its demise recorded in writing, little in the way of firm knowledge survives—so that what the dodo looked like, how it behaved, and so on are more-or-less matters of speculation.<sup>27</sup> What *is* known or knowable about the dodo—and what was already widely known in Maning’s time—is that it emblematises extinction. In foretelling the frenzied fascination that will greet the dodo photograph, Maning’s letter to Gillies points towards the nineteenth-century mania with objects that represent extinction and the disappearing knowledges for which they stand. It also points towards the fact that a nineteenth-century museum was conceived as a storehouse for knowledges about things that were passing into extinction—a universe of disappearing objects. As one of the contributors to the *Transactions* laments in an article published in 1874, “[i]t is difficult—almost hopeless now—to obtain any remains of the ... Dodo.”<sup>28</sup> For the “folk” of Auckland Institute and Museum, and for European scientists worldwide in the nineteenth century, the dodo would have stood as an object lesson in extinction—as the leading international touchstone for futurelessness, as a terminus point for knowledge, and as a point of origin for knowledge about the terminus points of species. In playing his hoax, then, Maning’s choice of subject evinces a kind of biting or precise aptness.

In the early twenty-first century, mounting scholarly concern has begun to be fixed on the era of planet-wide biodiversity loss that the dodo’s demise is now understood to have ushered in. Cascading extinctions are conceived as a global catastrophe and as the most mournful symptom of the human-catalysed environmental change which characterises the newly-dubbed age of the Anthropocene.<sup>29</sup> What the fate of the dodo as a species begins to make clear, however, is that settler colonial contexts offer advanced—and advance—lessons in extinction. As frontiers where environmental issues are centrally at stake, such places accelerate conditions in which locally endemic species cannot survive. In securing their own future in “new world” places, European settlers actively seek to over-write and replace the lifeworlds they encounter. In New Zealand, this activity has taken the form of felling forests, draining swamps, carving up the land into alienable and farmable parcels of property, and establishing categories and zones of protection that value selected species at the same time as they vilify or eradicate others.<sup>30</sup> As part of this destructive and reconstructive agenda, settlers also import a vast suite of “old world” animals and plants. Acclimatisation is the banal sounding term conventionally ascribed to this activity, although—as the Australian anthropologist Deborah Bird Rose observes—it more properly functions as a form of “deathworlding.”<sup>31</sup> While it works by introducing and privileging foreignness, settlers tend to forget or reverse this because what is foreign to the places they settle is familiar to them (as part of the cargo brought from their old worlds). The implications of this attempted wholesale environmental transformation are addressed in the frank admission made in the New Zealand government’s *Biodiversity Strategy* (2000) that “[n]othing since the extinction of the dinosaurs (65 million years ago) compares with the decline in indigenous biodiversity in New Zealand over the period 1900 to 2000.”<sup>32</sup>

Quite apparently, the dodo is not locally endemic to New Zealand, and live specimens were not acclimatised here—as much as anything, because the species was extinct by the time European settlement commenced in the early-nineteenth century. As a belated newcomer and “un-knowing knower” or “knowing un-knower,” however, Maning’s dodo raises questions about the extent to which extinction was acknowledged by nineteenth-century European settlers in New Zealand as a direct outcome of settlement. Two tendencies are apparent in the *Transactions* in the period up to 1879. First, in a number of published articles, the dodo is explicitly named. On each occasion, it is closely linked to—and identified with—the moa, the



giant flightless bird, endemic to New Zealand, whose abundantly available archaeological remains sparked great excitement in scientific circles internationally in the nineteenth century. While the dodo had been “discovered” by Enlightenment science before the species of moa spanning the *Dinornithiformes* order were described, speculation swirled as to the chronology of extinction—which came first, the dodo or the moa. Discussions of dodo-moa correspondences in the *Transactions* are framed by the fact that the extinction of the moa occurred at the hands of Māori, before Europeans arrived in New Zealand.<sup>33</sup> In other words, as related by the men of the Institute, these intertwined cases of extinction could be invoked to mark of the distinctiveness of the contributions to “knowledge” furnished by New Zealand without seeming to cast shadow on the ethics of European settlement.

And second, several published articles observe European acclimatisation of foreign species in New Zealand, and several refer to the fact that locally endemic species were passing—and would continue to pass—into extinction. In 1869, for instance, Captain F. W. Hutton expresses the matter-of-fact realisation that European settlers were producing discernible impacts on the environments they were settling:

Exact information, as to the date of the introduction of plants and animals into a country, together with the numbers introduced, and the place where they were first turned out, will be of great value, in future years, to all naturalists studying the difficult subjects of the diffusion and replacement of species; and for this reason I have here placed on record all the information that I have been able to collect with reference to the first introduction of the Pheasant into [Auckland] province.<sup>34</sup>

Referring to a paper published by Colenso in *The Tasmanian Journal of Natural Science* in 1845 in order to identify “ornithic forms that have become extinct within the memory of man,” Buller is circumspect.<sup>35</sup> Buller also notes—without passing judgment—the reduced abundance of several species: the fact that birds which used to be encountered in large flocks are reduced to being met singly or in pairs; the ease or difficulty with which specimens can be obtained (as compared with their former availability), and so on. In his presidential address to the Auckland Institute in 1869, Gillies—Maning’s co-conspirator in executing the dodo hoax—discusses the acclimatisation of insectivorous birds to assist agricultural settlement, acknowledging obliquely—if ominously—that “what seems good is not all good, and may become an evil, and what appears to be an evil has good in it, too, and may be turned to good account. These only can be determined by a series of accurate observations.”<sup>36</sup> The debate over the extinction of the kurī also tracks through the *Transactions* from this period, with at least one author applauding the fact that run-holders in Otago are “now saved from this scourge.”<sup>37</sup> In the *Transactions*, the dodo is not explicitly invoked in conjunction with faunal extinctions dating from the period after European settlement in New Zealand. Yet by virtue of the circumstances of its own extinction, the dodo iconises a set of knowledges about the extinction-work of settlement. Failing to name the dodo in the scientific record documenting European settlement in New Zealand (or falling short of naming it) figures the unfolding wave of extinction that was underway by the 1870s as a knowledge-that-cannot-be-named (or as facts that are not being turned into knowledge). Such reticence runs counter to the proactive staking of claims-to-knowledge that is otherwise discernible in the *Transactions*, suggesting palpable discomfort or misgiving.<sup>38</sup>

Unravelling differently, too, the dodo-moa correspondences set out in the *Transactions* might reveal other teachings and wisdoms. The dodo, for instance, is associated with numerous disparaging English-language proverbs (something said to be *as dead a dodo* is not working, obsolete, defunct or unavailable; a person described as *a dodo* is understood to be dull-witted,

slow-reacting, conservative or out-of-date). Such practices find a serious counterpart, however, in the moa, which is the subject of a number of whakataukī or proverbs that transmit environmental knowledges: *mate ā moa* (dead like the moa); *ko te huna i te moa* (destroyed like the moa); *kua ngaro i te ngaro o te moa* (we are lost, like the moa), and so on.<sup>39</sup> Embedding traditional ecological knowledge about responses to extinction and registering an ancestral landscape mapped and articulated through species and story, these whakataukī encode emergent forms of environmental stewardship.<sup>40</sup> Extinctions such as that of the moa served as the origin for kaitiakitanga, or the set of environmental knowledge practices that call for people “to act unselfishly, with right mind and heart, and with proper procedure.”<sup>41</sup> Working in conjunction with whakapapa (genealogy), whanaungatanga (kinship), tapu and rāhui (ritual exclusions), and understanding all elements of the lifeworld as being suffused with mauri or life-force, kaitiakitanga expresses non-anthropocentric knowledges about rightful behaviours, reciprocity, the sustainability of species and the interconnectedness of all things.

The dodo is perhaps an unlikely teacher of traditional ecological knowledges or indigenous ways of knowing in New Zealand, especially given its status as a symbol of maladaptiveness. As a purveyor of what it means to “not-know,” however, it is powerfully positioned to reveal truths that are unseen and unseeable in the terms supplied by European paradigms of knowledge. Through its afterlives, the dodo serves to remind that the extinct fauna of New Zealand offer their own teachings and wisdoms which have been received, interpreted and encoded in indigenous practices. In these ways, the dodo assists in crystallising grounded, place-based, relational and storied understandings of how a lifeworld is constituted, what its management and care ought to involve, and what non-human species know about this and what they can impart. What the *Transactions* unknowingly begin to reveal, then, is that attending to the dodo’s “truths” and aligning its story with local stories enables its teachings to be enfolded into local ecologies of knowledge, animating these in unexpected ways.

### Calling card

If the dodo points towards indigenous ways of knowing about environmental matters and human-animal relationships, a further pathos—both complementary and contradictory—attaches to the human extinction story that it ghosts or shadows. By the 1870s, New Zealand was understood by European settlers to be furnishing its own potential wisdoms on this matter. Frequent reference to the anticipated disappearance of tribal populations is made in contributions to the *Transactions* in this period, and an underlying dispute discernible in Maning’s and Colenso’s writings concerns the likely future of Māori in New Zealand. Both writers were acutely aware that Māori society was, in the 1860s, undergoing profound change, and their writings are aligned in some ways on the matter of population decline. In “On the Maori Races of New Zealand,” Colenso’s descriptions are given in the past tense, recording a pure way of life which has already vanished. Maning, on the other hand, registers more clearly a people in the midst of upheaval—“between two tides,” as he puts it. *Old New Zealand* is torn in its vision for the future (to “civilise” or “by our mere contact exterminate” are its understandings of the likely fate of Māori in the new settler society), although Maning’s writings from the 1870s evince mounting pessimism. Making reflexive use of the whakataukī format and reversing conventional understandings of the operation of acclimatisation, Maning wrote to Cheeseman in November 1878:

When the waters of the sea overflow and mingle with the waters of the lake the fish become sickly and many die. The Maori are now surrounded by a medium not made for them, or such as they, as Maories, were not made for, they are dying of the slow poison of civilisation. In their own native climate they are undergoing the process of

acclimatisation and are dying under that process.... When the water becomes too salt then all the fish of the lake must die. (45)

Profound difficulties associated with settler imaginings of indigenous futures can be discerned by examining the technical basis of the dodo hoax. Maning's photograph takes the form of a small, handheld *carte de visite* or visiting card. This photographic format emerged in Europe in the mid-nineteenth century and gave rise to a worldwide collection craze which reached its peak in the 1860s. Showcasing studio-based professional portraits, the *carte de visite* was used in New Zealand for commissioned photographs of settlers and of Māori. As Turner has noted, the cards that feature Māori subjects trade in the same kinds of images as oil paintings from this period by artists such as Gottfried Lindauer—and in some cases double over or are remediated via these works—but they were reproducible, affordable and tradable and thus reached “the greater number of people who make up the market for exotica [but who] could not own a painting, or afford to pay someone to paint one.”<sup>42</sup> *Carte de visite* images of Māori subjects are not altogether reducible to the colonial imaginary that they ostensibly serve, possessing value within indigenous frameworks of knowledge, instantiating mana or prestige, dovetailing with existing tribal traditions of cultural memory and modes of remembrance, and raising potential concerns about the extinguishment, diminishment or demeaning of the mauri or life force that they relay.<sup>43</sup> These photographs do, however, constitute stock elements of the settler album or the archive of settlement, and their material agency in processes of settlement points up discrepancies in agency (the fact, for instance, that Māori did not exercise control over how they were photographically represented). Reifying and exoticising indigenous subjects, these images convert “vanishing” people into ethnographic objects—which are, themselves, marketable commodities working in the service of settler-colonial debt to a metropolitan economy.<sup>44</sup> They also naturalise indigenous territory as a marketable commodity in the terms supplied by this economy. In the formality of their rectilinear, grid-like compositions, these images posit New Zealand as a stabilised and knowable place, circulating internationally as “invitation cards” welcoming ongoing European visitation, inhabitation and investment.

According to the media critic and philosopher Vilém Flusser, a photograph needs to be understood as a technical image which operates in terms of truth, doubt and redundancy.<sup>45</sup> To all appearances, Flusser explains, photographs seem to be objective and non-symbolic, functioning as windows onto the world and corresponding directly to phenomena in the world (“representing the world itself”).<sup>46</sup> What a photograph actually renders visible, however, is a range of transcoded concepts, a combination of chemicals on an exposed surface, a viewpoint that undoes itself by revealing other viewpoints, and an expression of the programmed parameters latent in the camera-as-apparatus. A photograph also operates nostalgically, in that the moment or “state of being” that it claims to have captured is constructed as an object of longing. For these reasons, the photograph's very claim to truth—its assurance that it documents something as-it-appears in the world—induces forms of “phenomenological doubt.”<sup>47</sup> And because there are limits to the programmed functions of a camera (and because cameras in fact operate photographers, turning them into functionaries), standard photographic formulations and templated compositions emerge, giving rise to images that are automatized and repetitive (hence “redundant”).

Applying these understandings to Maning's dodo photograph, it becomes apparent that technologies are inherently hoaxing. Functioning as “cheating” devices, they enable things to happen that could not otherwise happen. Indeed, photography perhaps stands as a leading example of technology-as-hoax, in that it makes things appear which could or would not

otherwise appear, beguiling and befuddling viewers by inducing mistaken acts of recognition. Yet because the *carte de visite* format is historically implicated in representing tribal peoples who were imagined to be passing from existence, the effects of its hoax are intensified. *Carte de visite* images of Māori subjects pose a crisis of knowledge, exposing the fact that photography interferes with orientations to time (a viewer cannot tell whether the subjects pictured in these photographs survive in the world or not, since a photograph implicitly converts its subject into an object of nostalgia). This doubt intensifies the aura of disappearance or absence that pertains to a photograph as a record for posterity of something already-past. And because *carte de visite* images were heavily programmed or standardised—emerging, more-or-less, as variations on a single composition—they may be understood as “redundant” in Flusser’s technical sense.

For these reasons, the dodo’s portrait or calling card is radically unstable. Functioning as a “joke,” it glitches the photographic program of the *carte de visite* by installing a non-human object in the frame in place of a human subject. And, indeed, because viewers already habitually mistake a photograph for an artefact of truth, the dodo image redoubles the signifiatory malfunction. The effect of this joke is theatrical, in that it casts the dodo as the butt or perpetrator while deflecting from the artfulness of the technology that actually produces the joke. A viewer might be left with the sense of the dodo as a ventriloquist’s unwitting or colluding dummy, and the photograph as the apparatus that throws Maning’s voice (or enables it to be thrown). Characteristically, however, Maning shows this to be no laughing matter. Figuring mistakefulness as a grim business, his photograph plays change (which, according to Flusser, is informative) against the familiar (which produces redundancy).<sup>48</sup> As the dodo morphs from the affectionately named and benign sounding “critter” (a diminutive form of the more formal “creature”) to become a “beast,” the comic image contorts to become, allegorically, the Joker in the deck that settler-colonialism will deal out, or the Grim Reaper’s calling card. Equating “redundancy” with extinction through its own technical procedure, the image connects the notions of something being surplus to requirement and after-the-fact with forms of justified obsolescence. Extinction is thus figured as being ordinary, necessary, technical, ethical and pre-ordained—as simply a calculus of the program run by the apparatus of settlement.<sup>49</sup> As a substitute for a human subject, then, the dodo image materialises in the settler archive as a “living” function of an automatized future extinction, transcoding concepts related to the collateral victimhood of settlement.<sup>50</sup> In this context, the dodo emerges as a subject lesson as well as an object lesson, transmitting historical lessons about subjectivities, agencies and futures that were understood as being decommissioned by the operations of settlement.

### **Disinterment**

As negative marks or marks of negation, as well as “collecting-places” and sites of accrual, fossils both attest to and arrest temporal processes of erasure and disappearance.<sup>51</sup> A fossil might be understood as a tomb or grave (the place where an organism died), or as a cast or refilled projection, and it functions as “nature’s photography” in that it produces proto-photographic imprints. The larger teaching of a fossil is that once any living thing passes into death, its impression or trace becomes indirect and what is “known” about it will require technical aids and mnemonic supports. In this context, the western science of archaeology emerges as its own hoax, where “facts” are stitched together (and knowledge stitched up) in dubiously tendentious ways. The materiality of the dodo photograph and the materiality of the faked geological specimen to which the photograph claims to grant access, then, belie the fact that this is an image of an image of an image, an imprint of an imprint of an imprint, a triple hoax, a death three-times over.

Maning was, himself, engaged in the business of uncovering fossils and archaeological specimens, submitting “geological vagaries” (stones marked with netting or ribbing, and partially hollowed) to Auckland Museum for analysis. Contributing to the *kurī* debate in a minor way, he also mentions in one of his letters to Cheeseman that he has unearthed the skeleton of a dog in “a very ancient ‘Kitchen Midden,’” and he discusses his recent finding of “several stone implements and many human bones which shewed that they had been baked” (47). For Maning, these objects may have served on one level as evidence of the seemingly inevitable demise of local peoples. As sediments dating from an earlier time, however, objects of this kind also suggest difficulties associated with settler occupation of a land which continues to disclose its prior history of inhabitation, and whose knowledges have an uncanny ability to “return.” These bones and fragments can be seen as troubling reminders of the price of European presence and as icons of *whakapapa*, *whenua* and *tapu*—of the fact that Māori continue to possess prior and ongoing knowledges of place that pertain in this place. *Old New Zealand* vividly conveys Maning’s awareness of the connections, in that the narrator becomes “*tapu’d*” for meddling with the bones of the dead, and he is subject to a raid carried out under the law of *murū* or plunder for accidentally setting alight a tree in which are concealed the remains of a chief. Fragments of this kind, then, have the potential to complicate seemingly straightforward tenses and unsettle European ways of knowing, and they archive—or trace the outlines of—knowledges that are grounded and place-based.

As his hoax shows, Maning was also in the business of manufacturing fossils-of-the-future, which is to say the dodo image survives as a disquieting piece of data whose own disinterment and piecing-together are matters of projection and happenstance. As both a “long cut” and a “long shot” to wisdom, this image speaks to the accidental nature of encounters with the manufactured objects (or hoax-work) of history, and to the unstable grounds of settler institutions of knowledge—the “shakey”-ness of settler stratigraphy. Transcoding truths that undergird, characterise, distort and haunt the fraught space of settlement, the dodo photograph exposes the larger operations of deathworlding and it opens space for existing, newly-made and once-extinct knowledges to emerge and be “engrafted.” In a settler-colonial place, the dodo teaches, temporalities of knowledge are recursive, and ways of knowing are nothing short of a matter of life and death.

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Bannatyne Gillies was a former superintendent of Auckland, a former president of Auckland Institute, and a judge of the Supreme Court of New Zealand. For a brief biography, see [nzetc.victoria.ac.nz/tm/scholarly/tei-Cyc02Cycl-t1-body1-d1-d4-d8.html](http://nzetc.victoria.ac.nz/tm/scholarly/tei-Cyc02Cycl-t1-body1-d1-d4-d8.html) (accessed 21 February 2017).

<sup>2</sup> Auckland War Memorial Museum MS 419. In the original manuscript, Maning uses underlining rather than italics for emphasis.

<sup>3</sup> Morton Jones, cited in Jack Lee, *Hokianga* (Auckland: Reed, 1996), 185.

<sup>4</sup> E. G. Turbott, “F. E. Maning Correspondence,” in *The Centennial History of the Auckland Institute and Museum*, ed. A. W. B. Powell (Auckland: Auckland Institute and Museum, 1967), 44.

<sup>5</sup> See for example Anna Boswell, “Maning’s Little Tale,” *Journal of New Zealand Literature* 31 (2013): 44-65; Stephen Turner, “Being Colonial/Colonial Being,” *Journal of New Zealand Literature* 20 (2002): 39-66; Alex Calder, “Introduction,” in F. E. Maning, *Old New Zealand and Other Writings*, ed. Alex Calder (London: Leicester University Press, 2001); Simon During, “What was the West?,” *Meanjin* 48, no. 4 (1989): 759-76.

<sup>6</sup> Maning’s fixation with truth may also be taken as a symptom of the delusions of persecution that are known to have afflicted him towards the end of his life.

- <sup>7</sup> See [www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/gravel](http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/gravel) (accessed 21 February 2017).
- <sup>8</sup> See [www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/hoax](http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/hoax) (accessed 21 February 2017).
- <sup>9</sup> George Shaw, quoted in Harriet Ritvo, *The Platypus and the Mermaid, and Other Figments of the Classifying Imagination* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 4.
- <sup>10</sup> See Roger Blackley, "Beauty and the Beast: Plaster Casts in a Colonial Museum," in *On Display: New Essays in Cultural Studies*, ed. Anna Smith & Lydia Wevers (Wellington: VUP, 2004), 41-64.
- <sup>11</sup> The "picture" to which Maning refers in the opening line of his letter to Gillies is of a New Zealand battle scene.
- <sup>12</sup> A small square of paper fixed to the bottom right-hand corner of the photograph bears the number "26a." The printed exhibition label bears the number "26" and reads: "AUTOGRAPH letter from Judge Maning to Judge Gillies in reference to Sergeant J. Williams's sketch of the 'Battle of Okaihow,' and also mentioning a 'fossil dodo' faked by Judge Maning, April 11th, 1879. Deposited by the Auckland Museum."
- <sup>13</sup> Maning's side of this correspondence is held in the archives of Auckland Museum (MS 419) and published in Turbott, "F. E. Maning Correspondence," 44-48. Further references supplied in parentheses.
- <sup>14</sup> James Hector, "Preface to First Edition," *Transactions and Proceedings of the New Zealand Institute* 1 (1868): v-vii.
- <sup>15</sup> William Colenso, "On the Maori Races of New Zealand," *Transactions and Proceedings of the New Zealand Institute* 1 (1868): 423. Further references supplied in parentheses.
- <sup>16</sup> Maning, *Old New Zealand and Other Writings*, 213-14.
- <sup>17</sup> Turner, "Being Colonial," 42.
- <sup>18</sup> Walter Buller, "Notes on the Ornithology of New Zealand," *Transactions and Proceedings of the New Zealand Institute* 2 (1869): 386, 387. See also Buller, "Further Notes on the Ornithology of New Zealand," *Transactions and Proceedings of the New Zealand Institute* 3 (1870): 37-56.
- <sup>19</sup> Buller, "Notes on the Ornithology of New Zealand," 385.
- <sup>20</sup> William Colenso, "Notes, Chiefly Historical, on the Ancient Dog of the New Zealanders," *Transactions and Proceedings of the New Zealand Institute* 10 (1877): 135.
- <sup>21</sup> See Anna Boswell, "Re-enactment in the Museum Case: Māori and Native American Artefacts in the Peabody Essex Museum," *Journal of New Zealand Literature* 27 (2009): 48-69; also "'Shakey Notions': Settlement History on Display" (PhD thesis, Auckland: University of Auckland, 2012).
- <sup>22</sup> Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (London, New York and Dunedin: Zed Books and Otago UP, 1999), 1-2.
- <sup>23</sup> See Paul Carter, *Dark Writing: Geography, Performance, Design* (Hawai'i: University of Hawai'i Press, 2009), 49-78.
- <sup>24</sup> See Maning, *Old New Zealand*, 94-106.
- <sup>25</sup> See Boswell, "Shakey Notions."
- <sup>26</sup> See [www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/dodo](http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/dodo) (accessed 21 February 2017).
- <sup>27</sup> For discussion of the dodo's extinction see Thom van Dooren, *Flight Ways: Life and Loss at the Edge of Extinction* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 1-4.
- <sup>28</sup> T. H. Cockburn-Hood, "Notes Upon the Probable Changes that have Taken Place in the Physical Geography of New Zealand Since the Arrival of the Maori," *Transactions and Proceedings of the New Zealand Institute* 7 (1874), 120.
- <sup>29</sup> See for example Charles C. Mann & Mark L. Plummer, *Noah's Choice: The Future of Endangered Species* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1996); Elizabeth Colbert, *The Sixth Extinction: An Unnatural History* (New York: Henry Holt, 2014); Human Animal Research Network (ed.), *Animals in the Anthropocene: Critical Perspectives on Non-Human Futures* (Sydney, NSW: Sydney University Press, 2015).
- <sup>30</sup> See Anna Boswell, "The Sensible Order of the Eel," *Settler Colonial Studies* 5, no. 4 (2015): 363-74.
- <sup>31</sup> Deborah Bird Rose, *Wild Dog Dreaming: Love and Extinction* (Charlottesville & London: University of Virginia Press, 2011), 12.
- <sup>32</sup> Department of Conservation & Ministry for the Environment, *The New Zealand Biodiversity Strategy* (Wellington: Department of Conservation, 2000), 4.

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- <sup>33</sup> See for example Cockburn-Hood, “Notes upon the Probable Changes.”
- <sup>34</sup> Captain F. W. Hutton, “On the Introduction of the Pheasant into the Province of Auckland,” *Transactions and Proceedings of the New Zealand Institute* 2 (1869): 80.
- <sup>35</sup> Walter Buller, “Notes on the Ornithology of New Zealand,” *Transactions and Proceedings of the New Zealand Institute* 10 (1877): 192.
- <sup>36</sup> T. B. Gillies, “Address,” *Transactions and Proceedings of the New Zealand Institute* 2 (1869), 409.
- <sup>37</sup> R. Gillies, “Notes on Some Changes in the Fauna of Otago,” *Transactions and Proceedings of the New Zealand Institute* 10 (1877): 321.
- <sup>38</sup> Occasional flashes of misgiving are evident in papers published in the *Transactions*, but these tend not to be developed to make a larger point. See for example T. H. Potts, “On the Birds of New Zealand, Part II,” *Transactions and Proceedings of the New Zealand Institute* 3 (1870): 59.
- <sup>39</sup> See for example William Colenso, “On the Moa,” *Transactions and Proceedings of the New Zealand Institute* 12 (1879): 88; A. E. Brougham & A. W. Reed, *The Raupō Book of Māori Proverbs* (Auckland: Penguin, 2012), 48.
- <sup>40</sup> For further discussion of the role of whakataukī in transmitting traditional ecological knowledge see for example Priscilla M. Wehi, Hēmi Whaanga & Tom Roa, “Missing in Translation: Maori Language and Oral Tradition in Scientific Analyses of Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK),” *Journal of the Royal Society of New Zealand* 39, no. 4 (2009): 201-04.
- <sup>41</sup> Waitangi Tribunal, *Ko Aotearoa Tēnei, Vol. 1* (Wellington: Legislation Direct, 2011), 38; see also 116-17.
- <sup>42</sup> Stephen Turner, “The Currency of Gottfried Lindauer’s Māori Portraits” (unpublished paper, 2016).
- <sup>43</sup> See Michael Graham-Stewart, *Negative Kept: Maori and the Carte de Visite* (Auckland: John Leech Gallery, 2013), 187; Turner, “The Currency of Gottfried Lindauer’s Māori Portraits.”
- <sup>44</sup> Turner, *ibid.*
- <sup>45</sup> See Vilém Flusser, *Towards a Philosophy of Photography* (London: Reaktion, 2007).
- <sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 41.
- <sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 38.
- <sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 65.
- <sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 58.
- <sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 44-45.
- <sup>51</sup> Carter, *Dark Writing*, pp. 165-67.