



Between fact and fancy

What media archaeology can learn from dodology
(and the other way around)

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“Who controls the past, controls the future: who controls the present controls the past.”

- George Orwell, 1984.

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Introduction



Jan Savery, painting of a dodo, 1651.

Few concepts are as vague and attractive as the past. It is a time that is never physically present, though its traces are everywhere. What we consider to have happened is largely a reconstruction that was made long after the events took place. The past is an indeterminate entity that can be changed in order to achieve something in the present. As such, it is highly in demand and has been the source of inspiration for various instances of literature and arts.

Yet, making up things that have not happened is considered unacceptable outside the realm of explicit narrative fiction on a social and academic level. Historians keep an eye on the past and those who recklessly try to cross the border between fact and fancy. Throughout the last couple of centuries scholars have developed academic tools that are able to preserve seemingly objective conclusions and make them acceptable to a larger academic community. Historical sources, either written or material, play an important part in this scientific apparatus. Inanimate objects might even be the foundation on which historical knowledge is built.

Unfortunately this lifeless material cannot speak for itself and it does not produce undeniable facts. Although historians try to approach the truth with their help, it is possible to speculate about their meaning. Sometimes this

happens within speculative literature, such as science fiction and fictional science. Even scholars sometimes project idiosyncratic feelings and hypothetical ideas upon historical findings and publish these disguised as unbalanced scientific papers. Sometimes, such misdirected contemplations can lead to very elaborate narrative constructions, which are told and remodeled over time again and again. It sometimes occurs that objects of the past become part of a brand new discourse, either in a material or a more abstract way. Variations and different interpretations of an endless variety of subjects are spread out over time. Countless alternatives to a pliable present and past are available in libraries by means of fiction and non-fiction. Each can be used as the starting point for new speculative texts in their own right.

Researchers within the field of cultural studies are able to make sense of these pseudo-scientific, idiosyncratic papers by interpreting them as discursive and material manifestations of a discursive context. Even the sketchiest document can be researched as a literary object of the time it was written in. The culturally minded historian can use speculative historic texts as a way to understand how past societies functioned and write an academic paper about them. The writer of the speculative historic text does not usually

focus on a broader sense of culture in itself and is not considered academic in its own right. Yet, both researchers are entangled in an interjection of the past, present and future, the personal and the objective, what is and what could have been.

By dragging up speculative approaches in the academic field cultural studies might contribute to further confusion about the past by means of post-modern relativism. This is a confusing matter and not without its victims. Something about the historical objects, which are used in the writing of history books, gets lost when they are researched as a speculative object. A hypothetical fixation can contribute to cultural misinterpretation, but a reevaluation of this fixation can be just as bad. In this way the understanding of the past was perhaps never more difficult than at turning of the twenty-first century.

The extinct dodo bird can be considered a victim of this discursive approach to history. After the bird ceased to roam the earth in the sixteenth century very little of its particularities were known, which is why it soon fell in the realm of speculation. Nowadays, the dodo is considered an icon of extinction and each representation of the bird remind the viewer of its faith. The dodo is stripped from its physical, material essence and has become a container of human

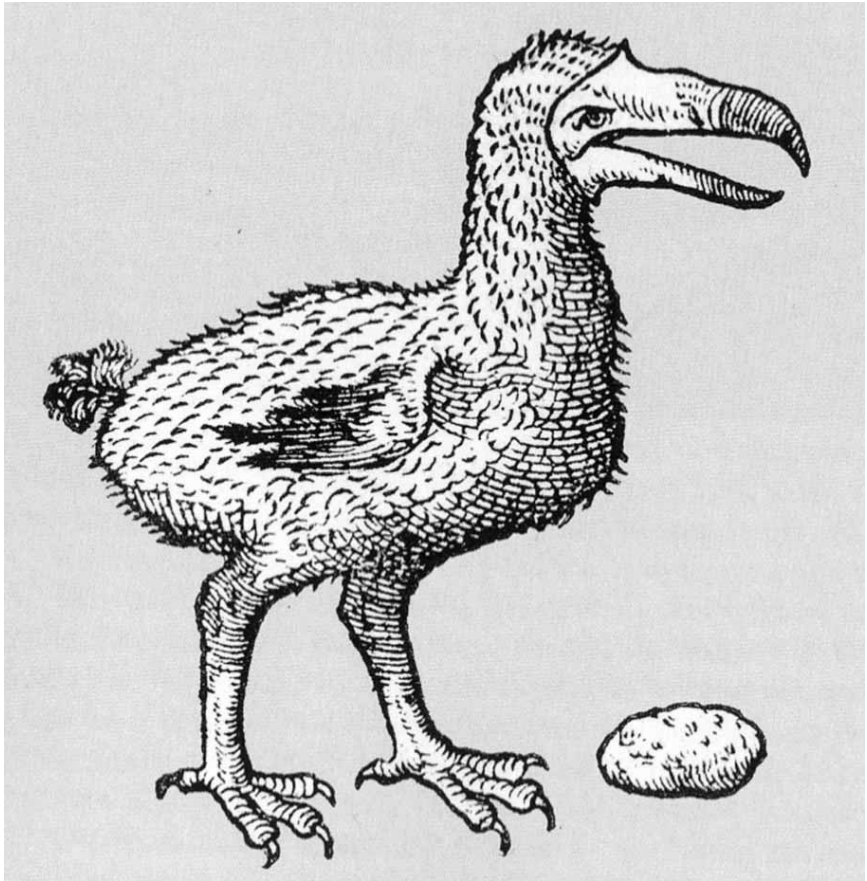
meaning. The way these birds are represented throughout time tells more about how individuals perceive the world and themselves, than about their corporeal appearance and behaviour. Perhaps this is one of the reasons why so much literature on the dodo has been written over the last two hundred years. Most of these texts try to clarify what the bird might have been like and try to distinguish between the iconic imaginary dodo and the real biological one that went extinct. Certain patterns emerge in this literature that tell a story in their own right.

Within this thesis I will address the way objects of cultural debate and imagination, such as the dodo, get reassessed within academic and speculative texts. By looking at different texts about the dodo, I will clarify what kind of metaphysical estrangement is constituted by a recursive approach to material objects. The dodo is a clear biological example of a shift in meaning and essence that can occur when historical sources get reevaluated. Rather than retelling the account of the life and times of the bird this text aims to research the literature that has been written about it. A comparative study of speculative and academic texts will indicate the interplay between both.

To show that the dodo is not a singular case and that speculation is still present in contemporary studies this text will also draw a comparison with how *new media* approaches its own history. There is an uncanny resemblance between what we could now define as *dodology*, the study of the dodo, and what media professors pinpoint as *media archaeology*. Comparing the two and highlighting the differences will shed light on the general human origin of speculative approaches to history and objects from the past.

An introduction to the way the dodo got depicted within biological encyclopaedias, also known as bestiaries, will be given in chapter one. In the second chapter there will be elaborated on the matter of *dodology* as a cross-discipline by describing the way nineteenth century naturalists laid its foundation. During the third chapter the rise of the speculative, iconic dodo will be described and comparisons with *media archaeology* will be made to show the way fact and speculation can overlap within a speculative field of research. Along the way we will answer what exactly constitutes *dodology* and how fact and speculation are entangled within not only this field of research, but many others as well.

Chapter 1. Bulky Bestiaries



Carolus Clusius, Illustration of a dodo and its gizzard stone, copied from an illustration in the journal of van Neck, which is now missing, 1605.

In the introduction I commented that some researchers have the tendency to get carried away by their imagination. This chapter will focus on the attempts of early naturalists to make sense of the world by means of speculation. Nowadays, this approach is often regarded with some skepticism within the realm of strict scientific research. There are however countless approaches to scientific topics that are not concerned with the academic trajectory. These are often considered pseudo-sciences, because they are not part of the official methodical canon.

An example of this is crypto-zoology, a type of research that is concerned with animals whose existence has not been proven.¹ The existence or non-existence of creatures such as Bigfoot, the Yeti and the monster of Loch Ness are regular sources for debate in this field of study. They insist that intellectual explorations outside the realm of the known can be quite fruitful and should not be dismissed too hastily. To strengthen this point crypto-zoologists refer to the discovery of the okapi. Up until 1901 this animal was known as the African unicorn and considered a myth that was merely known from hearsay and ancient hieroglyphs (**Fig. 1**). Only after the British governor of Uganda, Sir Harry Johnston found

¹ *Cryptozoology A to Z: The Encyclopedia Of Loch Monsters, Sasquatch,*

some living examples of the species and sent a skull and some bits of striped skin back to England did the animal enter the system of modern animal classification as the *Okapia Johnstoni*.²

The taxonomic system of biological classification that is used nowadays is very much embedded in an academic tradition. It is usually attributed to the Swedish botanist and zoologist, Carl Linnaeus. He developed this method in the first half of the eighteenth century and promoted it in books such as *Systema Naturae*.³ The need for a universal biological system was there because of the onslaught of biologists using their own idiosyncratic taxonomic systems. Besides continuous re-classifications of the same species this also produced a lot of confusion. Before naturalists more or less universally accepted the system of Linnaeus, most encyclopedic works about the animal kingdom were a messy affair. Sources were only moderately available and because of the lack of a general order it was hard to confirm previous claims. In an unexplored world without global communities it was hard to distinguish between mythological beasts and existing animals.

² The African Okapi, A Beast Unknown To The Zoos, *The American Review Of Reviews* #57, Albert Shaw, 1918.

³ *Systema Naturae, sive regna tria naturae systematice proposita per classes, ordines, genera & species*, Carl Linnaeus, 1735.

One of the most well known examples of this can be found in an early bestiary called *Historiae Animalium*.⁴ This manuscript was written by professor Conrad Gesner and published between 1551-1558 and 1587 in Zurich. It is considered to be the first modern zoological work that tried to describe all the animals that were known to man at the time. This meant that Gesner also incorporated animals, which did not actually exist. Mythological creatures such as the unicorn were described and illustrated next to existing ones, such as the porcupine and the rhinoceros.

In 1669 Gesner's tome was amended and translated from Latin to German by a less well-known naturalist called Georgium Horstium.⁵ Thanks to his additions there now roamed another peculiar animal between all the bizarre and incredible animals that already filled the pages. It was a then recently discovered bird from the island of Mauritius known for its awful taste and enormous rear end. Dutch sailors had reported about it for the first time in 1598. ⁶ They named the bird the dodo, which probably originates from the Dutch word

⁴ *Historiae Animalium*, Conrad Gesner, 1551-1558, 1587.

⁵ *Vogel-Buch / Zweyter Theil. Franckfurt am Mayn: In Verlegung Wilhelm Serlins Buchhändlers*: p. 93, Conrad Gesner, 1669.

⁶ "The journal of the flagship *Gelderland* – dodo and other birds on Mauritius 1601". *Archives of Natural History* **30** (1): pp. 13–27, J.P. Hume, 2003.

dodaers, which means something along the lines of ‘fat-arse’. Horstium added the animal to the annotated version of Gesner’s bestiary as the *Cygnus cuculatus*, which translates to ‘cuckoolike swan’ (**fig. 2**).

The description of the animal, as well as the picture that accompanied it, was based on the research of the more renowned naturalist, Carolus Clusius who had already described it in 1605.⁷ Clusius based his description of the dodo “on observations of remains of the bird, such as a foot preserved at the house of a friend, the anatomist Peter Paauw, combined with the study of ship’s logs, wooden carvings and tales of sailors”.⁸ Because naturalists seldom traveled in the seventeenth century and dodo relics in Europe were scarce, it is very likely that Horstium had never seen remains of the bird himself, when he added Clusius his description to Gesner’s encyclopedia.

Historiae Animalium is full of illustrations of animals that the illustrators had never actually seen. Gesner based this illustration of a rhinoceros on a famous woodcut by Albrecht Dürer from 1515 (**fig 3**). Dürers famous and slightly misguided

⁷ *Exoticorum decem libris*, Carolus Clusius, 1605.

⁸ *Return of the Crazy Bird: The Sad, Strange Tale of the Dodo*: p. 136, Clara Pinto Correia, 2003.

depiction of a rhinoceros was also based on descriptions. A Moravian merchant and printer, Valentim Fernanded described an animal that he saw in Lissabon in 1515 in a letter to a friend in Nuremberg and accompanied it with a sketch. This letter made its way to Dürer who produced the Rhinoceros woodcuts based on its content. Several layers of interpretation add up to an almost mythological depiction of the animal.

Horstium would have not been aware that by the time he added the dodo to Gesner's encyclopedia in 1669 the animal was in all likelihood almost completely extinct. There are no undisputed claims of dodo sightings from after 1662. In this year a sailor called Volkert Evertszen got marooned on a small island a little off the coast from Mauritius and claimed to have seen some specimens.⁹ Besides a few stuffed specimens that had reached Europe some decennia earlier the creature was all but lost by the end of the seventeenth century. For the scientific community these relics of the extinct bird sufficed as proof of its existence. It was not common for researchers to travel far distances. As Clusius illustrates, research was mostly based on dead specimens brought along by travelers.

⁹ The report got published in *Orientalische Reisbeschreibung*, Adam Olearius, 1669.

Therefore, modern researchers regard historical descriptions of the dodo with some uncertainty. Travelers often let their imagination run wild and this was certainly the case with a bird as strange as the dodo. For instance, François Cauche, a Frenchman who took a trip to Mauritius claimed the bird had no tongue and placed a stone “the size of a chicken’s egg” next to its real egg that was “quite as large as a penny bun”.¹⁰ The need for reconsideration rose in the eighteenth century.

By 1755 nearly all physical dodo remains in Europe had been destroyed by moth and fire. In this year the stuffed bird that was kept in the Ashmole’s museum was ordered by the museums Vice-Chancellor and the other trustees to be destroyed because of the bad condition it was in. Only a claw and a skull were saved from the flames and until new dodo bones were found on Mauritius in 1865 these two relics, together with a foot kept at the British Museum, were the only physical remains of the bird available in England.¹¹

The dodo had seized to roam in the minds of men for most of the eighteenth century. Some naturalists even claimed

¹⁰ Published in *Relations véritable et curieuses de l’Isle de Madagascar et du Brésil*, François Cauche, 1651.

¹¹ *The Dodo: From Extinction to Icon*: pp. 116-123, Errol Fuller, 2003.

that the bird had never existed to begin with. They wanted to remove bird from the biological canon and condemn it to the realm of fiction. There was the need to reevaluate the evidence available and redefine the dodo. In the process a new field of study was born that would be recycled over the course of the next one hundred and fifty years: *Dodology*.

Chapter 2. Dodgy Dodology

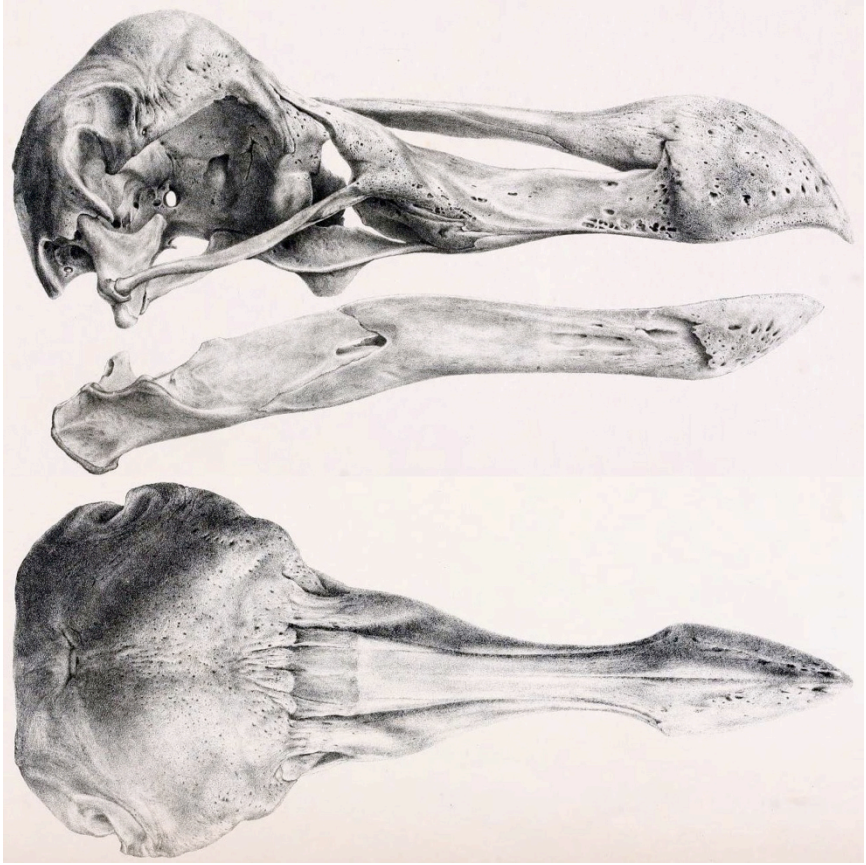


Plate from Strickland and Melville's The Dodo And Its Kindred from 1848 depicting an anatomic study of the Ashmole's Museum skull.

This chapter concerns itself with the way modern naturalists in the nineteenth century tried to demystify the dodo by distinguishing between speculation and fact. Their research

often gets described as *dodology* in twenty-first century literature about the bird.¹² The word *dodology* did not exist at the time that the first naturalists who studied the bird popped up. It is a tag that was added to their research with the 'benefit' of hindsight. Most dictionaries do not even contain a definition for the word. In this text *Dodology* can be defined as a specific type of research revolving around dodo's that differs from the encyclopaedic research mentioned in the previous chapter. This is because it does not concern itself with a plain description of a bird, but also focuses on its enigmatic nature, which is caused by its extinction.

In this sense *dodology* can be seen as a broader approach to a naturalist subject. It is a field of research that stretches over various disciplines. To provide a comprehensive history of the dodo and its cultural meaning one has to write about paintings, nautical history, biology, palaeontology and literature. By the turn of the nineteenth century the dodo was mostly a hypothetical creature. Few physical remains were left and texts that described the bird, such as the reports of sailors, were not taken for granted. There were a few portraits in existence that depicted the dodo, but these also asked for a closer observation. Nobody was sure what the dodo looked

¹² Correia, 2003: pp. 133-176.

like, how it behaved, to what animal family it belonged and why it went extinct.

This final question is perhaps one of the more enduring enigmas surrounding the dodo. The matter of extinction stirred up a very lively debate at the time that research on the dodo recommenced in the midst of the nineteenth century. The idea that mankind could lead an entire species into extinction was not as universally accepted as it is today. There was a widespread creationist belief that God had created all tangible animal life in a consistent form whilst creating the world and that these forms did not change over time. Creationist naturalists considered deviation of these original forms as an irregularity and incorporated this idea in theories that explained their cause.

An example of this can be found in the widespread idea of Lamarckian inheritance, which was developed from 1809 onwards and named after the French biologist Jean-Baptiste Lamarck.¹³ Lamarckism incorporates the idea that organisms pass on features that it acquired during its life to its descendants. The concept can be brought back to the catchphrase “use it or lose it”. For instance, the small wings of

¹³ The outlines of his theory are given in *Philosophie zoologique ou exposition des considérations relatives à l'histoire naturelle des animaux*, Jean-Baptiste Lamarck, 1809.

a dodo would be the result of its disuse of them. Lamarck still works from the idea of a creationist god and is able to define abnormalities as a form of degeneration from an original concept. This creationist belief would become one of the more prominent opponents of evolutionary thought in the second half of the nineteenth century.

The dodo stumbled in the midst of this debate when Sir Richard Owen, who was an outspoken opponent to Darwin's *Origin Of Species*, took up research on the creature.¹⁴ Nowadays, Owen is sometimes portrayed as a villain, due to some unfortunate plagiarism scandals and a feisty temperament in debate, but he was also considered a brilliant comparative biologist during his life.¹⁵ His research on the *Dinornithidae* or Giant Moa, an extinct giant bird species from New Zealand, made him the perfect candidate to study the dodo (**fig. 4**).¹⁶ Owen jumped into the field of *dodology* with a paper called *Observations on the Dodo* that was presented to

¹⁴ *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection, or the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life*, Charles Darwin, 1859.

¹⁵ *Richard Owen: Victorian Naturalist*, Nicolaas Rupke, 1994.

¹⁶ "On the remains of Dinornis, an extinct gigantic struthious bird". *Proceedings of the Zoological Society of London*: pp. 8–10, 144–146, Richard Owen, 1843.

the public in July 1846.¹⁷ Twenty years later, in 1866, he would publish *Memoir of the Dodo*, which is an example of careful comparative biology.¹⁸ Owen measured and analysed the few dodo remains that were available at the time and speculated about the physical properties of the bird. He attempted to make the first anatomically correct reconstruction of a complete dodo skeleton (**Fig. 5**).

By the time Owen published his reconstruction of the dodo in 1866 the existence of the bird was no longer disputed. There had been other studies that tried to make sense of all the speculation that surrounded the topic. The most significant for these is probably *The Dodo and its Kindred*, which was published in 1848 and written by H.E. Strickland and A.G. Melville.¹⁹ This book compared physical sources, literature and paintings. It is an example of early comparative culture studies that distinguishes between truth and fantasy. Owen would later adopt this interdisciplinary approach in *Memoir of the Dodo* by working with the naturalist William John Broderip who provided the preface for the booklet.

¹⁷ "On Dinoris," *Transations of the Zoological Society of London III*: pp. 235, 307, 345, Richard Owen, 1839-1848.

¹⁸ *Memoir of the Dodo, Didus Ineptus (Linn)*, Richard Owen, 1866.

¹⁹ *The dodo and its kindred or, The history, affinities, and osteology of the dodo, solitaire, and other extinct birds of the islands Mauritius, Rodriguez and Bourbon*, H. E. Strickland and A.G. Melville, 1848.

Both Owen and Strickland and Melville had tried to distinguish between myth and fact and both seemed to agree on the credibility of particular accounts and depictions. However, they had a difference in opinion when it came to declaring where the strange morphology of the dodo came from. Their debate happened on the level of scientific interpretation. The dodo was considered to be an example of *paedomorphosis*, which is the retention by adults of traits that are previously seen only in the young. In the case of the dodo this can be found in the small size of its wings and chick-like plumage, which are common traits to young birds that have not left the nest.

Strickland was very much a disciple of Darwin's evolutionary theory and saw the appearance of the dodo as the result of it fitting in with its surrounding circumstances. The dodo would have been fit for the conditions on Mauritius and extinction got attributed to the outside influence of man. Owen however, was a supporter of Lamarck's morphology theory and saw the small size of the wings as the result of degeneration that went against the concept of the original bird. For him, the dodo was a malformation, doomed for extinction. The idea that species were the result of anything else, such as evolution, as Strickland suggested, was laughable to him: "This

notion of type-forms or centres, unfortunately, has not merely relation to abstract biological speculations or theories, but to practical questions on which the true progress of Natural History vitally depends.”²⁰ It was a theoretical difference of opinion that could not be resolved, because it did not concern itself with any physical matter and the conclusion was already there. Whatever the case was, the dodo failed to adapt to its most recent changes in circumstances and remained extinct.

Chapter 3. Miscellaneous media

²⁰ Owen, 1866.



John Tenniel's illustration of the dodo in Lewis Carroll's Alice in Wonderland from 1865.

After the pioneering studies by Strickland and Owen several enigmas surrounding the dodo were cleared up, but some questions remained. Unfortunately, the few physical

sources on which their research was based could not answer all of these. To come up with a solution to them speculation arose that was fuelled by scientific concepts of the time. This chapter concerns itself with what type of speculation remains after an established academic approach has defined a subject, such as the dodo. It will also compare this approach to 'new' archaeological studies, such as 'media archeology'.

Dodology is the study of something which is evidently lost and of which only referential matter remains. Studying references has become a specific field of study in itself. The scientifically sound comparative studies of Owen and Strickland are still mentioned in later *dodology* studies and taken for fact, but the speculation that added to these texts changes over time. There were only few additions to the general knowledge of the dodo added after 1866. *Dodology* papers began to consist of reiterations of a couple of undisputed facts produced by source material with an addition of theoretical speculation.

One of the more noteworthy examples of this is A.C. Oudemans *Dodo-Studiën* from 1917.²¹ In this book the Dutch zoologist used the alleged finding of the image of a dodo in a

²¹ *Dodo-studiën; Naar aanleiding van de vondt van een gevelsteen met dodo-beeld van 1561 te Vere*, Anthonie Cornelis Oudemans, 1917.

gable stone from 1561 to speculate about the supposed travels of a dodo to Europe with the help of the Portugese (**fig. 6**). Not only was this idea particularly far-fetched, it was also a little too sensational when it is taken into account that the first acknowledged mention of the dodo was made in 1598, 37 years after the production of the gable stone. The fact that the text under the image of the bird tells it's an ostrich also does not help. Such excessive historic guesswork is only possible when the *dodologist* is in search of new silent witnesses and ignores previous sources. Later texts criticize Oudemans methods, but appear fascinated by them, which causes *Dodo-Studieën* to keep being mentioned.²²

This fascination for the unlikely and the speculative texts that iterates them, appear to be as much part of the mythmaking surrounding the bird as its physical remains. Perhaps this is caused by the fact that so few new findings are made and the same research gets repeated over and over again. Besides the occasional find of a new image that Strickland and Owen did not know of, not many new historical sources are being found (**fig. 7**). The same historical eyewitnesses are dragged up, the same bones and skulls measured and the same pictures analysed. Sometimes this is

²² *The Dodo: From Extinction to Icon*, Errol Fuller, 2003.

done from the perspective of a veterinarian.²³ At other times an art historian sheds some light on the matter.²⁴ Although this can lead to interesting new theories, most of these do not lead to an addition to knowledge about the actual dodo. Instead there is only an extension of literary speculation which *dodologists* need to take into account.

The continuous speculation about the creature, mixed with its recycling as an image in popular culture lengthen the span of material that *dodologists* can study. In 1865 the writer and mathematician Lewis Carroll introduced the dodo as a character in *Alice in wonderland* and gave the bird another life in the public imagination.²⁵ Though the physical dodo is dead and *dodology* is basically a recycled discourse from the nineteenth century, the human interest in extinct animals makes it as much alive as ever. The existence of the text you are now reading is proof enough for that. This text can function in itself as a study object for later dodo studies. As long as people stay fascinated with the bird *dodologists* have something to research.

²³ *Het dodo mysterie: de dodo gezien door de ogen van een dierenarts*, Gerard Th. F. Kaal, 2012.

²⁴ *Uiterlijk van de dodo*, Eline Levering, 2009.

²⁵ *Alice In Wonderland*, Lewis Carroll, 1865.

The scientific reconstruction of the dodo by Owen, combined with the popular reimagining by Carroll was the start of something that can be described as a dodo craze. From 1865 and onward the dodo reappeared in illustrations and literature countless times. Besides appearing on the national crest of Mauritius, the bird had its own tv show²⁶ and showed up in various instances of juvenile fiction.²⁷ Sometimes the bird represents extinction, since it was one of the first animals to raise awareness on this topic. At other times the dodo is just a cuddly plush toy (**fig. 8**). Whatever the case may be, the actual dodo is not necessarily present in these instances.

The modern *dodologist* not only has to make sense of the bird that walked across the island of Mauritius, but also of these later reincarnations. I previously emphasized the fact that *dodology* borrows academic tools from various disciplines. It could be said that if there would be a single specific academic approach that is manifested in its practice it is this eclectic method. One particular view on the dodo never suffices. This approach is very similar to the academic practice of cultural studies, which is also characteristically interdisciplinary. Just like with *dodology* a large number of sources are being used to theorize about an abstract concept.

²⁶ *Dodo le Retour*, 1995.

²⁷ For instance: *Dodo's are forever*, Dick King-Smith, 1990.

One of these is media. These are objects that store or deliver information or data. As such, they are containers of something else. Researchers concerned with new media are interested in the interplay between these containers, their information and the people who use them.

The dodo can be considered as a speculative object since the arrival of its popular imagery. Certain concepts and ideas get projected on the bird, which make it a container of information. These are spread by means of fiction on a commercial and mediated level. The link between media and dodo's is not so far fetched. There is even a field of media studies that focuses on 'extinct' media of which few historical sources are left. This is 'media archaeology'. The media-archaeologist Erkki Huhtamo stresses that "media Archaeologists have challenged the rejection of history by modern media culture and theory alike by pointing out hitherto unnoticed continuities and ruptures. As a consequence, the area for media studies has been pushed back by centuries and extended beyond the western world. On the basis of their discoveries media archaeologists have begun to construct alternate histories of suppressed, neglected and forgotten media that do not point teleologically to the present media-cultural condition as their "perfection." Dead ends,

losers and inventions that never made it into a material product have important stories to tell.”²⁸

The actual dodo, like the neglected media that Huhtamo writes about, is ‘a loser’ in more than one way. Nowadays there is a general awareness of it having existed, but knowledge of the bird from before it went extinct is limited and unfortunately irretrievable. Fact and myth were entangled in the nineteenth century in biological studies, but with the absence of the bird itself questions remained. These were filled up by imagination, resulting in a popular culture doppelgänger of the dodo, estranged from its material source. The image of a fat, clumsy bird, informed by the repeated depiction of imaginary pictures, replaced the actual bird in popular culture and shoved aside the research done by Strickland and Owen **(fig. 9)**.

Media Archeology deals with a similar distinction between popular myths and little known facts. The early history of modern media is one of showmen and countless variations of crossover entertainment, starting vividly from the eighteenth century. Dioramas, moving panoramas and phantasmagoria filled the fairs. Historical sources of these are scarce, though a popular image remains in film and literature.

²⁸ Erkki Huhtamo, 2011: p. 3.

The actual contraptions are usually not around, while advertisements for these are **(fig. 10)**. At the same time these descriptions on these are usually regarded with some suspicion, as they tend to overstate matters such as their size and length.

A scrutinizing source related study of moving panoramas such as Huhtamo's *Illusions In Motion* shares similarities with Strickland's *The Dodo And Its Kindred*.²⁹ After the examination of all the remaining historical sources not all questions surrounding the contraptions will be answered. Only through speculation will later media archaeologists be able to answer remaining enigmas. The importance of a particular panorama, what kind of audience it attracted and what it depicted can no longer be stated without doubt. There is a limit to what can be known, but no limit to what researchers want to know.

Perhaps 'the losers' of history are more concrete than 'the winners' of today. *New Media* is the opposite field of research from media archaeology and concerns itself with contemporary media.³⁰ Ever since its entry on a social

²⁹ *Illusions in motion: Media Archaeology of the Moving Panorama and Related Spectacles*, Erkki Huhtamo, 2013.

³⁰ *The New Media Reader*, Noah Wardrip-Fruin and Nick Montfort, 2003.

discursive level there have been theorists who tried to define it, hoping to pinpoint either the current state we are living in or to predict future trends that are bound to happen. *New Media* is sometimes perceived and depicted as a futuristic utopian apparatus that takes humanity to the next step³¹ and sometimes as an evil commoditised structure that estranges mankind from its essence.³² It could be said that the forward thinking technological fancy that was so typical for *new media studies* at the turn of the twentieth century has given way to a theorization of what already happened. This can happen in the form of anti-futurism³³, anti-media³⁴ or anti-retro.³⁵ With the aging of the *New* a speculative approach rises. Mythmaking is in the work as it has been doing since the dawn of mankind.

All that could be known about the dodo through what is left of it had already been described by the end of the nineteenth century. This was followed a reevaluation of these discoveries and an expansion on them by means of footnotes. The actual dodo remained dead, while a speculative iconic dodo grew. To make sense of this, literature about these

³¹ *Cyberspace Odyssey. Towards a Virtual Ontology and Anthropology*, Jos de Mul, 2010.

³² *You Are Not a Gadget: A Manifesto*, Jaron Lanier, 2011.

³³ *Imaginary Futures*, Richard Barbrook, 2005.

³⁴ *Anti-Media: Ephemera On Speculative Arts*, Florian Cramer, 2013.

³⁵ *Retromania*, Simon Reynolds, 2011.

projected animals popped up. Something similar appears to happen in the realm of *new media*. *Dodology* now focuses on the fictional iconic incarnations of the bird as a study object in its own right. *New Media*, like any type of hopeful avant-garde started revolving around itself by means of redefinition. While both subjects appear quite different from the outset, the way their theory is defined by fact and fancy is very alike.

Conclusion



Photograph of a reconstructed dodo, reflecting new research. It was taken at an exhibition at the Oxford Museum of Natural History in 2011.

For some years now there has been talk of reviving the dodo with the help of genetic cloning. It is not the only animal that

scientists wish to bring from the dead. There has been talk of reviving mammoths, Tasmanian tigers, aurochs and passenger pigeons among others. No animal that ever fell into calamity is safe from the possibility of being brought back with the help of modern biology. A species brought back from the dead, like the recycled dodo, would be able to set disastrous matters straight again and 'correct' history. Furthermore, it would show the power of humans over the animal kingdom. Unfortunately, the historical fact that the dodo has gone extinct cannot be corrected so easily. The resurrected dodo would be a product of human fancy and not nature. The remaining gaps of what is known about the bird have to be filled up by speculation. The resurrected dodo would not be the same bird as the one that went extinct in the seventeenth century, not by definition and not by nature.

This text was never a quest to find out the exact morphology of the dodo. It deals with the way fact and fancy shapes and changes an icon with the help of human speculation and scientific papers. It is about how human beings tend to the past by means of material sources and use its matter to shape an ideal present and future. Speculation functions as a feedback loop, it creates interest and from this new speculation arises. The interest in cloning the dodo

originates from a more general human interest in the bird that can be found both in the bestiaries of the early naturalists and in the comparative papers of the nineteenth century biologists. These contributed to the later popular interest in the bird, which made it into an icon that is not concerned with the actual bird that used to live on Mauritius. Cloning can be perceived as a way to reshape the extinct animal. It functions also a tool of correctional power of history. Speculation does the same on both levels.

Before the foundation of the modern university with its standardized scientific methods in the seventieth century, the dodo entered the animal realm in a fictional menagerie filled with mythical creatures such as unicorns and phoenixes. Because it was not actually seen by the people who described it, the bird was a speculative creature from the start. After it went extinct, its legendary status grew, until Victorian scientists started researching its physical remains methodically to find out what the truth behind what was written. Unfortunately, with the absence of the bird itself, everything that could not be determined by material sources had to be theorized over and the bird remained part speculation. Popular culture and imagery redefined the dodo

as a fat and clumsy bird, an icon of extinction that was always heading towards extinction.

These fictional reconstructions of the dodo, which can be seen as the iconic dodo, became another object of research for *dodologists*. Texts started to be not so much about the actual bird, but everything around it. A similar theoretical approach can be perceived in *media archaeology*. Both are concerned with subject matters of which little historical sources remain and both theorize and speculate to answer certain questions of which no definite answer exist. Texts about media also seem to be more about other texts about media than the media objects themselves. It appears both *doodology* and *media studies* revolve around themselves and study their own speculative myths.

There is no conclusion to this matter, because there are no sources that can fill up the gaps of what can be known. The past will be reiterated again and again while the present is also redefined in conjunction with the redefinition of the past. Myths become truths and truths become myths. What is new now is old tomorrow. The more enigmatic and scarce an object is, the more appeal it will have as an object for research. This was the case at the dawn of modern biology and it still is so today. However, this theoretic guesswork might be the exact

thing that got researches enthusiastic to write about the topic. Perhaps all is exactly where it belongs. Everything belongs to the past, present and future at all times, be it man, pen or dodo.

Images



Fig. 1. Relief detail of what is considered to be an okapi at the Apadana palace at Persepolis in Iran. The animal in the relief is being led by Ethiopians as Tribute. The building of the palace commenced in 515 BCE.

Cygnus cuculatus.



Clusius erzehlet daß die Holländer diese seltsame Schwanen auß der Insel Cygnea il ha docirne oder Schwanen Insel gebracht haben/und beschreibet sie also: dieser fremde Vogel ist so groß/oder fast größer als ein Schwan/von welchen er aber sich weit unterscheidet/was die Gestalt des Leibes betrifft/ dann dieser Vogel einen dicken Kopff hat/welcher gleichsam mit einer Kappe bedeckt/auch keinen breiten/ sondern einen dicken langē Schnabel hat / dessen Obertheil dunkelgelb biß auff die Spitze / so schwarz ist. Der Untertheil aber ziehet sich auff blaw. In dem ganzen Leib hat er dünne und kurze Federn. Er hat keine Flügel/sondern an stat derer 4 oder 5 lange schwarze Federn. Der Hintertheil dieses Vogels soll gar stark und fett seyn/ woran er anstatt des Schwanzes 4. oder 3. aschenfarbe krause Federn über sich stehē hat. Seine Beine sind nach Gestalt des Leibes stark/welche oben umb das Knie mit schwarzen

Federn bedeket/am Untertheil aber dunkelgelb sind. An den Füßen soll dieser Vogel nur 2. Zehen habē/alle mit schwarzen Klawen versehen. Nierenbergius gedencket/daß er bey Petro Pavvio ein Bein von solchē Schwanen gesehen/welches von dem Fuß biß zu dem Knie nicht mehr als 4. Zoll lang/aber das Bein in die Runde gemessen 4. Zoll dicke gewesen seyn. Fornen seyn das Bein mit grossen/hinten aber mit kleinen Schuppen bedeket gewesen/deßgleichen auch die Füße oben waren / unten aber sollen sie ganz dickschwällicht seyn. Nach Gestalt der dicken Bein/ sol dieser Vogel kurze Zehen haben/und sollen die mittelfsten und längsten nur 2. Zoll/die nebenstehende kürzer/un die hinterste kau einen halben Zoll lāg seyn. Die Klauē sollen hergegen lang seyn/und sonderlich die hinterste über einen Zoll hinauff gehen.

Die Schiffer haben diesen Schwanen den Nahmen gegeben Walghvogel/einen Vogel welcher Eckel erregt/theils weil er von hartem Fleisch und übel zu vertawen/theils aber/daß sie in gedachter Insel besser Geflügel angetroffen. In ihren Magen/haben sich unterschiedliche Stein befunden/deren einer Nierenbergius bey diesem Vogel abmahlen lassen/aber zu muhtmassen ist/daß solche nicht bey ihnen gewachsen/sondern zu besserer Vertawung nach aller Vogel Artz/an dem Ufer aufgelesen haben. Die weil diese Insel ganz wüst und unbewohnt ist/sollen diese Vogel so zahlr seyn/daß sie vor keinem Menschen weichen/sondern sich schlagen und fangen lassen.

Fig 2. Page 83 of the amended German translation of Gesner's *Historiae Animalium* from 1669 depicting Clusius' research of the dodo.



decem, ut ipse mensuravit, longitudine excedit: & diameter eius in radice sesquipalmum, (sequis lo-
sarem intelligo,) superabat, Hæc ille, in sepe autem facit, primam quod a sinam Indicum ex Aristo-
tele scribers solipedem esse, mox rhinocerotem animal bisulcum interpretatur; deinde, quod rhino-
mitem & unicornem confundit; tertio, quod archa uel archos Arabicum nomen faciens libro se-
cundo, (corruptum forte à uoce karas,) duodecimo principem interpretatur ac si Græca esset. Sed et
prioritas ista cornu, decem pedes excedens, rhinoceroti puto non conuenit, sed monoceroti carta-
bono, nam Oppianus rhinocerotis cornu paruum (hoc est breue, Gillius quoque paruum transferit)
ita scribit: *διεπέρι τ' οὐκ ἴσχυεν πικρὴ δαρδύλιος ἕλπιος ἄνιψ, ἀνταρπύδιον, ἀνταρπύδιον.* Quod si quis uerbum *διεπέρι*
non ad cornu quantitate, sed ad loci distantiam referat, hoc sensus: paulo supra extremum narium
ostende, & acutissimum cornu oritur: nos tamen ex ipsa picture quam ad usum dedimus, propo-
nere, cornu breue esse conuincemus: nam cum supra nares incipiat, & multo infra aures desinat,

Fig. 3. Page 953 of Gesner's *Historiae Animalium* made somewhere between 1551 and 1558, depicting a rhinoceros inspired by a picture made by Albrecht Durer in 1515.



Fig. 4. A photograph of sir Richard Owen with the skeleton. The picture is taken from *Memoirs on the extinct winfless birds of New Zealand: Vol. 2. plate XCVII*, Richard Owen, 1879.

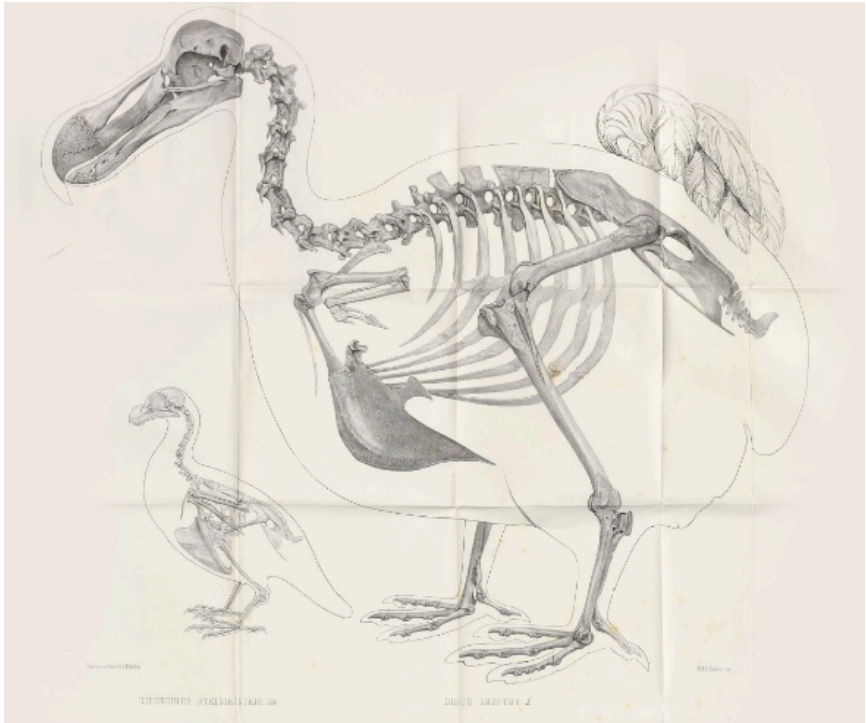


Fig. 5. Lithographic Plate from Richard Owen's *Memoir of the Dodo* (1865) depicting a speculative reconstruction of its bone structure.



Fig .6. Photograph of the façade of *het Schotsche huis* in Vere with the presumed dodo gable stone. The picture is taken from Oudemans' *Dodo-studiën* (1917).



Fig. 7. Sketch of a dodo head by Cornelis Saftleven from 1638, which may be one of the last illustrations made of a living dodo.



Fig. 8. Photograph of a plush dodo toy, which is sold online for 35 dollars a piece.



Fig. 9. Movie still from the digitally animated movie *Ice Age* (2002), depicting three fat, clumsy dodos.

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Fig. 10. An original advertisement of the myriopticon, a moving panorama from the nineteenth century.

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