

THE ANXIOUS POP

ON THE BLACKNESS OF SCIENTIFIC AND
OTHER SWANS (excerpt)*Jan Bovelet, Kai Dolata (urbikon.com)*

“AB + Ab + aB + ab + 2ABb + 2aBb + 2AaB + 2Aab + 4AaBb”¹

Science herds its own sorting of swans; Science Swans are discoverable, object-based things. If a swan is a member of a scientific herd, its color is either white or black. The color, or the gradation of Design Swans, in contrast, is nothing a designer discovers, rather something he invents in a process.

One black swan is all it takes to make the scientific all-swans-are-white theory history. Science is invested in corralling herds of white swans, prioritizing the size of the herd, and denying interaction with black swans. In design, you find swans in every grayscale between black and white. Additionally, Design Swans’ gradation very often changes within the black-white spectrum over the course of history.

In design, the familiar relationships between all swans within a herd determine whether a newly hatched swan is black or gray. It’s rather unlikely that a swan hatches as white, but not impossible, as some Design Swans know the art of identical reproduction, and thus design their own progeny.

An ideal exemplar of a Design Swan is one that hatches in black and immediately turns white after it has been released into the wild—a phenomenon that is generally uncommon. In design, swans very often hatch in gray and stay gray for a lifetime. They may turn slightly lighter, but they never become completely white. Gray swans comprise the majority of the Design Swan population.

The second largest contingent of the Design Swan

herd is white. In brushing their plumage and observing a healthy diet, they follow a more stable way of life and are thus the easiest to corral.

If a Design Swan ever turns white, it stays white; it’s petrified white unless society changes, unless fashion changes. There is no way for a Design Swan to become darker again, unless the whole breed is roused or moved into a different environment.

The smallest part of a Design Swan herd, however, is black, the most ephemeral color of all. Already nearly impossible to invent or breed a pure black swan, it is veritably impossible for such an exemplar to conserve its blackness. As soon as it enters its herd of swans, it starts to bleach. Bringing it into contact with others affects its brightness; it either immediately turns white or it turns grayer and grayer until it eventually turns white. But the more shades of gray a Design Swan assumes, the more unlikely it is that it will turn white at all.

Science Swans and Design Swans are not common in nature, even in light of recent crossbreeding. Science Swans are either white or black, often changing from one to the other but never remaining indeterminate, never gray. If a white swan mates with a black swan, their offspring is either white or black. If a Science Swan is born black or becomes black, it is excluded from the herd, as it challenges the canonical forms and conventions of the herd. In contrast, Design Swans only reveal their color when confronting other swans of their herd; they are valued as black precise-

ly because they bear the potential to challenge the forms and conventions of the herd. The only agency a designer has is his freedom to arrange Design Swans, but only within a linear spectrum, from black to white, which is only possible by taking the relation of every arbitrary pair of swans into consideration. This can lead to a potentially infinite task and thus calls

for an active, creative solution. If the designer separates one Design Swan from the herd, two strange things occur: first, the swan he selects turns out to be colorless, and second, all the swans in the herd become darker or lighter, as the herd—which determines the color of each single swan—transforms its identity.

1. Development scheme for hybrids with two varying attributes: Gregor Mendel, *Versuche über Pflanzen-Hybriden* (Brünn, 1866), 28.