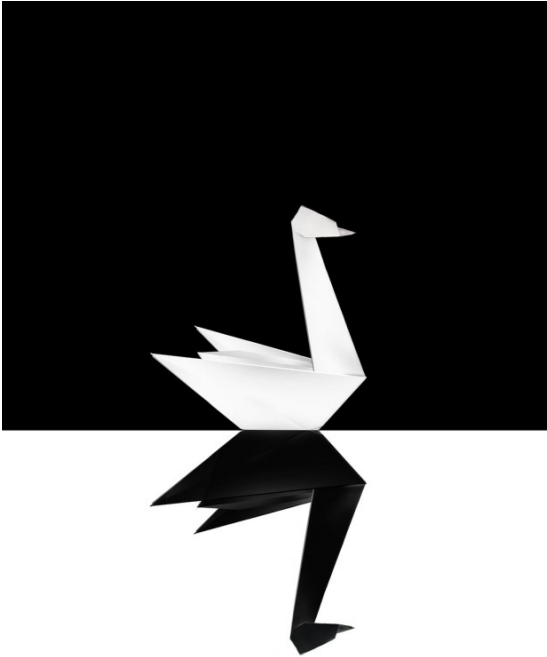




FACTVM
FOVNDATION
FOR DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY
IN CONSERVATION



Of Black Swans and Hope

25-02-2015

One of the activities that make us different as humans from most other animals is planning - and planning requires that truly distinct and humanly defining emotion, hope. Without hope we are nothing and with hope - we have a future, we plan. We plan and we try to anticipate so that our lives can be fruitful and we can derive the greatest pleasure, fun, progress, tranquillity, grace, development, productivity - whatever is our hope and desire - from the efficient and organised use of time and resource. It is all rather dry but it works - to an extent

We are surprised when the unexpected happens - obviously - or it would be expected and not a surprise. We've all heard of Lorenz's butterfly effect - we live in a big world where the contagion of events has become normal and understandable, we know every effect has a cause. But what is remarkable is how we don't factor in Black Swan events.

Much has been written since Nassim Taleb named and described the concept so clearly - and much has been developed by mathematicians and economists and chaos theorists and risk managers so that fat tail events can be worked into our thinking, our modelling, into our planning. But we are still thrown by circumstances that come out of left field. We plan to have a contract signed, a trip to visit something wonderful, an assignation that we just can't wait for, a plane to somewhere important to us and then some event, that may or not have any relation whatever to our plan, occurs and the plan is destroyed - and we are surprised, upset, annoyed or even devastated. Remember the Icelandic volcano. Where were you? We shouldn't be, of course. We should be intelligent enough to factor in these events - but we - as a civilisation and as individuals - aren't. We hope for the best. And it works, normally.

If you read these Opinion pieces you will know what's coming..... There is one way we can beat the gods, the odds, the fates and do something that mitigates against our inability to anticipate the unexpected, to predict change which is, of course, inevitable. That is - record precisely what we have so that at least those objects we really care about, are important to us, can be passed on to our grateful descendents. Though we can't manage our lives perfectly we can record and preserve digitally, almost with perfection, so those things that make up our soul, our culture, are preserved from the Black Swan event - or just from change. Preserved for ever - preserved so that any intervention can be monitored, preserved so that if terrorists destroy the original we still have our precise record.

Why don't we - well, we don't think anything will happen, we hope it will be OK.....the Foundation is built on the idea that just maybe it won't be, completely and if it is - terrific - we can preserve and we can enjoy the peace of mind knowing that we have.