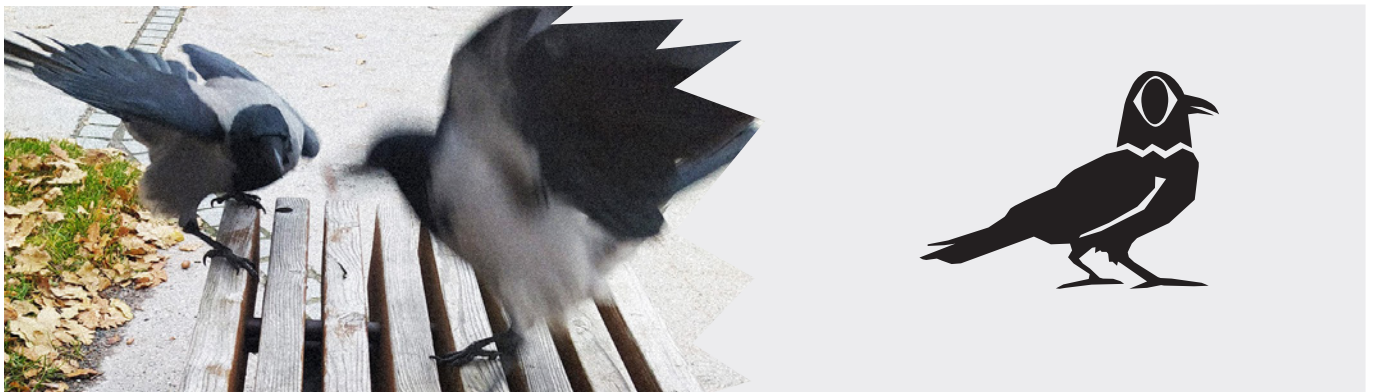
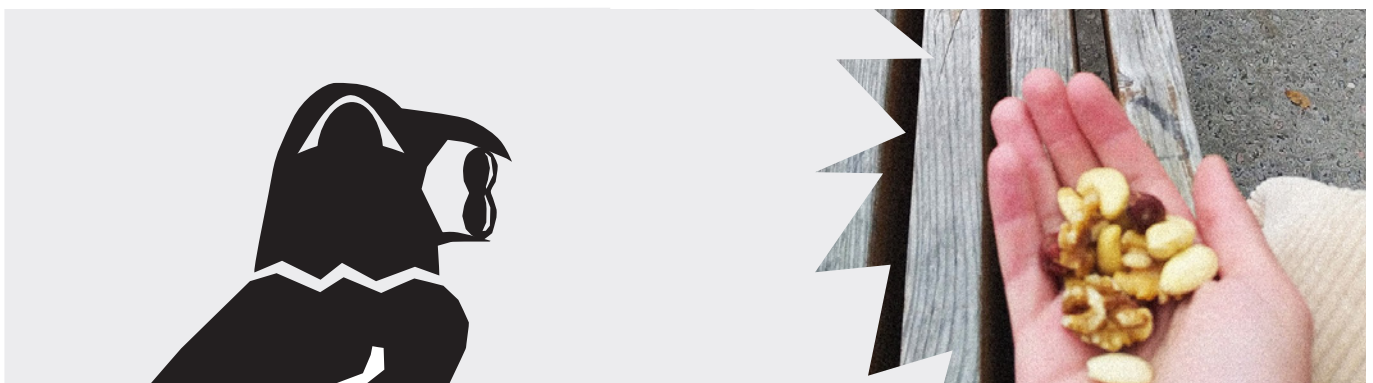


The interest started in Helsinki after observing the crows roam the city, the fact that it is possible to find them in areas with high human traffic. In Portugal, it's not common to encounter crows at all, let alone co-existing in the same spaces as humans. When I was introduced to the "Feral Design" concept, I had a small idea of what this term could mean. I am fascinated by nature and wildlife, I thought it was an adjective that served to give the connotation of wild, uncontrolled or even pure. Learning the meaning of different feral terms, new ideas and ways of thinking about crows started to form.

As the first exercise of the course, we were asked to choose an other-than-human identity that we encountered in everyday life and that could somehow represent us, and we would like to get to know better. The crows quickly came to my mind, so I decided to pick them and embark in this research. I researched about their behavior, food, origin, similar species and the most curiosities we (humans) found about these birds. I was surprised, a fascinating discovery! Not only that, but I found similarities with crows that I never expected to find - the only idea I had before starting research was that they were very intelligent animals and that they had a very large brain compared to their size.



I discovered that crows are very complex creatures. They live in communities, grouping together in winter due to extreme weather and food conditions. Crows help parents raise new offspring, scare off predators together, and hold funerals for the dead. - This demonstrates an enormous level of emotional intelligence. Among other things, these birds can remember faces and communicate them back to their community. - It is common for humans to establish a feeding relationship with crows. By exchanging food, crows are able to bring back shiny objects to reward humans. Crows can create ingenious tools for their goals. They create hooks with pine needles to reach insects in more difficult holes, they use the crumbs given by humans as bait to catch fish. I found more in common with this bird than I had initially thought. This creature has a profound intelligence and made me think about how is possible to have such a negative connotation. It is depicted as a scavenger feeding on scraps, a pest to humans. Through research, I learned that the easiest way to get close to crows was with the help of food. I researched their favorite food, all types of nuts - peanuts, almonds, walnuts, cashews, acorns, etc. Did you know that crows love eggs, of all types, boiled, scrambled, raw or even in the form of an omelet?

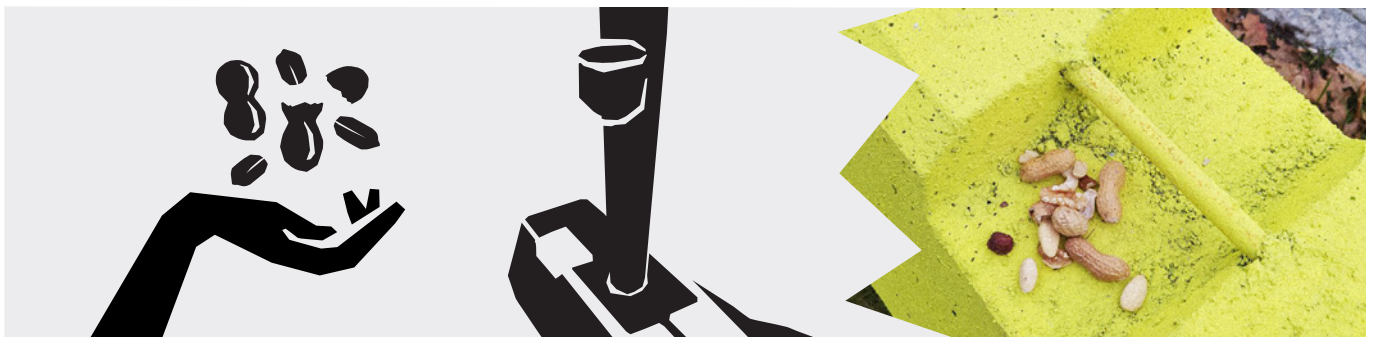


At Aalto University I observed for several days the places where I saw the largest concentration of crows: The oak tree near Väre entrance, on the roof of the Undergraduate center, and the many pine trees that surround Ablock square. I chose a point that intersected the birds' path through these three sites. My more-than-human place was a humble oak tree that is accompanied by a trash can, two benches and traffic signs. It was easy to interact with the crows without being disturbed by people walking around.

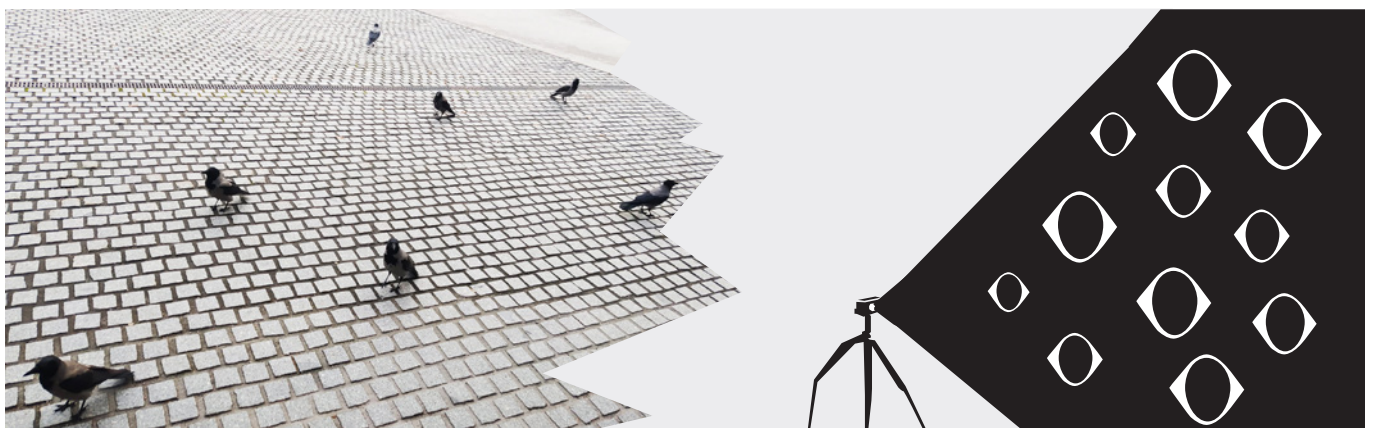


I started to document my interactions with the crows, during several weeks I brought them nuts in the morning. At first the crows were very suspicious of my behavior and many were easily scared until one was the bravest and took the peanut from my hand. I filmed the different interactions and wrote about them.

- Crows have unique personalities. After some time, a hierarchy became obvious when interacting with several crows. They copied each other by imitating the fastest movements to get to the peanuts. I decided it was time to raise the bar and create some feeders using a plastic bottle. I placed them both suspended from traffic signs that were present at the location. I filled them in the morning. Without any apparent interaction, each time I returned the following day, the peanuts I had left behind mysteriously disappeared.
- Who is the "peanut monster"? I took a camera and try to record the crows near the feeders and even eating from my hand, but without any success. During this stage the weather conditions were not the best, it rained and when the temperature permitted it snowed. This meant that the number of times I saw the crows was greatly reduced.



The moment I most wanted to document the crows and when I thought I had the necessary tools to do so, I couldn't find any. Am I being sensed by the crows? Do these more-than-human creatures have an even greater intelligence than I have studied? A "sixth" sense? Why don't these birds come just because I left their favorite food?





Even with all the great data I got, I still wanted to know more about them. It just wasn't enough. We don't live on the same frequency, their ecosystem is much more complex. The crows' rhythm is dictated by more-than-human factors than just a few nuts. My approach reached a point of no sense.

I had to take a step back. Find the higher reason for the knowledge these animals hold. I found a path in Norse mythology. The first depictions of this bird are documented in Norse mythology - Odin, the god of all beings and all gods, has two ravens that co-exist on his shoulders. Odin's human form is incomplete, he needs Hugin (mind) and Munin (memory) to fly over the earth and gather information, the news among humans. Odin releases the ravens every morning, and they always return at the end of the day - for dinner. Here we can see the first depictions of symbiosis between a god and an animal, working towards a common goal. What were the reasons for this powerful entity to choose the raven among countless creatures? Could it be that the intelligence of crows belongs to the gods? It refers to a greater intelligence, something that I couldn't understand with my attempts. Are the crows smarter than me?

Between symbols and Nordic mythology discovered the term Fylja - "a supernatural being or spirit which accompanies a person in connection to their fate or fortune." Could it be that the crows are connected to me in some way? Could the crows know more about my meaning? Is it possible to make sense with an animal that has more sense than me?



I reached a new resolution. Crows are more intelligent and complex than I initially thought, their knowledge was lost with time. They live by their rules in their ecosystem. It was futile to think that I could somehow change their day-to-day lives. Despite my efforts, crows live in their own reality and only in the same environment as us, humans. I learned as much as I could from crows, I learned about their food, their intelligence, their meaning, their ecosystem. Unconsciously, these animals taught me more than I could ever teach them, the complexity of things are in the fabric that makes them curious. How can I thank the crows, how can I give back to them? These questions flooded my mind to, I thought greater gesture in the form of gratitude. In my research, I discovered that one of the first depictions of Odin was on a Bracteate: A single sided gold medal worn as jewelry produced in Northern Europe during the Migration Period. This artifact symbolizes ostentation and served as an ornament for the Nordic people. It was here that I found a way to represent the knowledge acquired throughout the course, an ornament that serves to materialize and symbolize my wanted gesture. How do I transform this object for crow consumption? These birds are unable to wear this pendant around their neck. However, can they perhaps eat it? It was at this point that I went back to the beginning of the research, peanuts - crows love peanuts and all types of nuts. I can recreate this in a form of a peanut-shaped bracteate. I wanted to materialize my gesture of gratitude in a medal that the crows could eat.



source: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bracteate>

The gratitude ritual began. I created an identity that expresses all the emotions I felt when interacting, discovering and co-creating with the crows. This identity took shape in several illustrations that could tell this story in a striking way. I researched the Nordic style and what the ancient illustrations used in Nordic mythology were like, their simple layout characterized by the contrast of color and dramatic strong lines. Based on this, I developed my own style and proceeded to create various illustration telling our story. - this later become the base for my presentation.

I spent time perfecting the illustration of the crow. The specie that habits in Helsinki are characterized by having two main colors of feathers, dividing their head from the rest of the body, hence the name Hooded Crow - I made sure to have this important detail present. It represents the location, the characteristic that defines them from other species of crows. Crows in mythology are the eyes of the sky, their eyes see everything. Although they are not big in real life, these birds metaphorically see beyond the simple realm of humans. With the illustration of the crow, I created two variations that represent two contrasting sides obvious in this research: The feral side of crows, the domesticated side, the knowledge lost in time, the interpretation of mortals and their ignorance. On the other hand an illustration that symbolizes the mythological, the divine, the meaning without the understanding of humans, the one that looks over us all, the extension of a god in the form of an animal

To create the nut bracteates, I researched several recipes with natural ingredients where there was no problem for crows to eat, although crows are designated as omnivores. The recipe chosen was peanut butter cookies made with simple ingredients: peanut butter, butter, flour, eggs and sugar. These cookies do not rise in the oven, which means I can easily stamp my illustrations. 3D modeled and printed in PLA (food safe) a stamp that could leave a mark on these cookies. The process was straightforward, I followed the recipe and mixed the dough by hand without any electronic tool. - Does more effort equal more reward? First I mixed the dry ingredients and then the rest. Rolled out various balls and stamped the dough with the crow illustration. They cooked for about 10 minutes. Reflections happened while waiting for the cookies to become hard. Will the crows eat this cookie? Will they like it? Will they feel my effort? Will they understand my act of gratitude? Will their divine intelligence show itself the moment I leave the nut bracteates in my more-than-human place?



The next day I continued with the plan, went exactly to the place where I had interacted with the crows and left my artifact there. On this day, there were no signs of crows, only my place. I left the artifact and move on with my day.. Did they eat them? Did they acknowledge my gratitude? Was my effort enough to understand these creatures? I didn't look back, I didn't check, it's not for me, it's for them.