

Emotidon

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An Experiment in Dinosaur Aesthetics

Imagination and Identification at the Limits of Knowledge

by

Chris Wildrick

INPUT/OUTPUT PRESS
SYRACUSE, NY

Chris wishes to thank everyone who filled out the *Emotidon* form, including the many visitors to his exhibitions and performances at the Redhouse, XL Projects, and the Museum of the Earth.

Emotidon is an ongoing project conceived, performed, and presented in multiple formats and locations by Chris Wildrick, ©2008-2010.

This book edition of *Emotidon* was analyzed, written, designed, printed, and hand-bound by Chris Wildrick, ©2010, and published by INPUT/OUTPUT PRESS in Syracuse, NY.

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The typefaces used in the body of this book are Arno and **Futura**.

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INTRODUCTION

Chris is studying the role of dinosaurs in our culture. Each project in this series approaches this subject from a different angle. *Emotidon* seeks to find insights into our subconscious mind as it relates to dinosaurs.

Methodology

Chris has done this project in a few different ways, but they have all been based on the same basic process. Chris created ten images that look similar to the images from the Rorschach Test. (The original Rorschach Test images are supposed to be a secret, but can be found online.) He built these images out of an aggregation of dinosaur silhouettes. Three of the images are made from therizinosaur silhouettes, three from oviraptor silhouettes, three from pachycephalosaurus silhouettes, and the last is made from all the silhouettes together.

Chris shows the participants the images and asks them what the image makes them think of, and why, just as one would do with a Rorschach Test.

Originally Chris did it with people one-on-one, and asked several follow-up questions based very specifically on the original Rorschach Test. Later, he did it using a projection in a lecture class, and everyone wrote down their answers at once. Eventually he settled on a procedure where he provided people with a set of ten cards in an envelope. They fill it out on their own and return it anonymously in the sealed envelope.

Objectives

This is one of the more abstract and subjective of all the projects, by its very nature. The basic goal is to build up a

psycho-social portrait of our culture as it relates to dinosaurs. This can lead to an understanding of the relationship between dinosaurs and other deep-rooted avatars of psychological desires and fears, and perhaps into the idea that dinosaurs may represent the Uncanny, as Freud put it--an unsettling mixture of the strange and the familiar, something alien to our times and lives, but with the subtle hallmarks of contemporary reptiles and birds.

The three dinosaurs used to create the images were chosen for a variety of reasons, but especially because they are within the realm of dinosaurs that the general public *may* have seen, but probably is not very familiar with--possibly enough to recognize them, but not enough to know their names. In this sense, they fit well into the idea of the uncanny, or into the "tip of my tongue" feeling that signals a welling-up of the subconscious.

They also all have particular distinguishing physical characteristics that set them off from other dinosaurs as well as from the animals of today. These characteristics--the therizinosaur's claws, the oviraptor's crest, and the pachycephalosaurus' bumpy enlarged head--could also be interpreted as having somewhat fraught psychological implications regarding deep-seated fears of death, authority, and abnormality.

The question is, do any of these *possible* characteristics come through in people's interpretations of the images?

The following sections of this book provide the original data supplied through the experiment, then analyze that data for answers to the above questions.

The Original Survey Form

This is one example of one of the cards as Chris now distributes them. (All of the images themselves are shown below at a larger scale; this is just to give a sense of what the card looks like to a participant.)

People get the card in an envelope, write down their answers, and return it anonymously.

EMOTIDON CARD #1



What does this image make you think of?

What parts of the image make you think of that?

The Survey Results

The ten images, and the responses they elicited, are shown on the following pages.

The images are shown by themselves, alone on the page, to help give them a full share of aesthetic and psychological impact.

After each image, the responses people had to it are laid out on the pages immediately following it.

Each response is ensconced within one of the individual silhouettes that make up its parent image. In other words, each main image is made up of the silhouettes of many smaller images. For the response pages, these smaller images have been broken back apart and can now be seen on their own. This makes their dinosaur species much more clear than in the original images, although the originals certainly contain hints as to their species, and are fairly obviously made up of dinosaurs of some type.

Each of the main responses (“what do you see?”) is nestled within one of these images. The secondary response (“why or where do you see it?”) is written around the outside of the silhouette.

This is clearly not the most legible way to present the responses. However, Chris felt that it created an important analogous situation to that of the original participant. The original participant had to “read” the image and find some stimulus in it to inspire meaning. A reader of this book must visually interpret the text and attempt to find meaning out of its own aggregated shapes. A misinterpretation is not necessarily less interesting in this case, because it would be as if the reader was taking the test him/herself, as it were.

The last four images are in color. This is also the case with the original Rorschach Test, although that is a deeply-guarded secret. One of the important features of the Rorschach Test is that people may register “color shock” when seeing the color images for the first time. Anyone who has color shock can then be interpreted as having various psychological deficiencies.

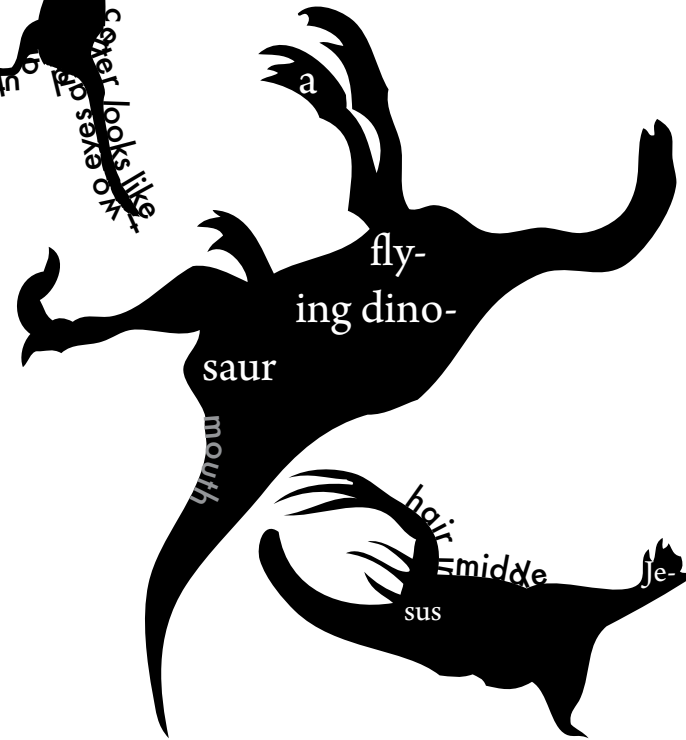
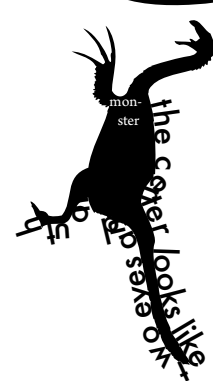
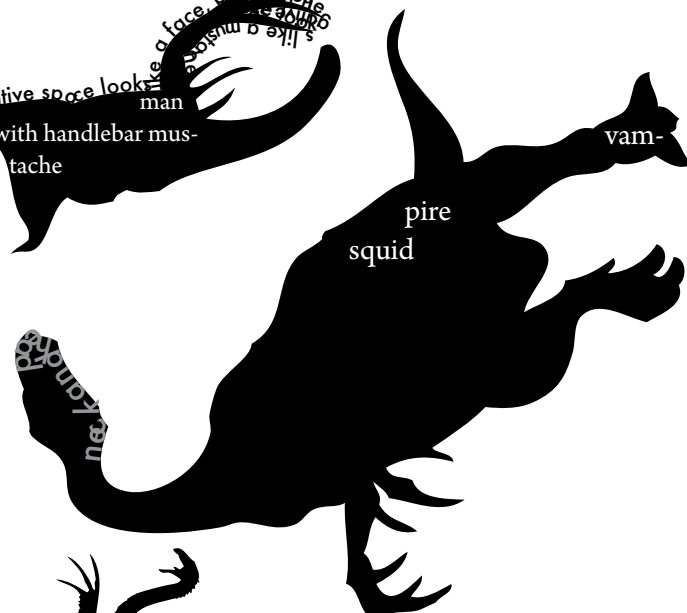
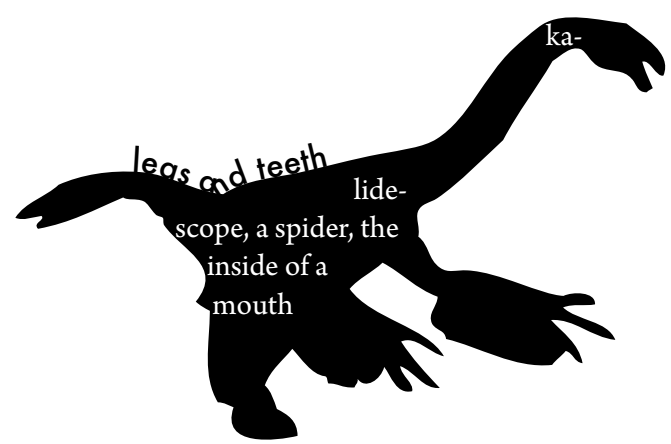
Likewise, during *Emotidon* examinations, many of the participants have mentioned that they felt color shock upon seeing the color slides for the first time. Chris asked anyone who had color shock to note it on their form.

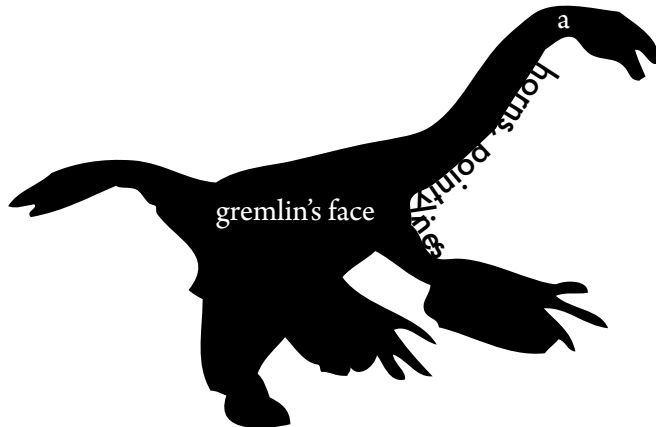
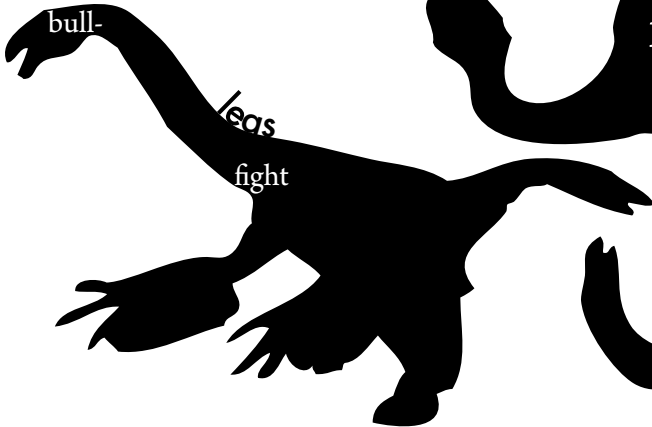
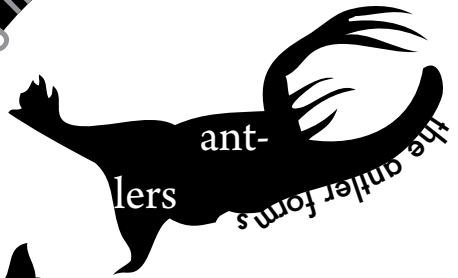
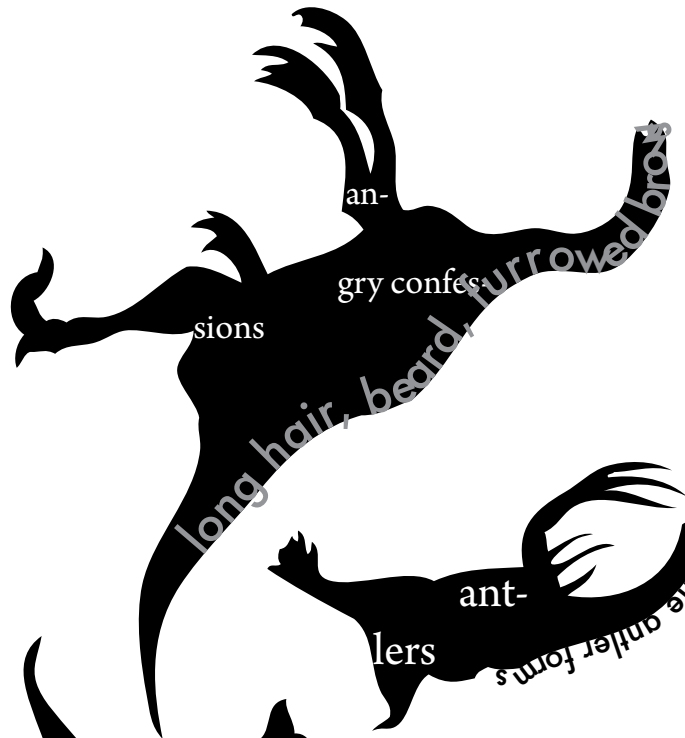
If someone did feel color shock, this is denoted on their response by giving their dinosaur silhouette a light-colored extra outline around its exterior contours.

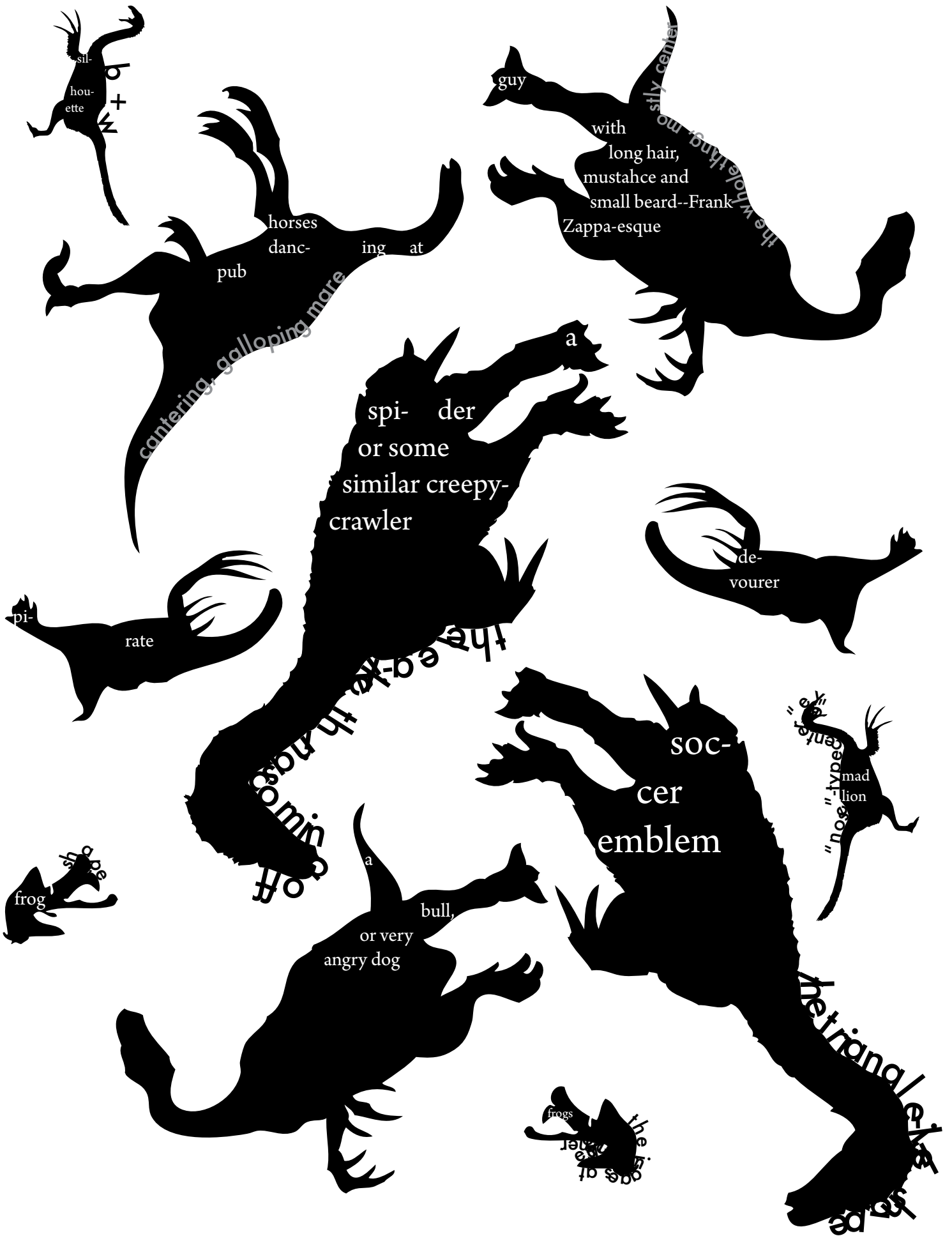
Color shock is only noted on the first color image; after that, it is assumed that the use of color has been assimilated by the viewers and is no longer shocking.



IMAGE 1







sil-
hou-
ette

guy

with
long hair,
mustahce and
small beard-Frank
Zappa-esque

horses
danc- ing at

pub

cantering, galloping mare

spi- der
or some
similar creepy-
crawler

a

de-
vourer

pi-
rate

the e-a-th no min
off

soc-
cer
emblem

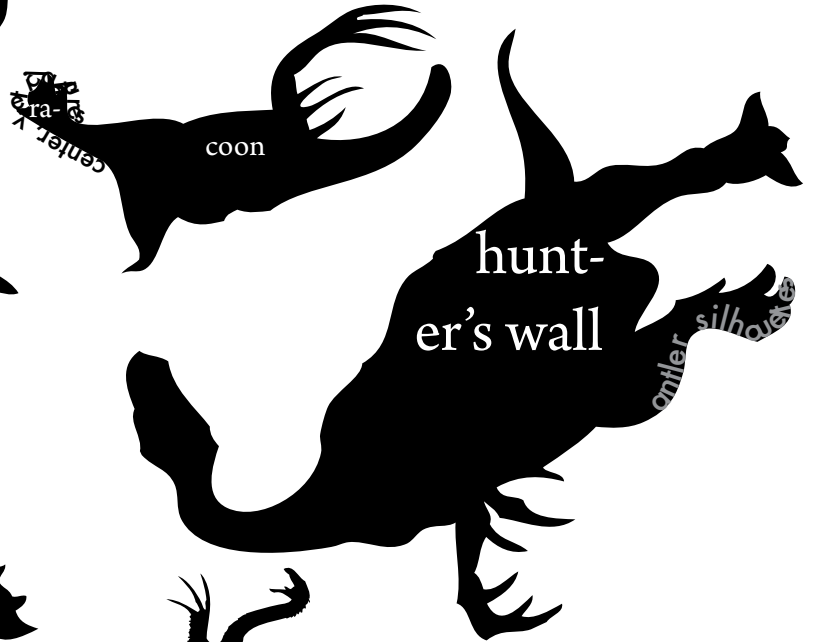
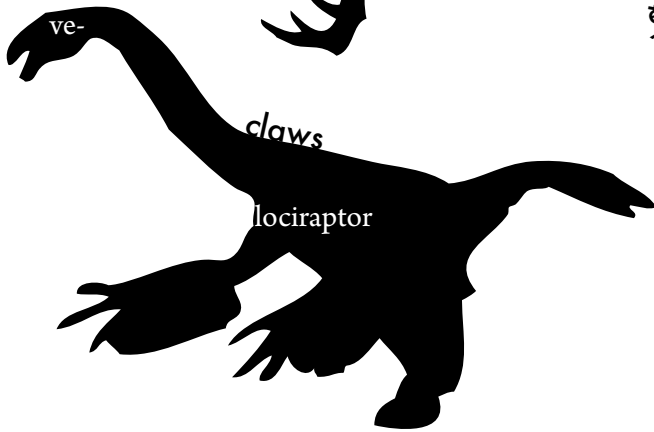
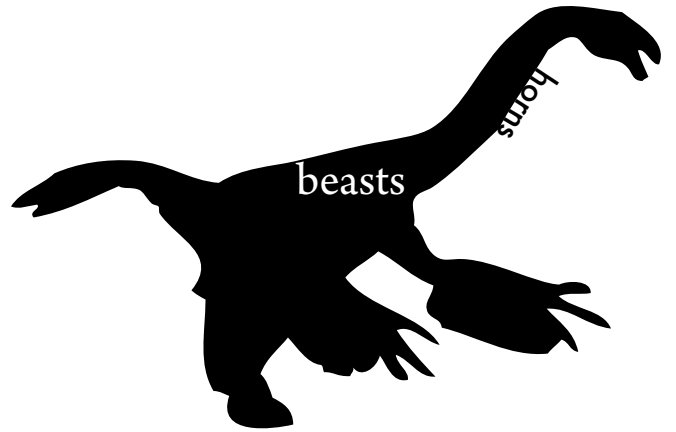
"nose"-type
mad
lion

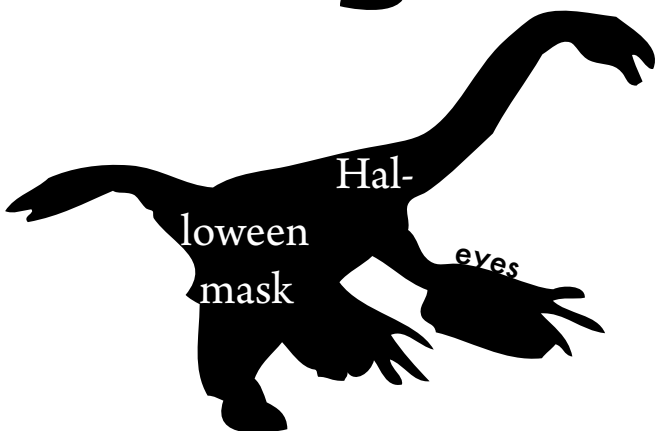
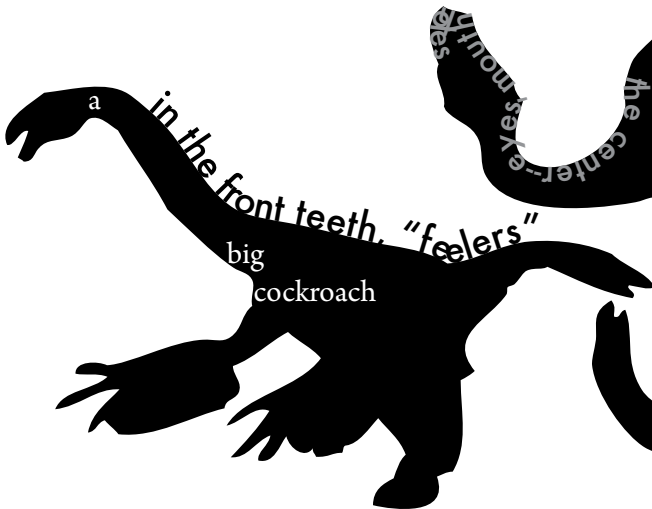
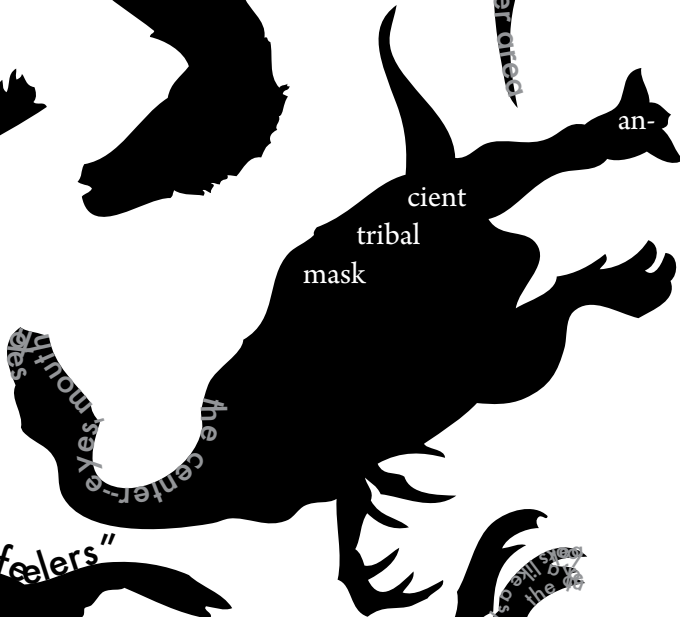
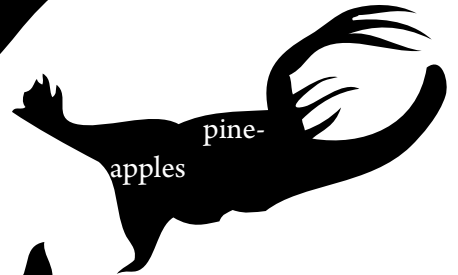
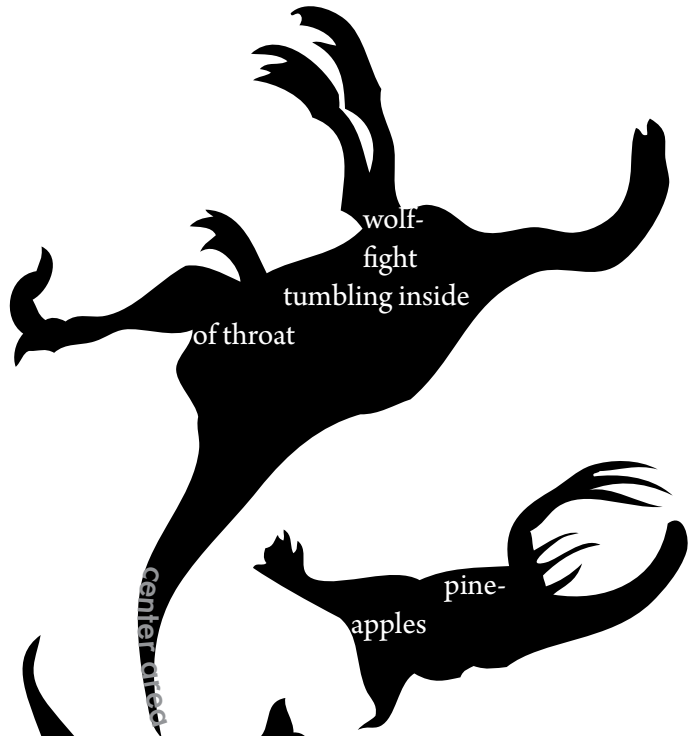
frog

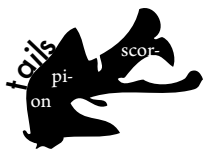
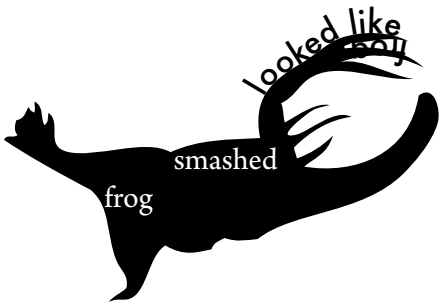
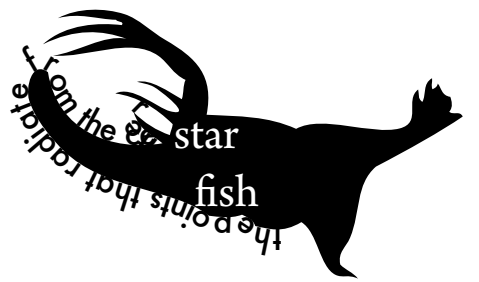
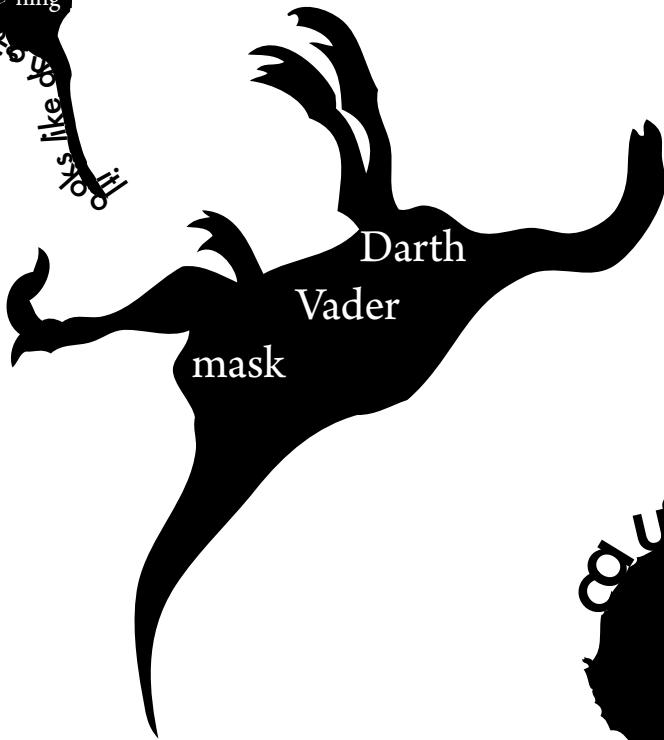
a
bull,
or very
angry dog

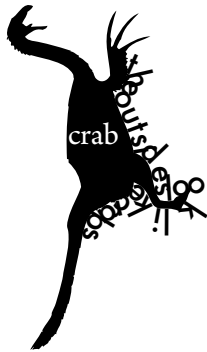
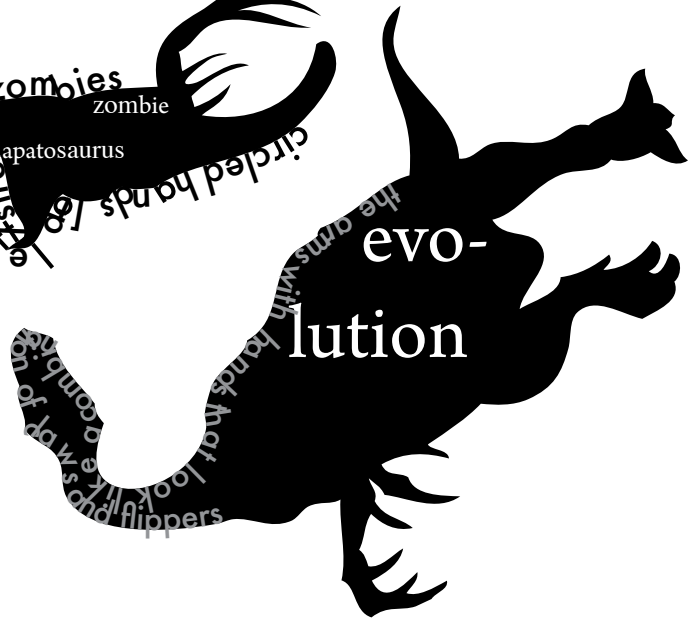
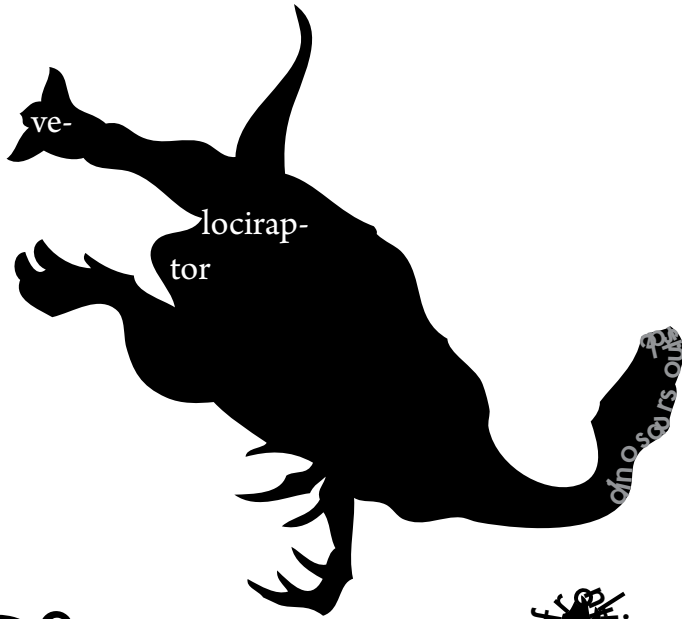
frogs
the is
of

the whole thing, mostly center









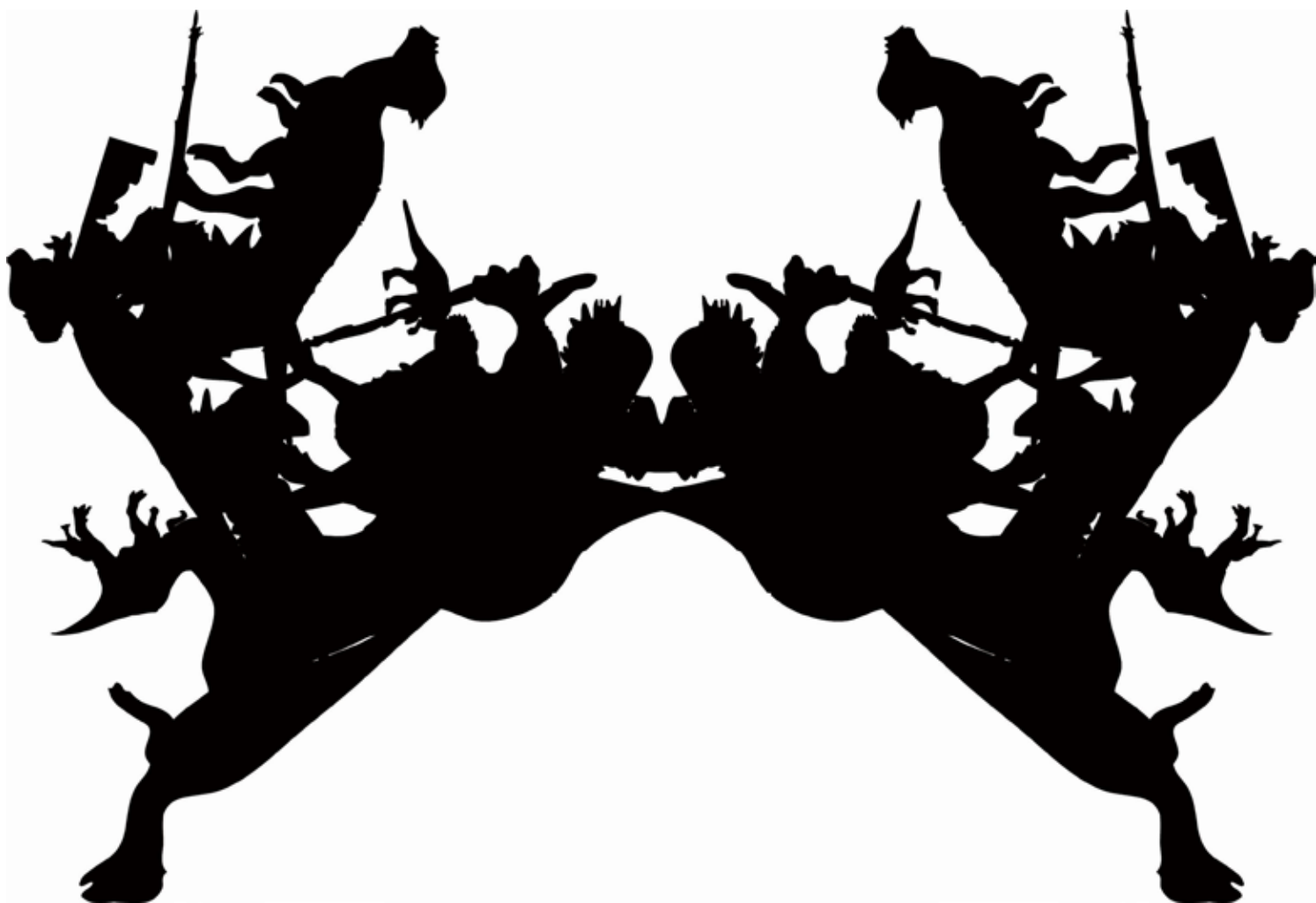
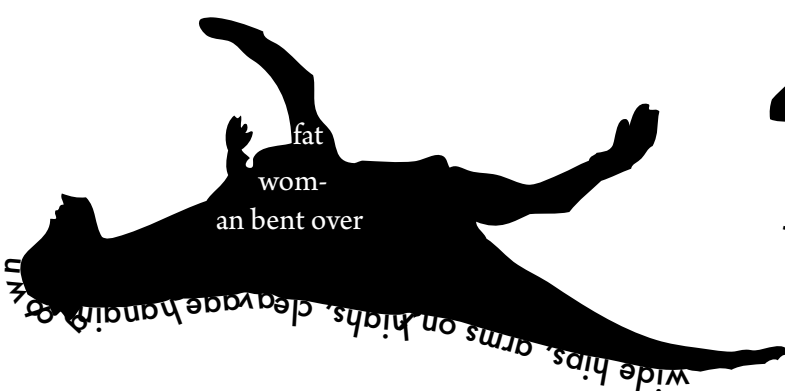


IMAGE 2



like
they're
being
stabbed



fat
wom-
an bent over
wide hips, arms on highs, cleavage hanging off



Jer-
ry
Garcia
eyebrows
stock
eyehair



leaf



two
fighting
dinosaurs



army

left side



the point
of the
knights



Pip-
pi

Longstocking



sol-
diers



looks like people on motorcycle
motorhead



bird



like flowing
flow-
ing
danc-
ers



bra

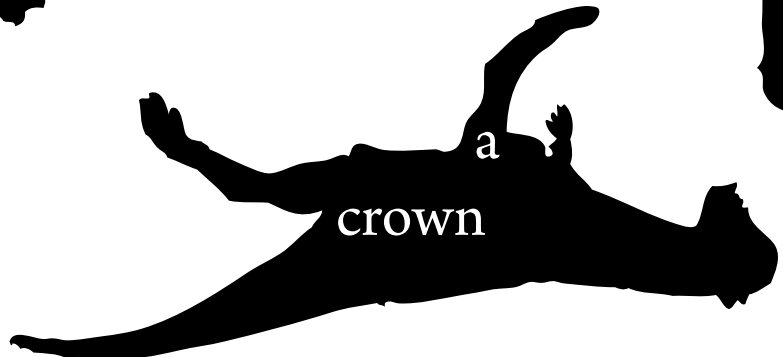
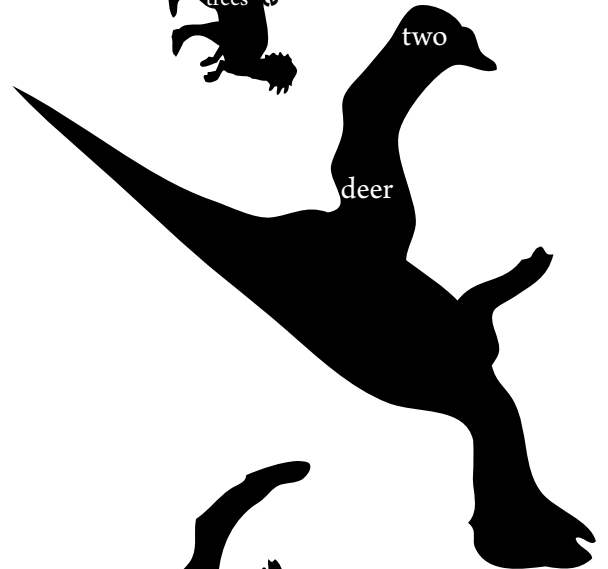
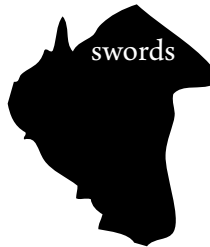
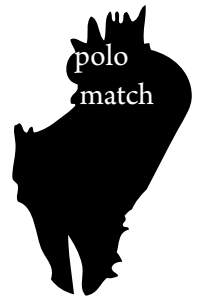
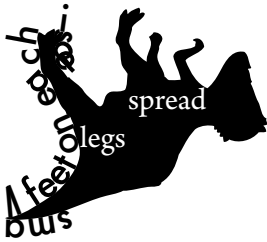
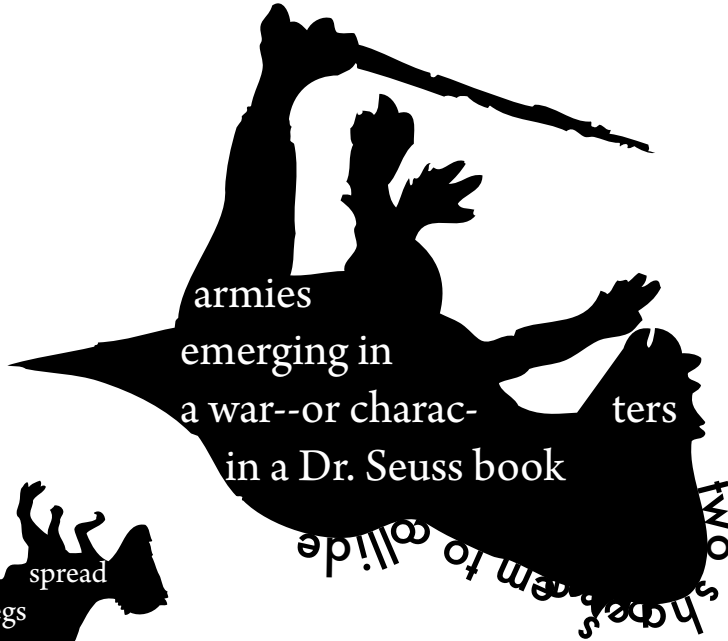


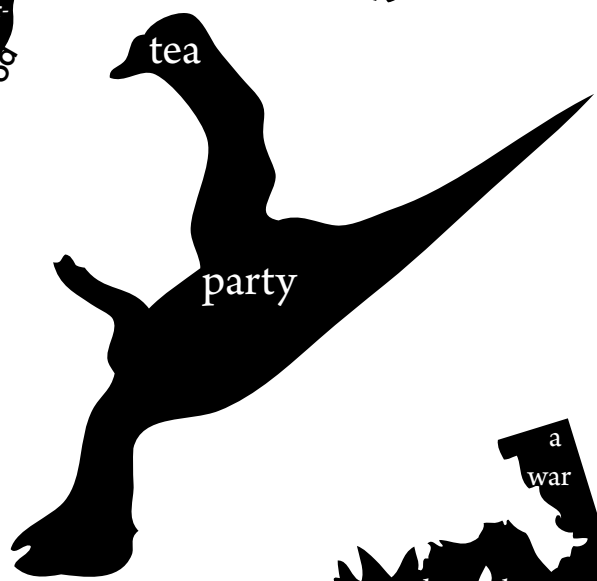
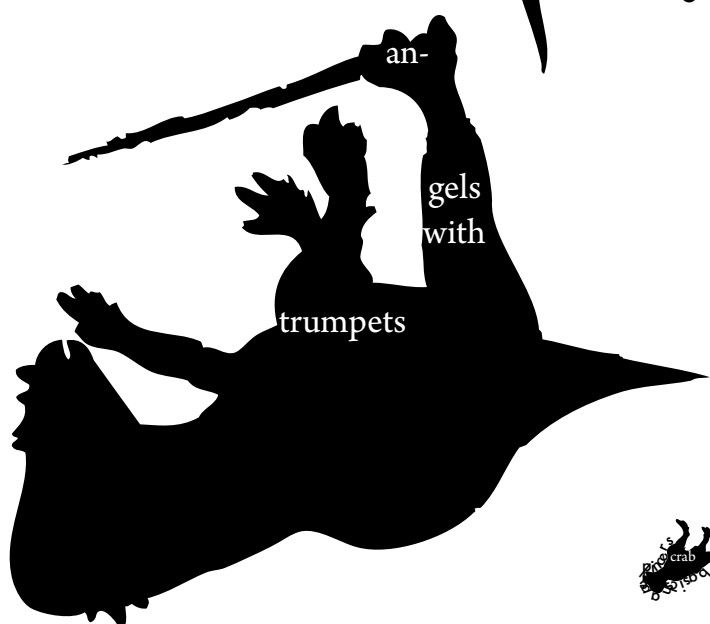
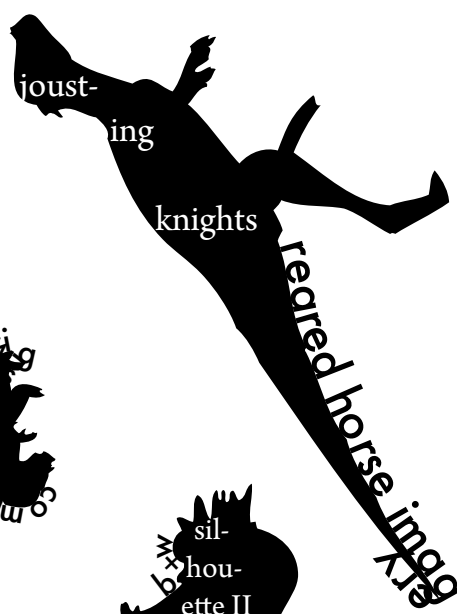
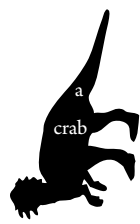
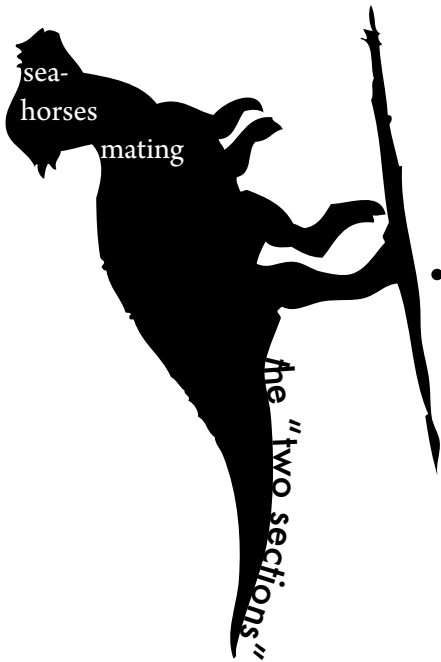
because of
white butterfly

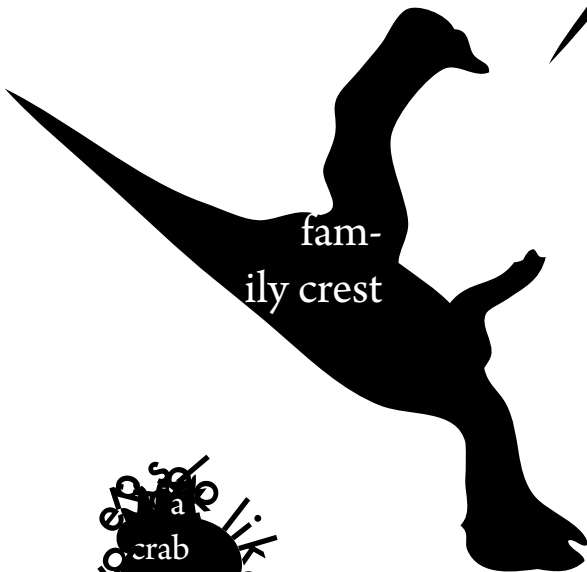
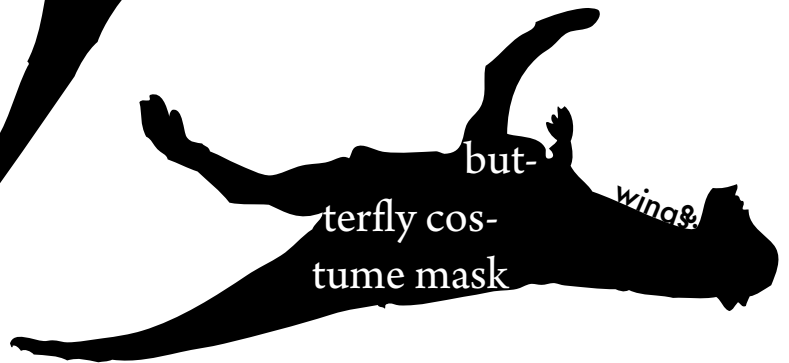
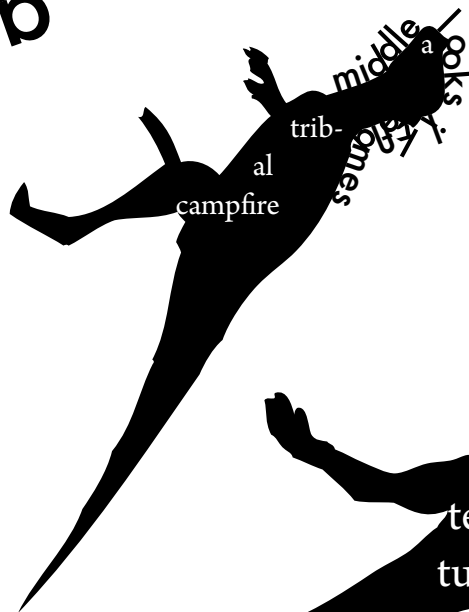
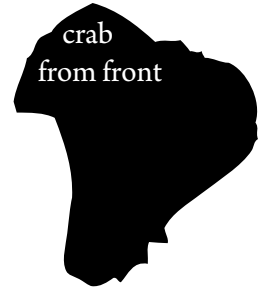
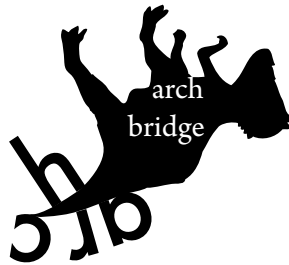
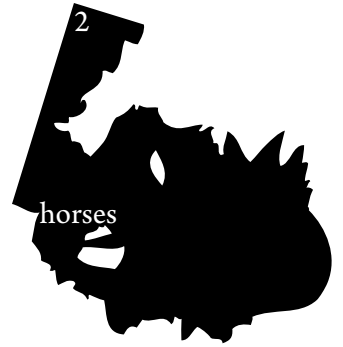


bats
or a
mask

its on bottom are like feet
phallosqu









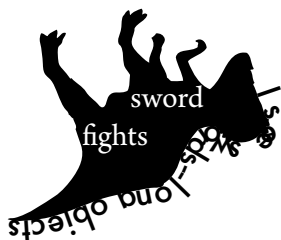
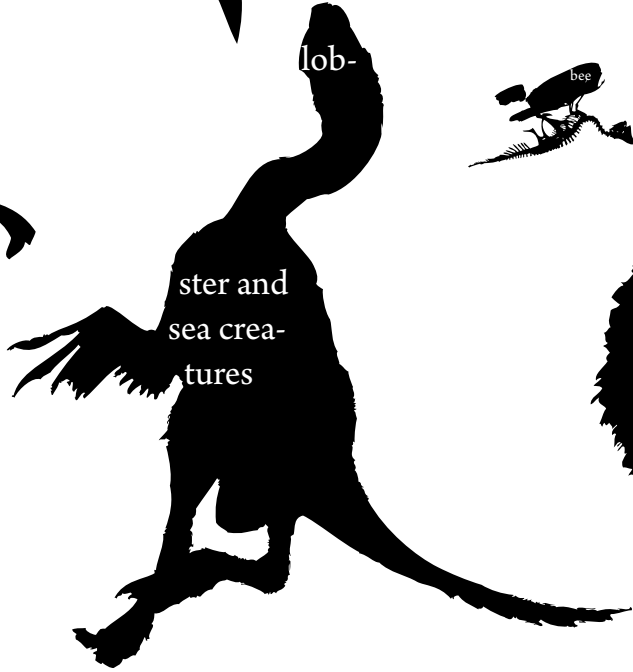
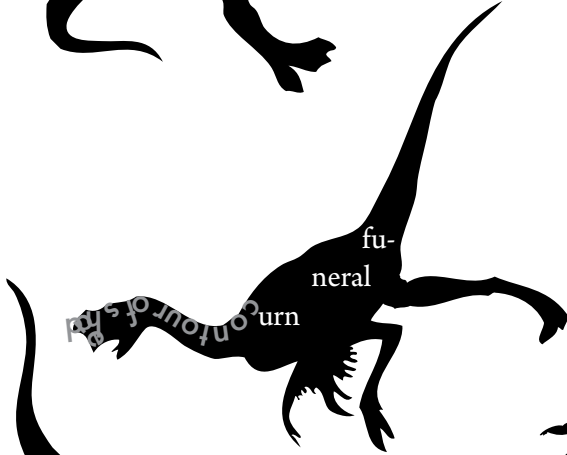
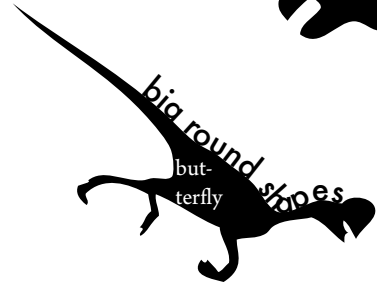
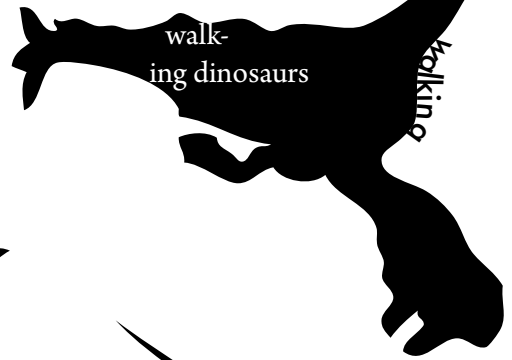
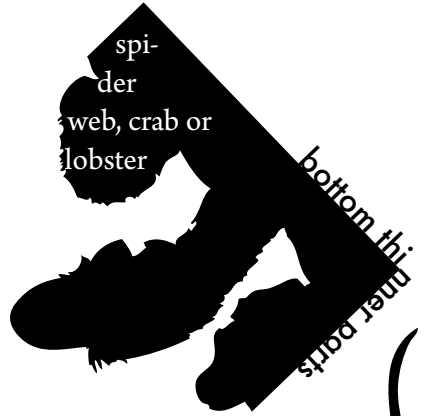
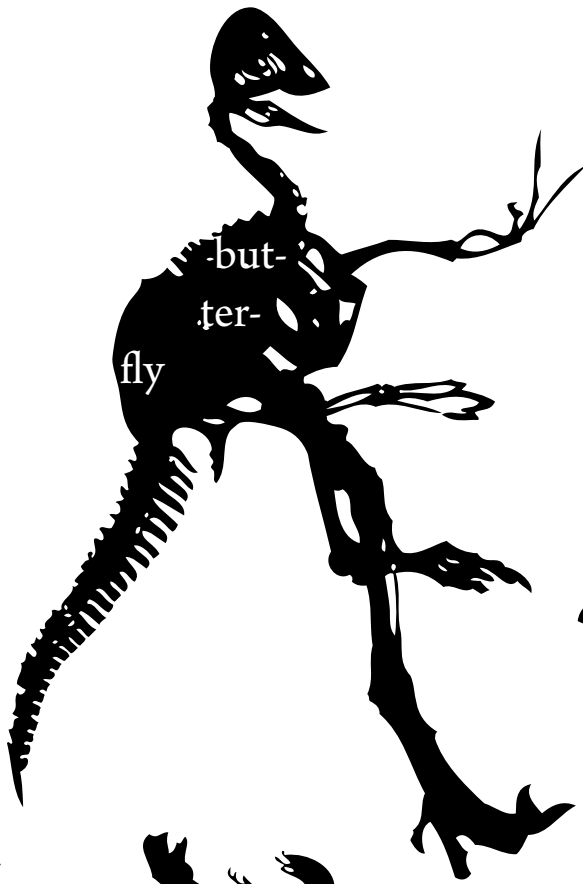
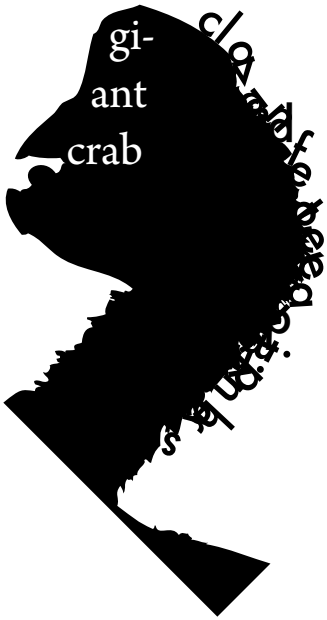




IMAGE 3





mon-
key



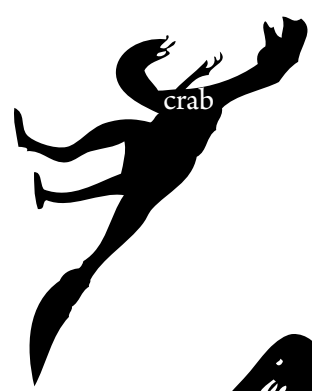
play-
ing
patty-
cake



a
seal
on a me-
dieval shield



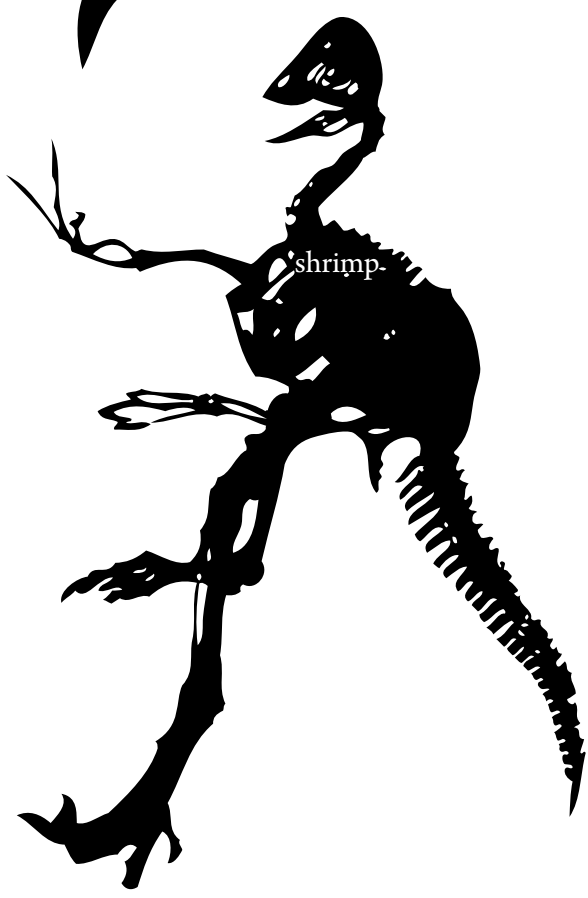
ar-
chi-
tectural
motif
the airaptors on edge



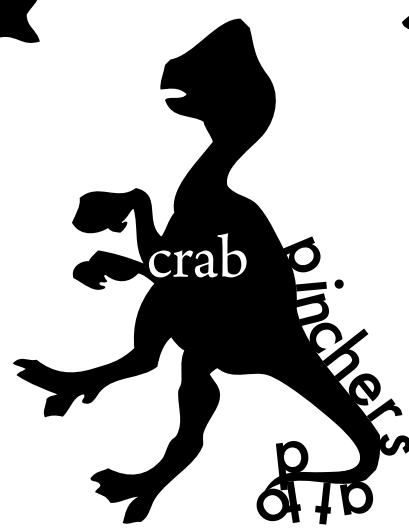
crab



rib-
bon

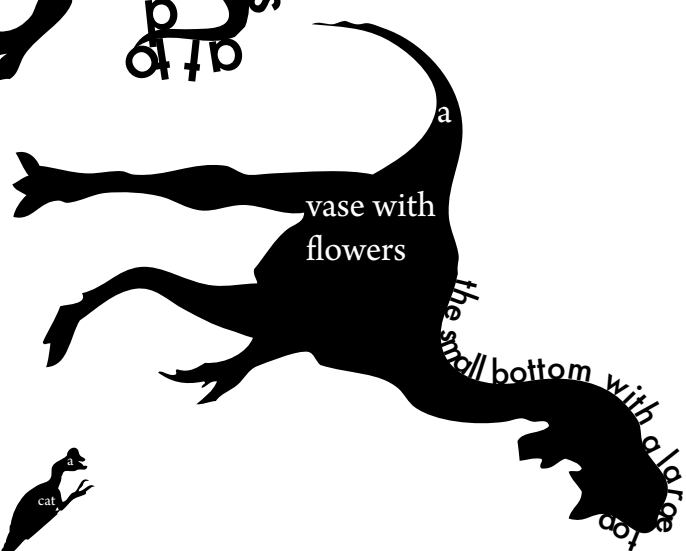


shrimp-



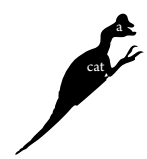
crab

pinchers
p
o t b



a
vase with
flowers

the small bottom with a large
foot



cat



silhou-
ette

III

claws on each side,
eyes in the middle
king
crab

crab

some of the top parts
of the

composition
parts

crab

bull-
dog

but-
ter-
fly

as-
tro-
nomical
sign of
cancer

crab/
heart

scor-
pion

the shapes of the
scor-
pion

scor-
pions

face
bottom

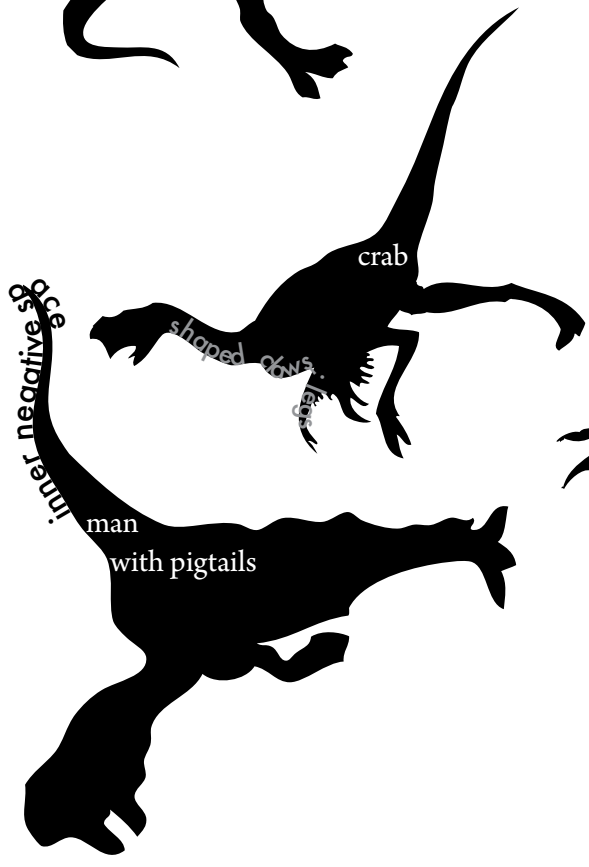
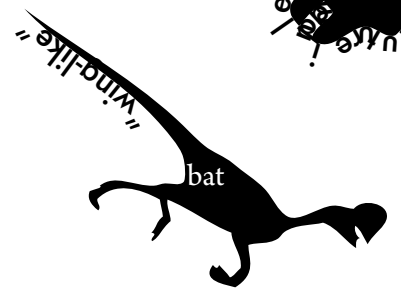
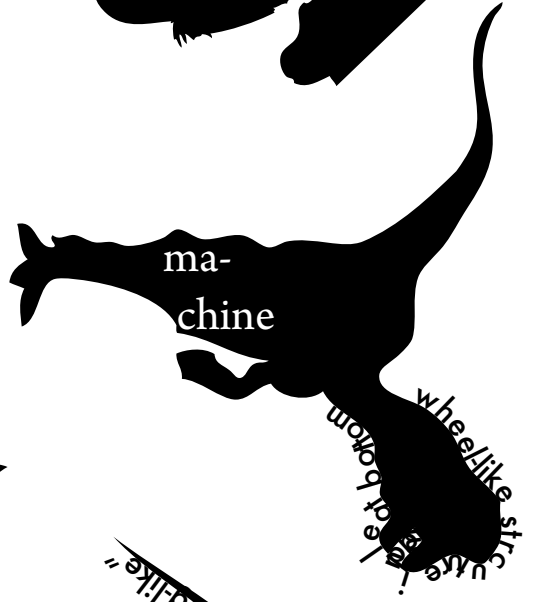
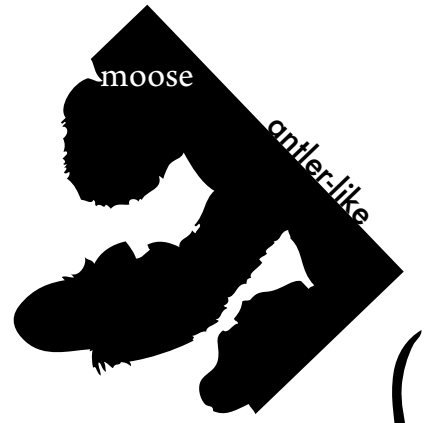
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o ss



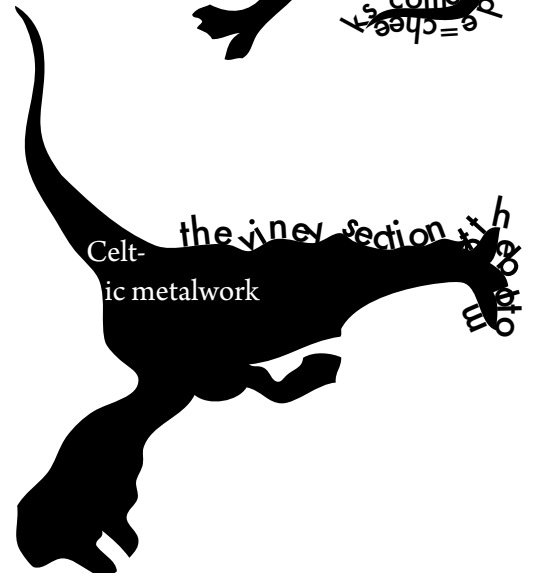
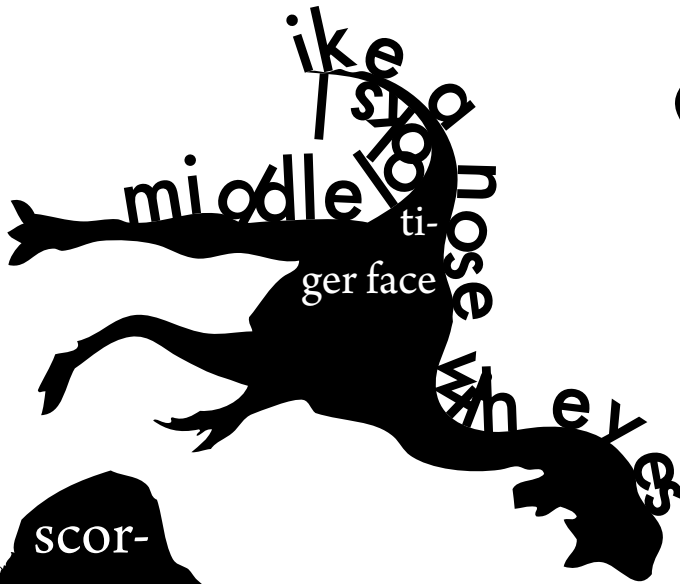
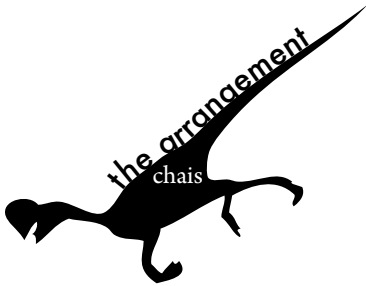
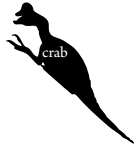
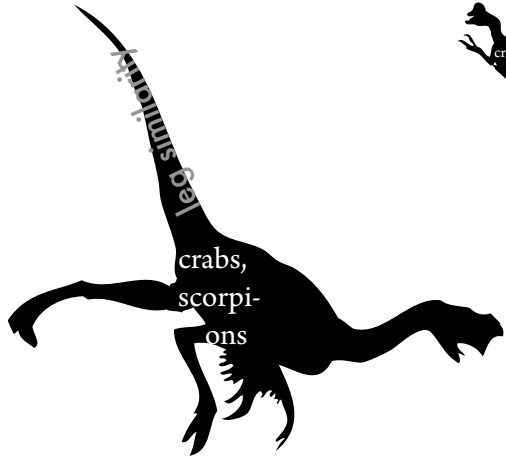
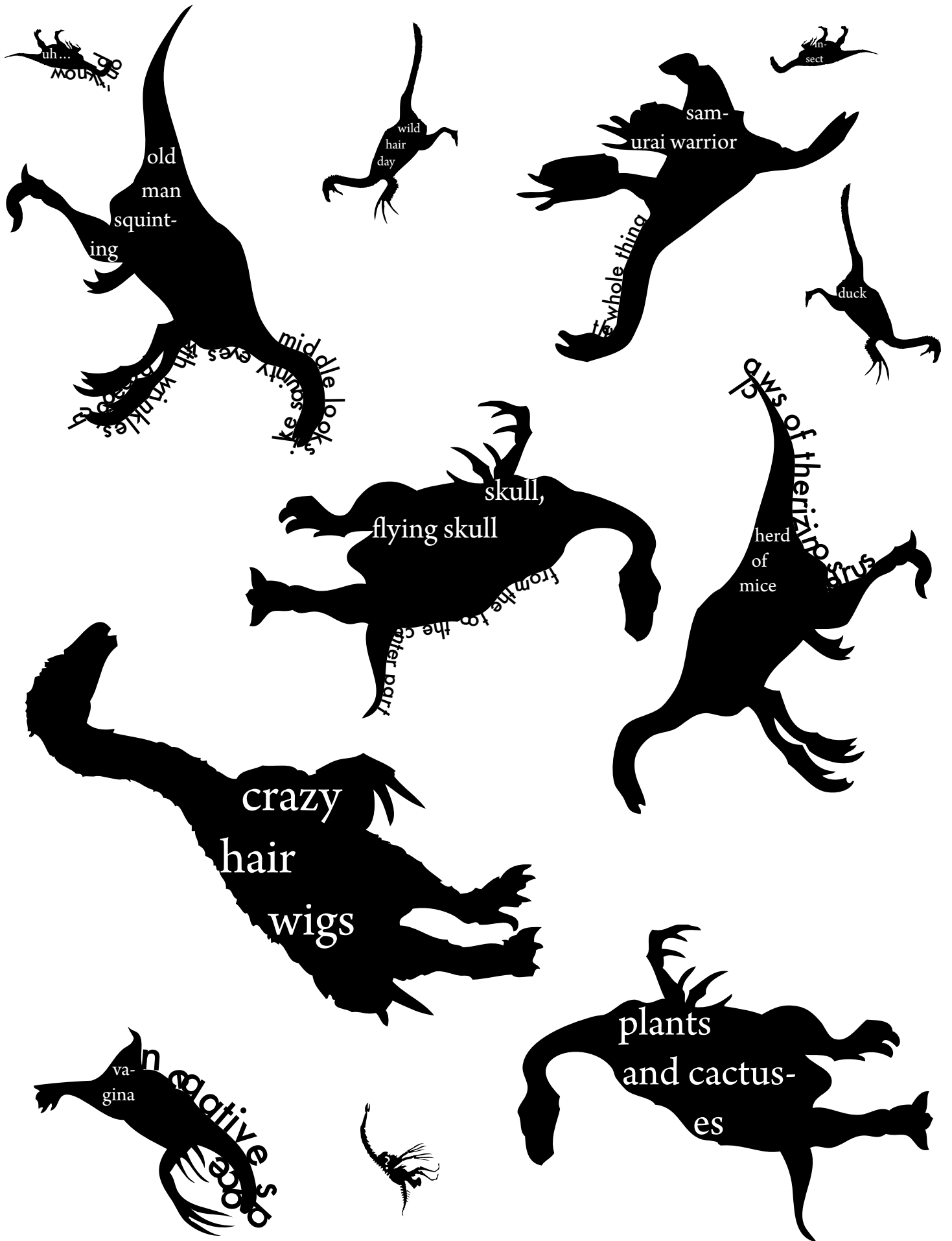
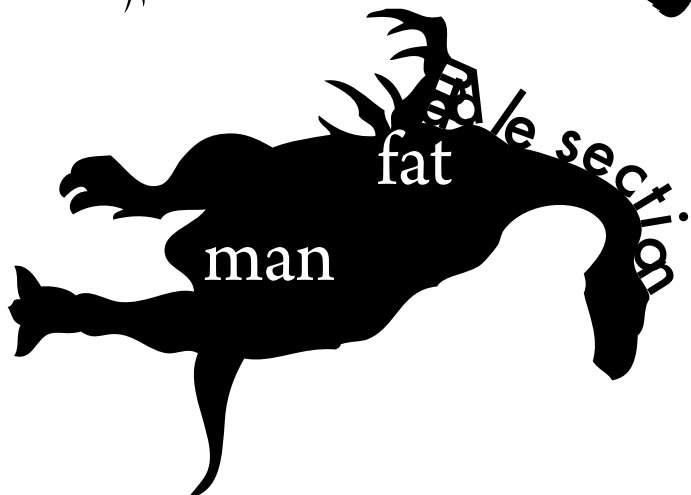
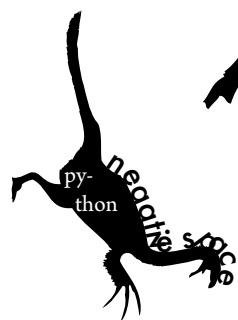
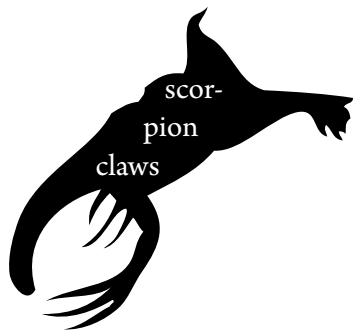


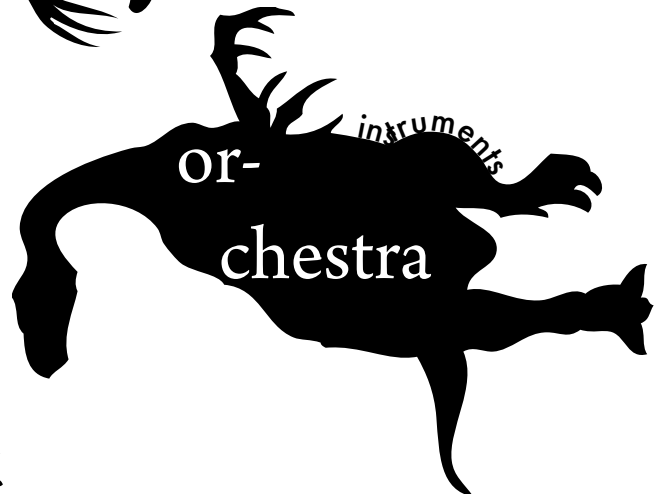
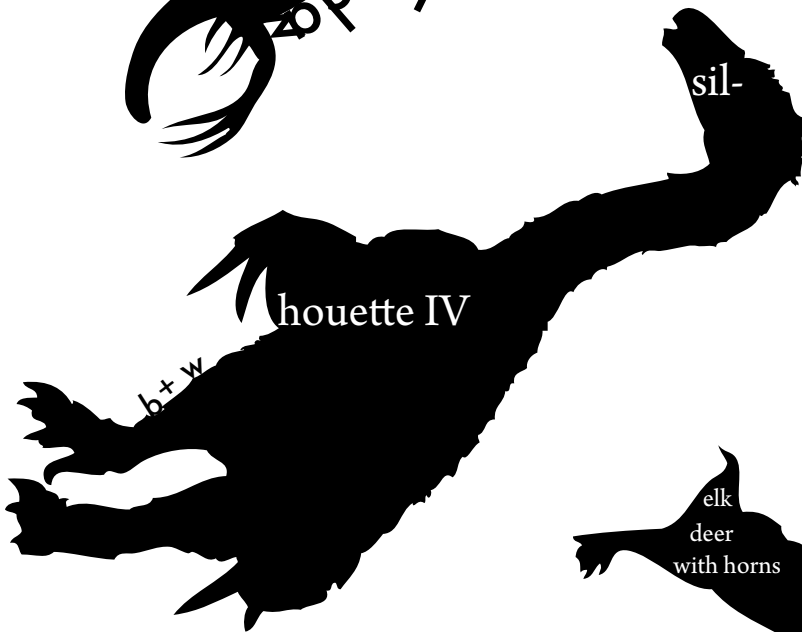
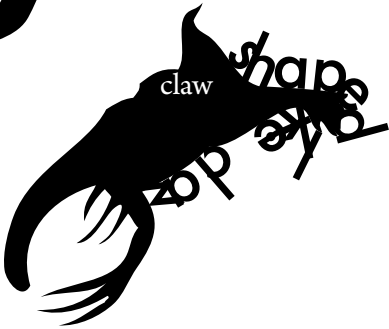
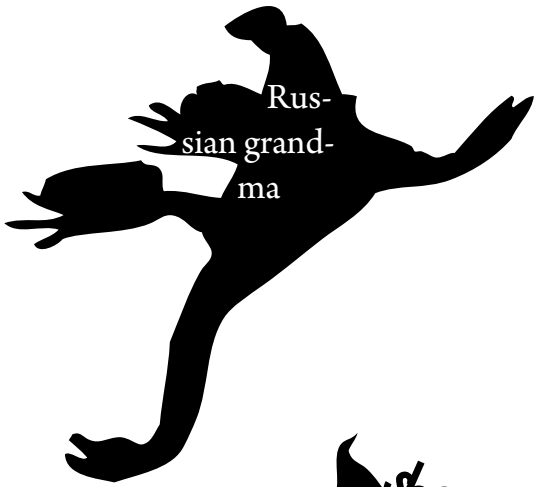


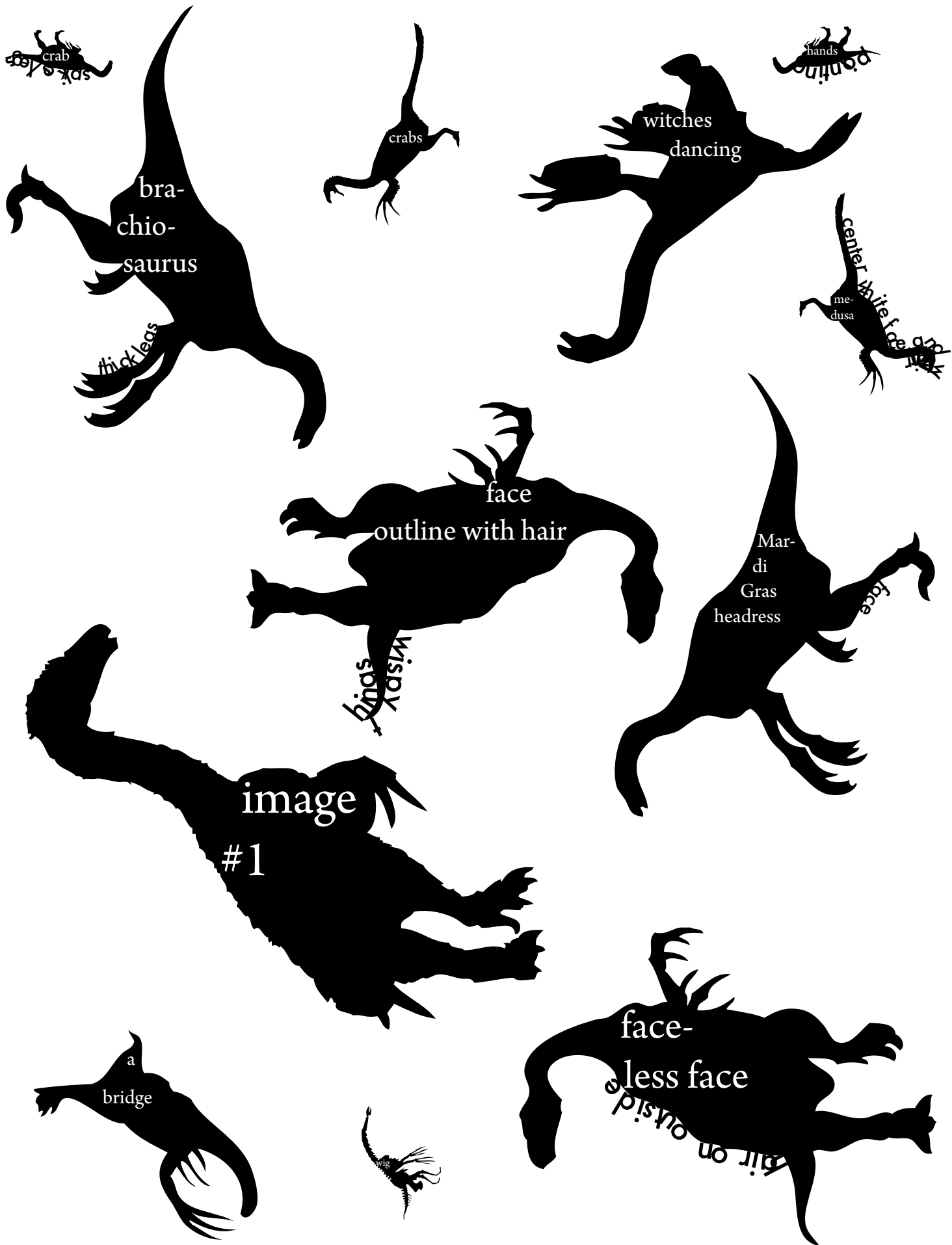


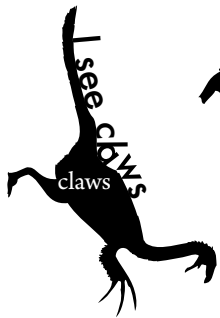
IMAGE 4











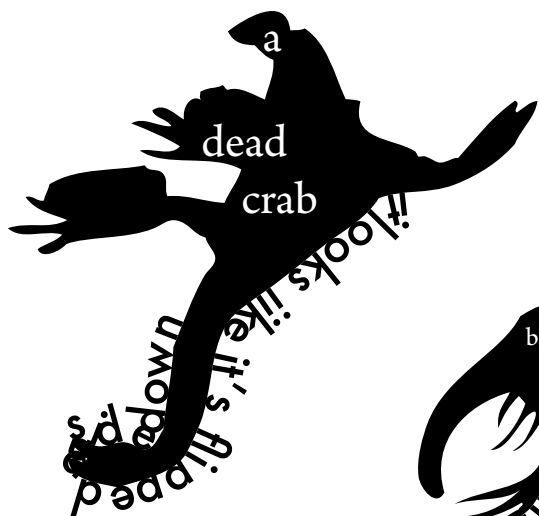
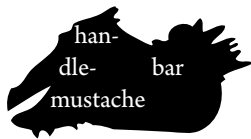
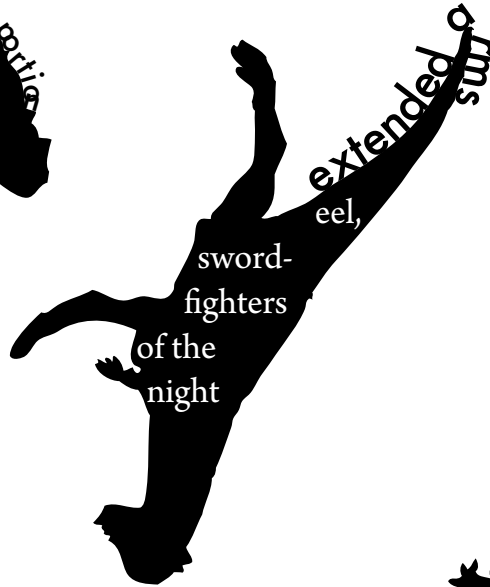
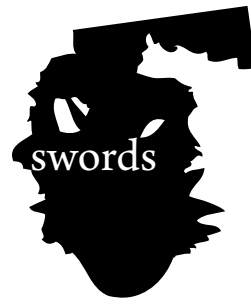
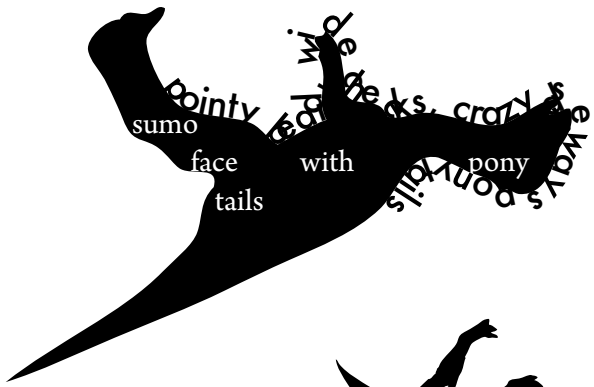
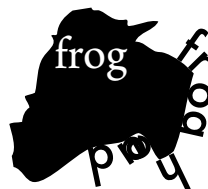
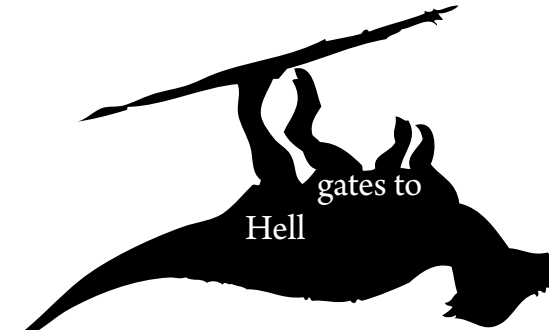
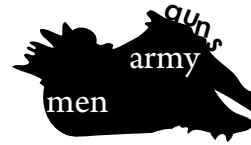
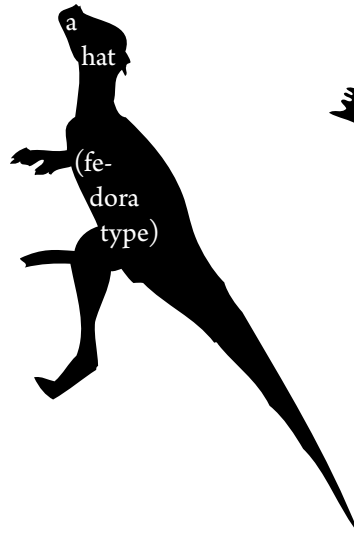
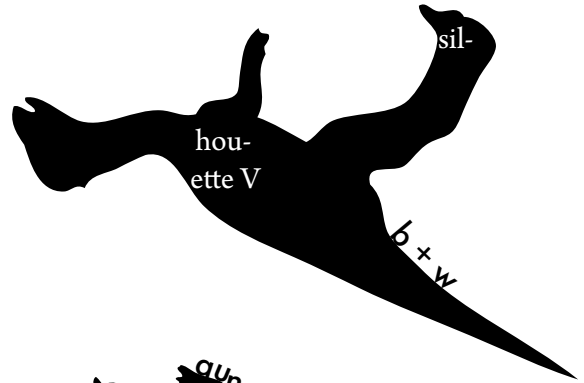




IMAGE 5





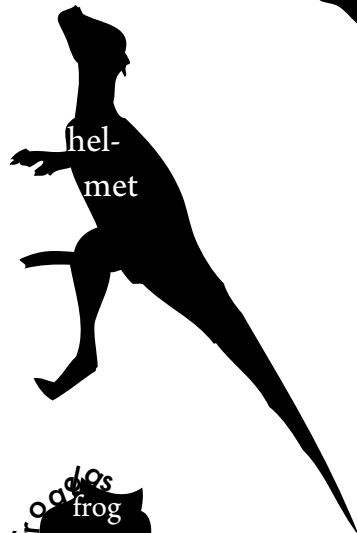
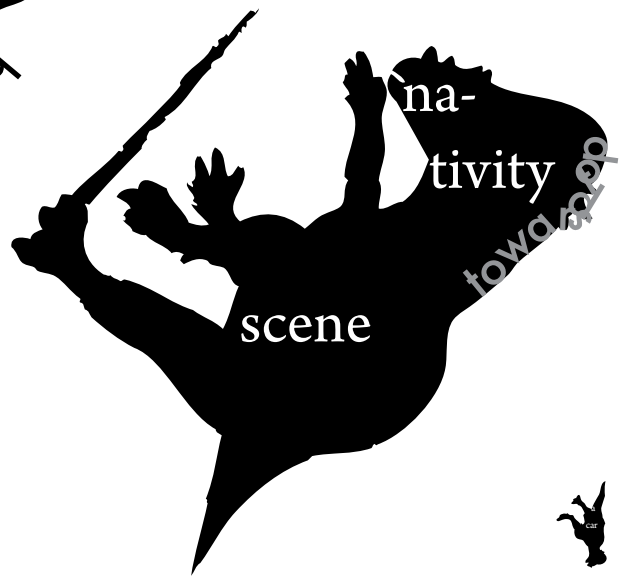
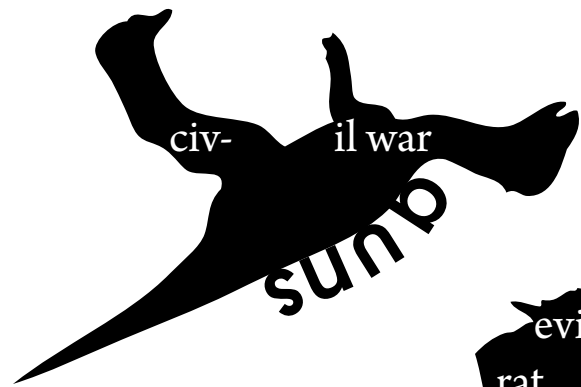






IMAGE 6

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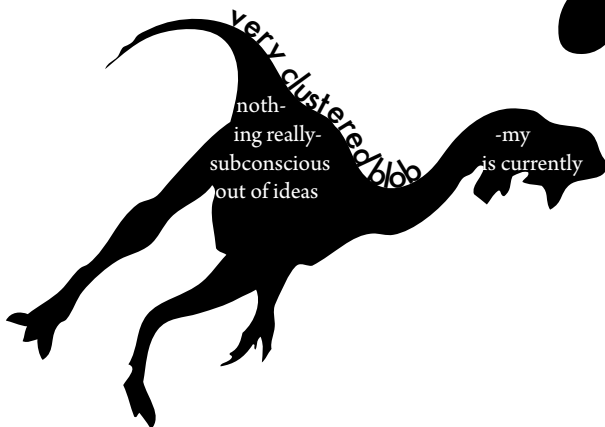
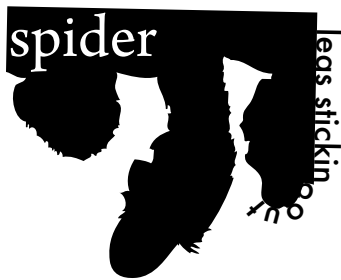
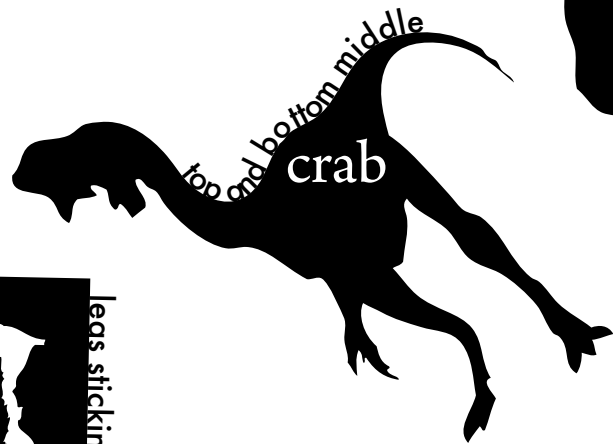
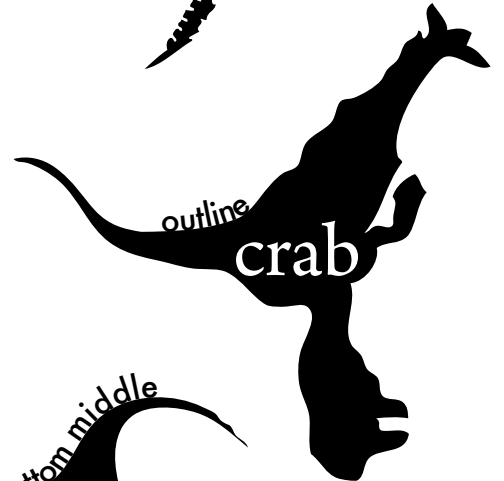
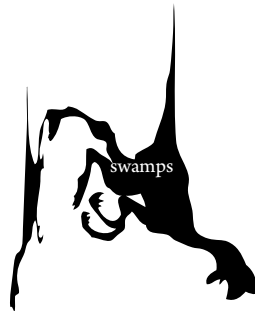
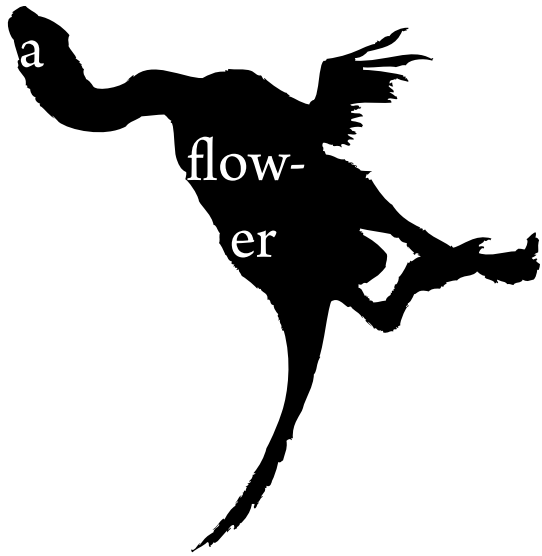
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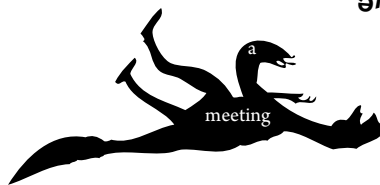
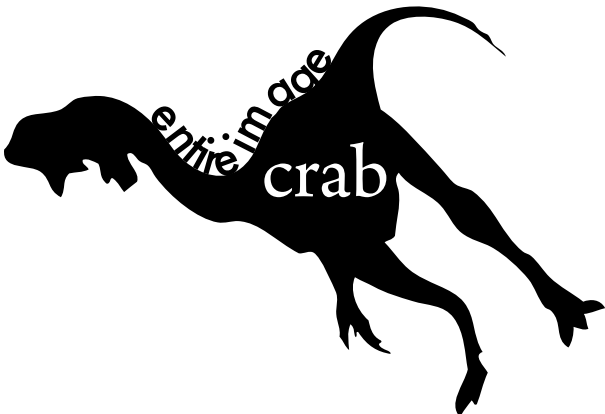
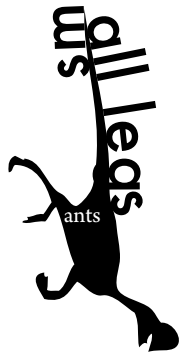
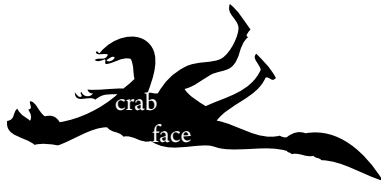
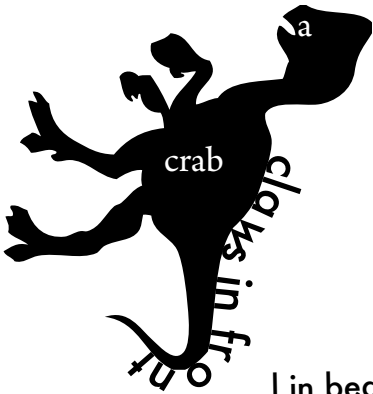
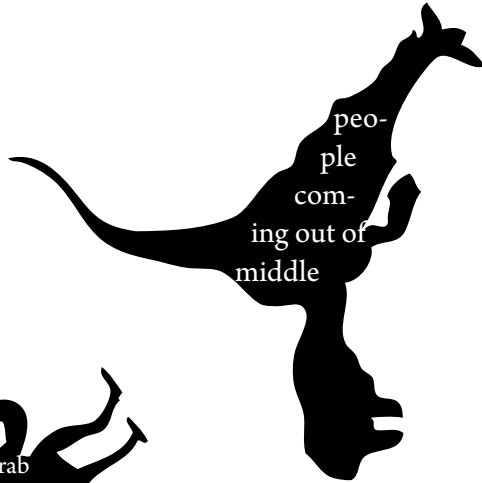
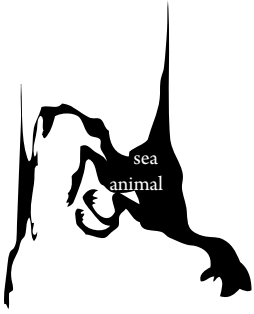
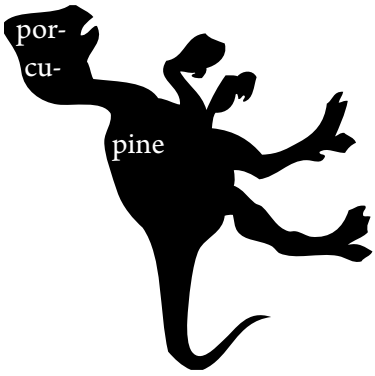
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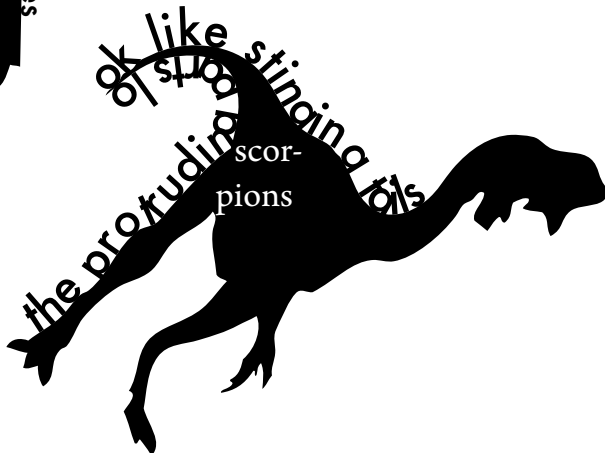
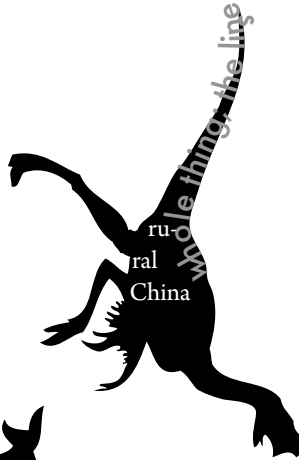
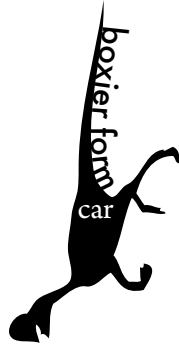
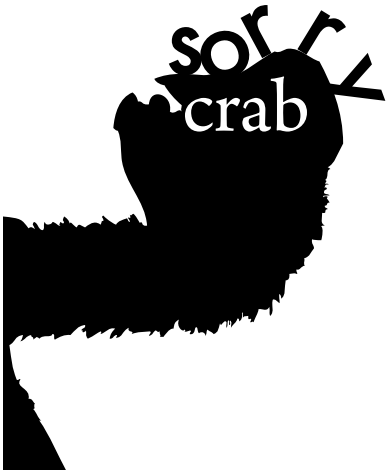
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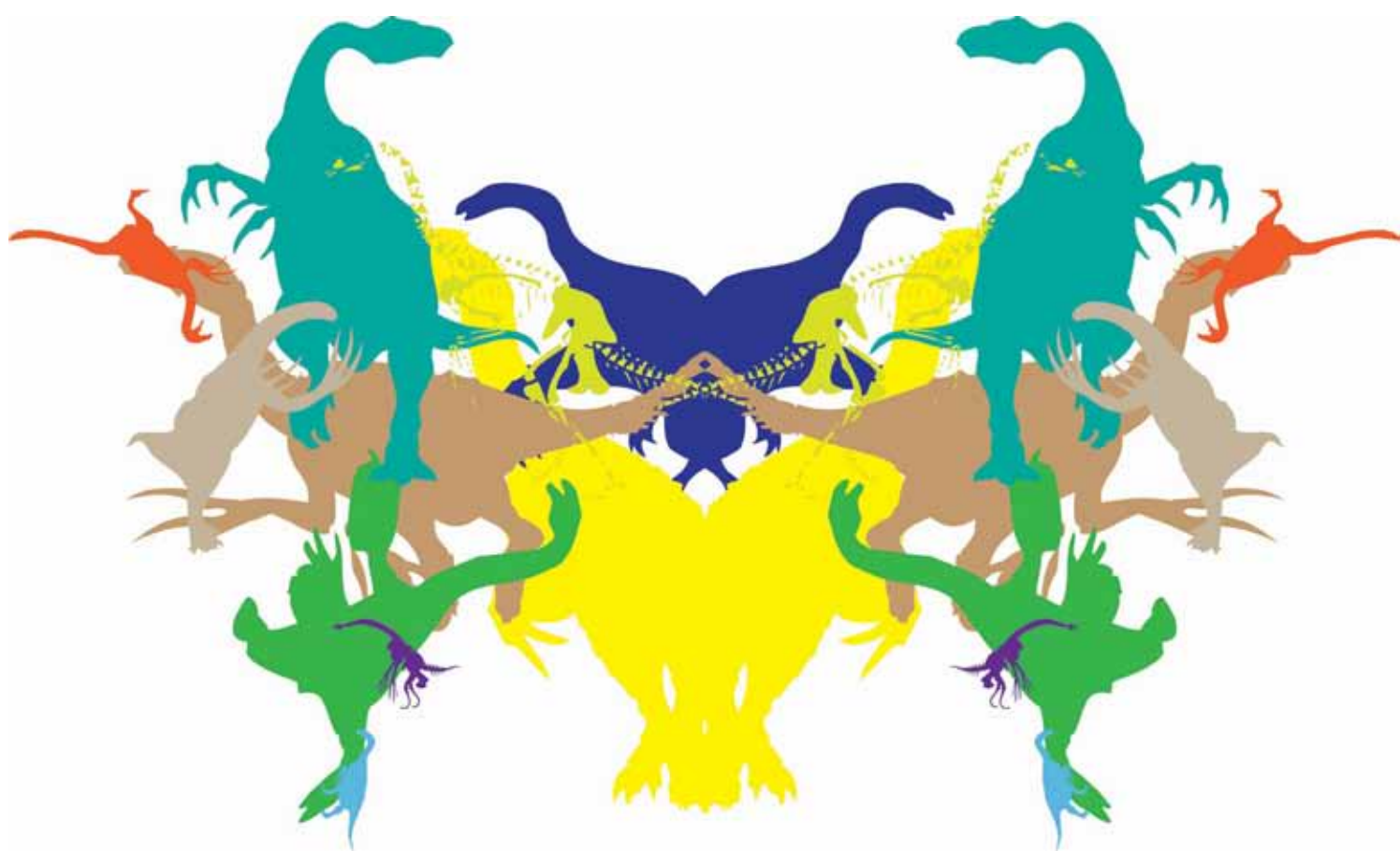
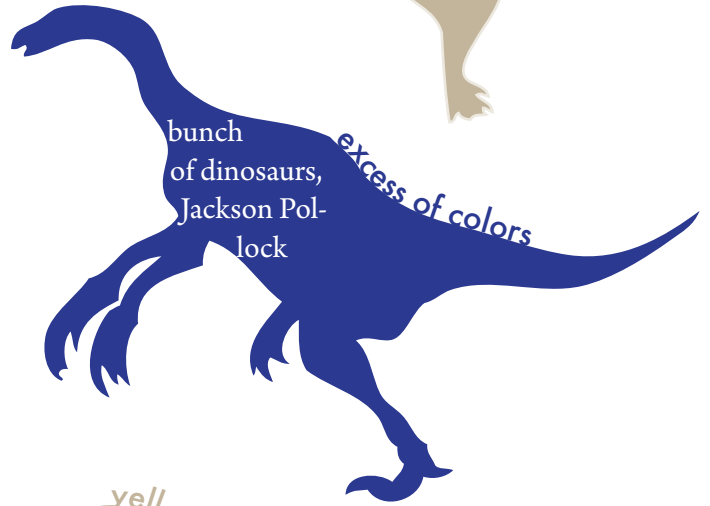
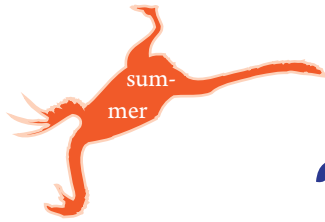
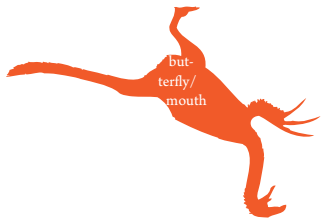
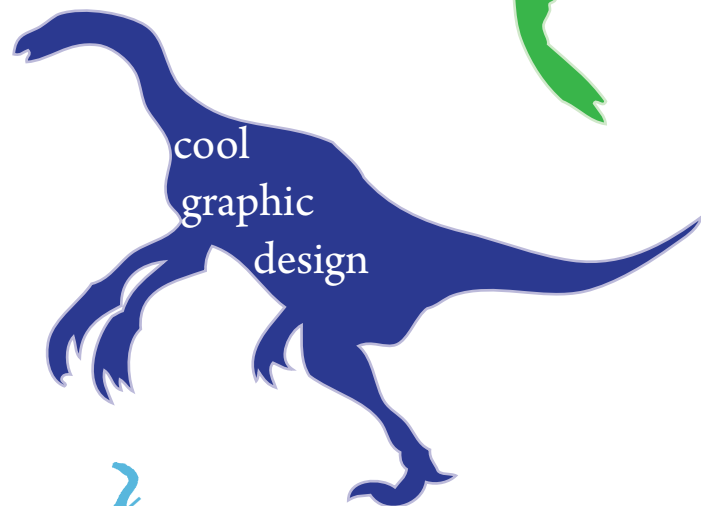
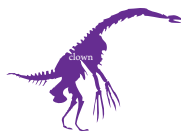
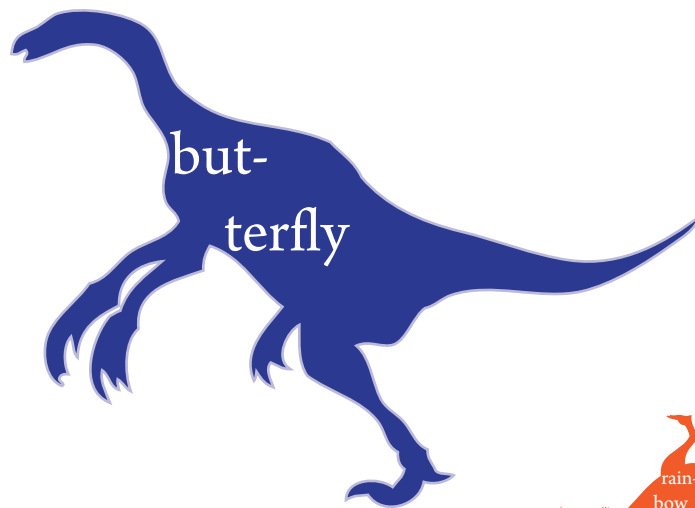
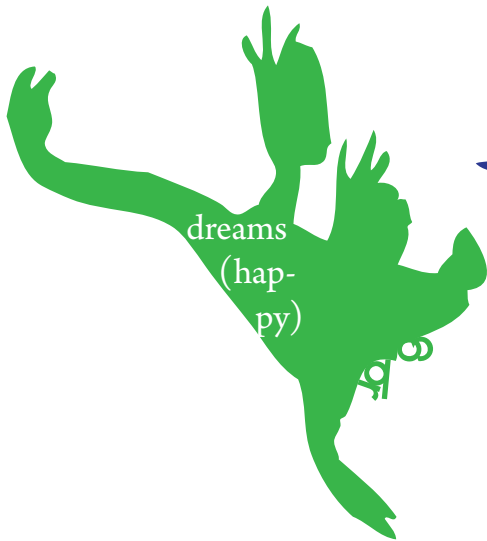
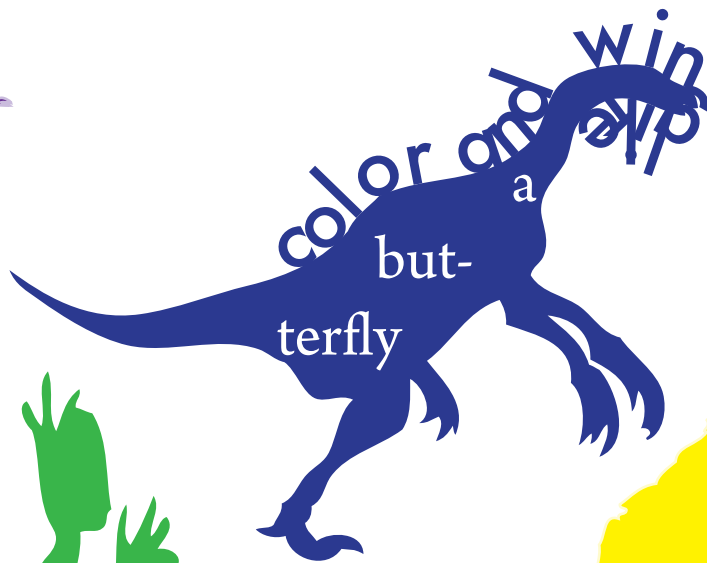
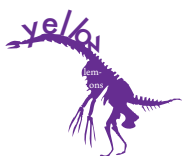
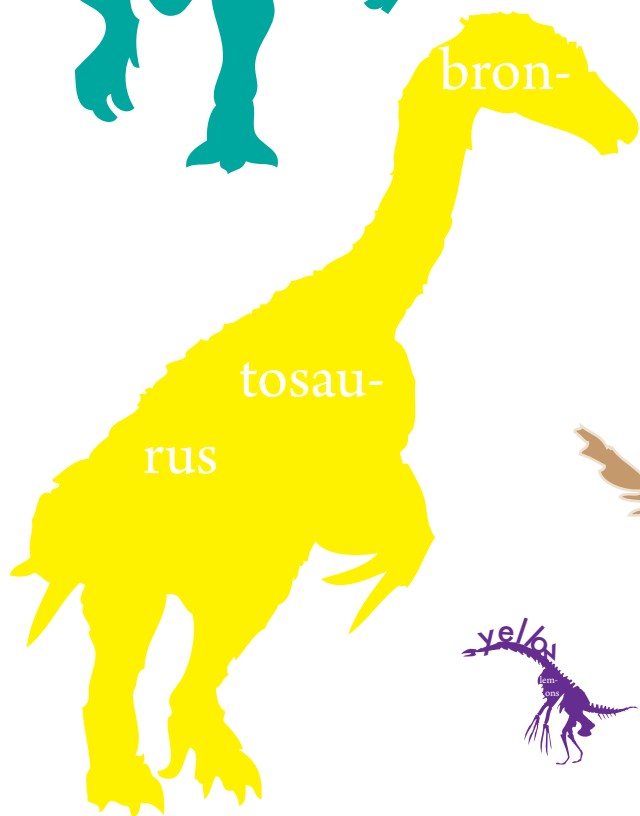
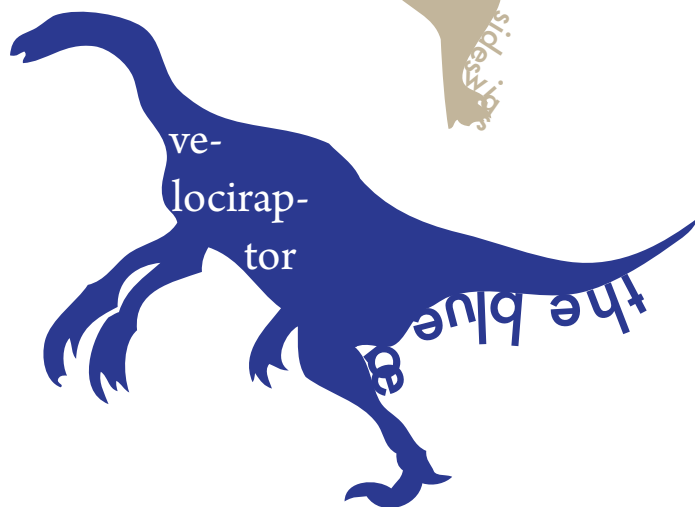
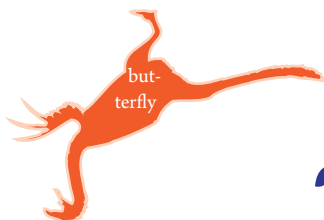
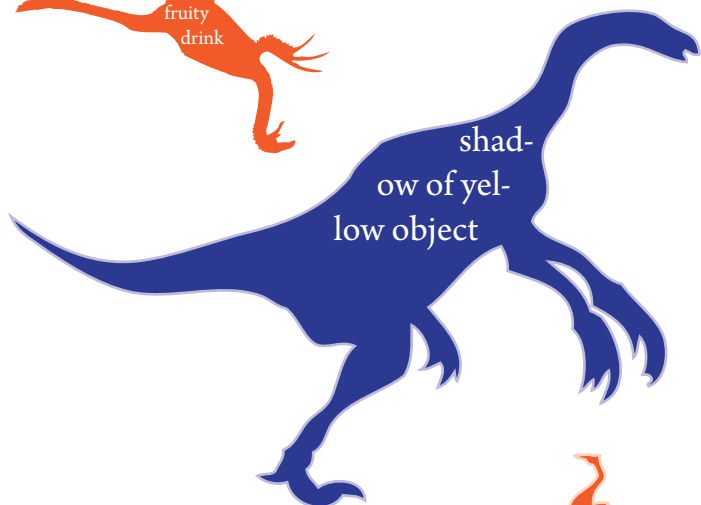


IMAGE 7









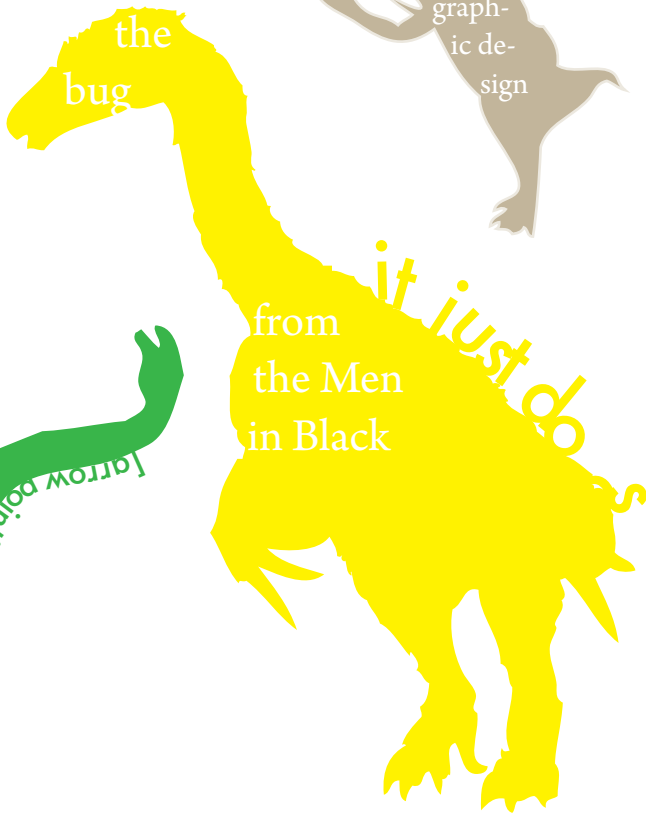
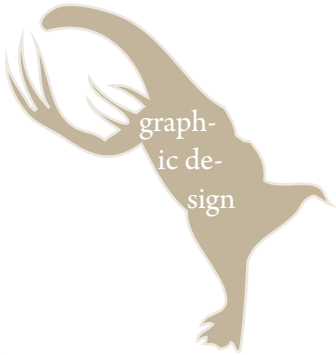
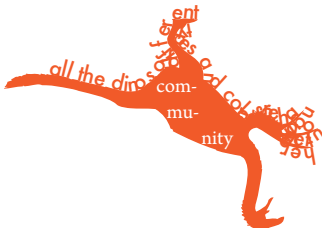
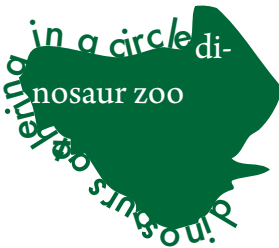
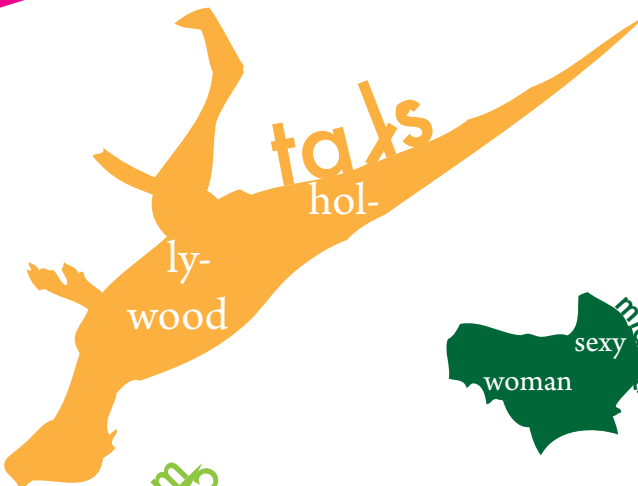
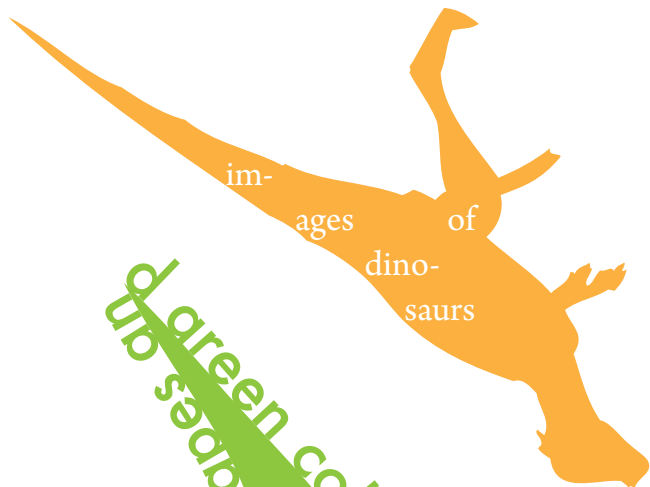


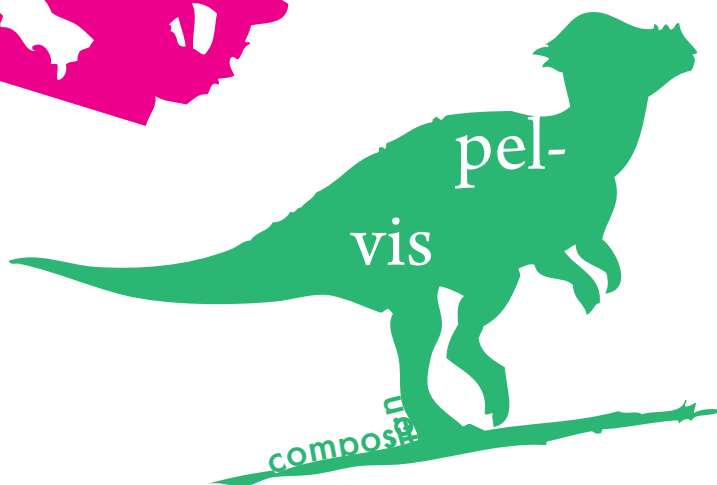
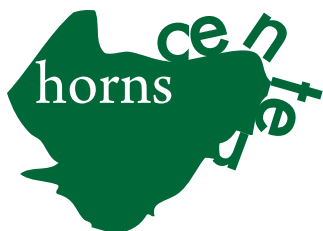
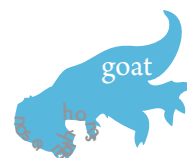


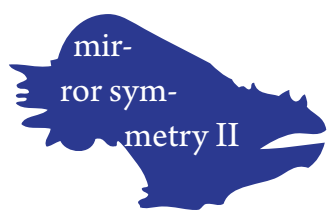
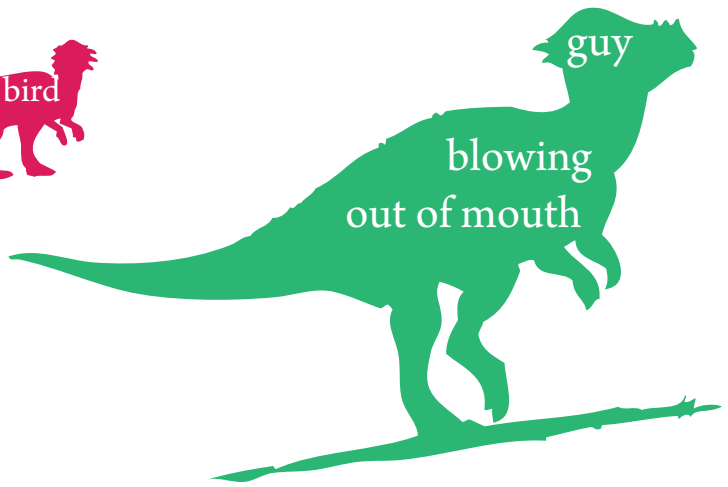
IMAGE 8

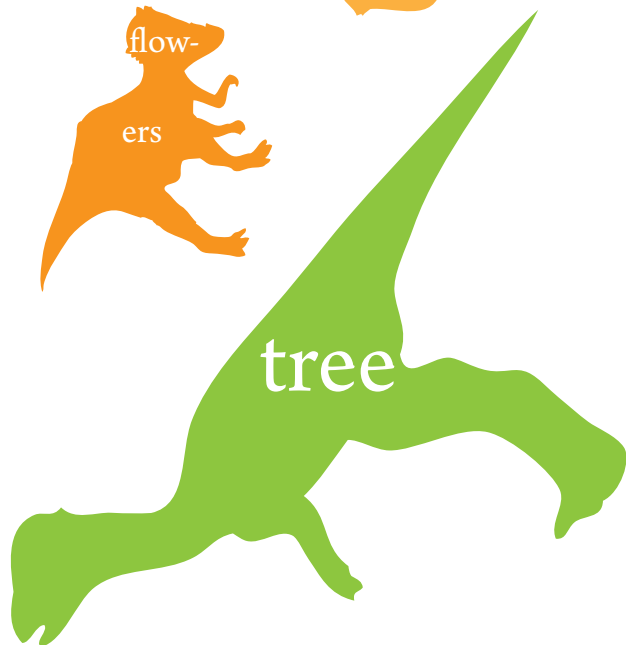
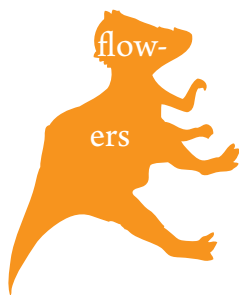
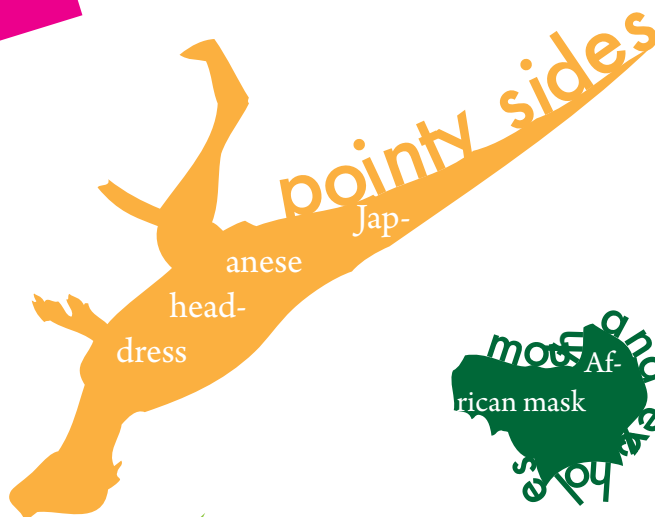
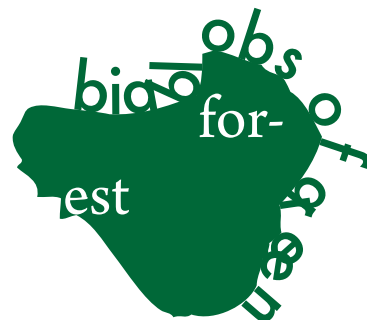
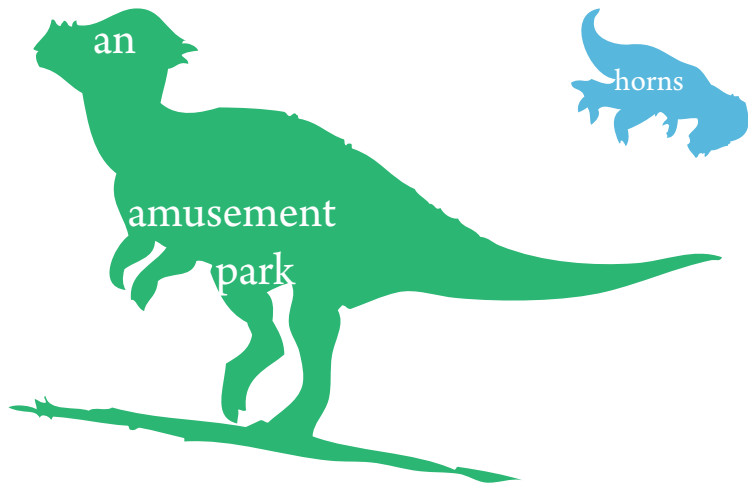


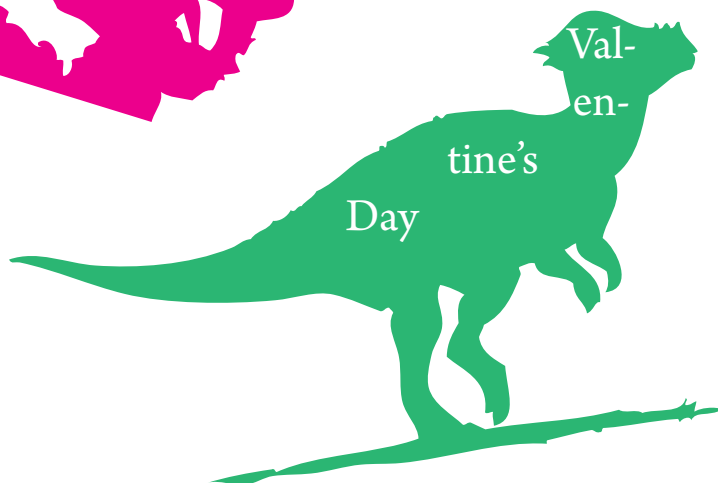
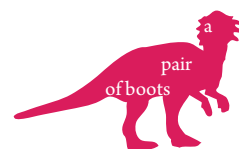
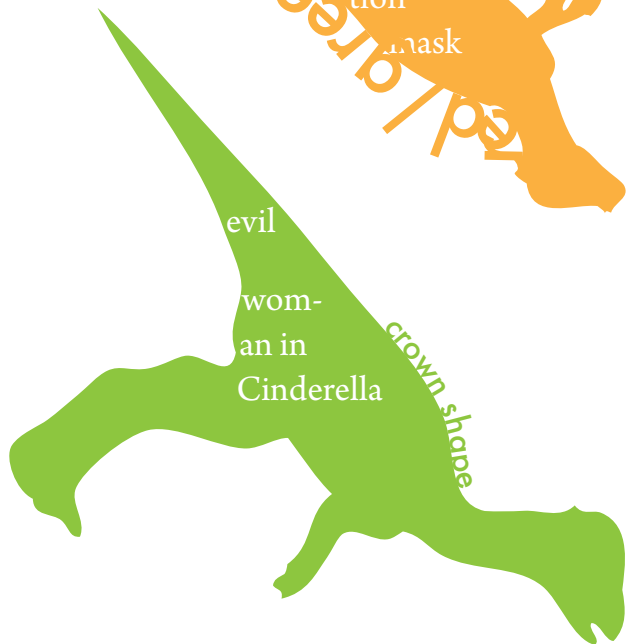


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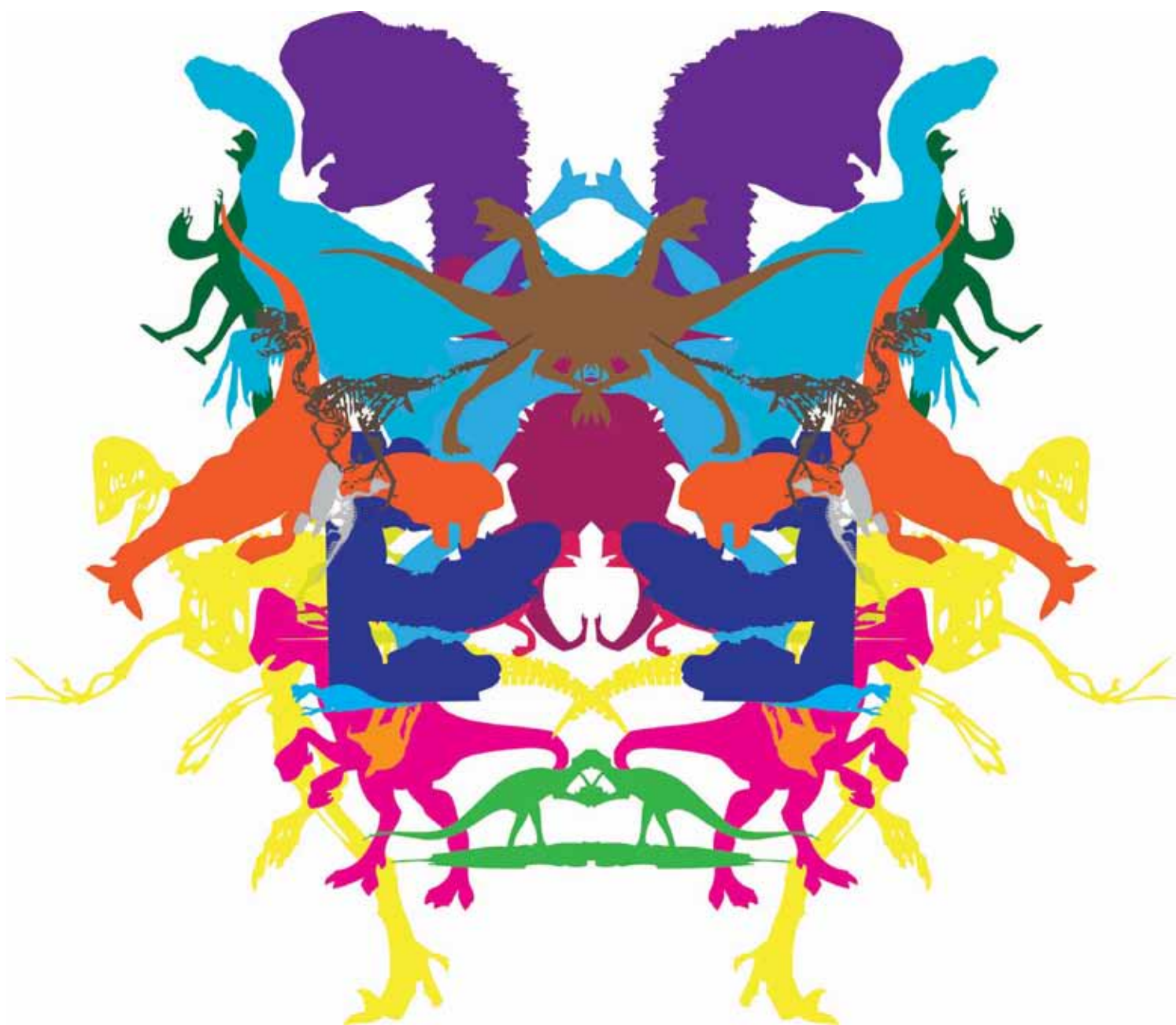
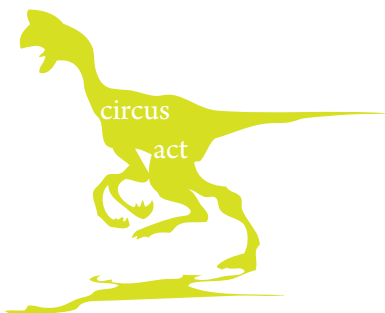
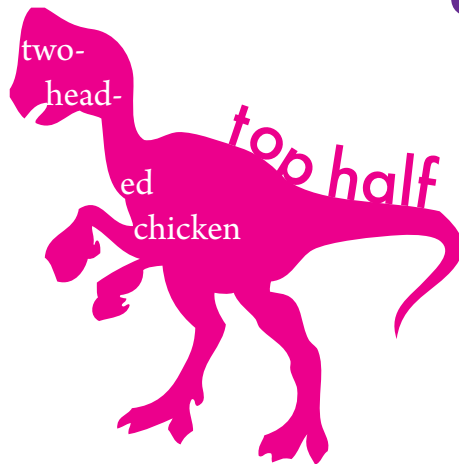
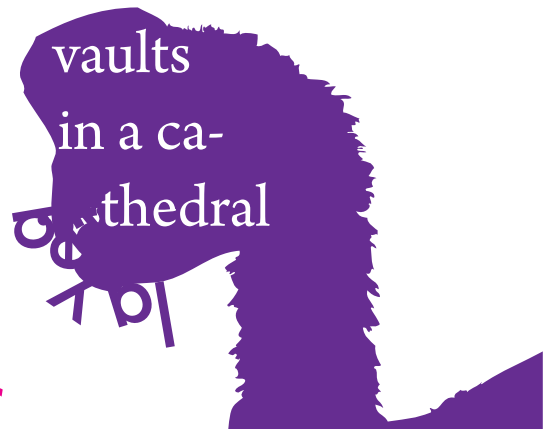
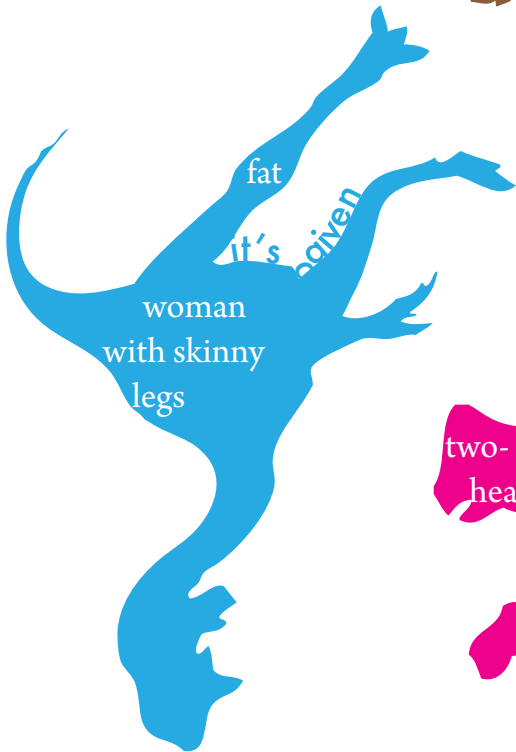
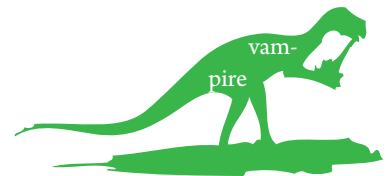
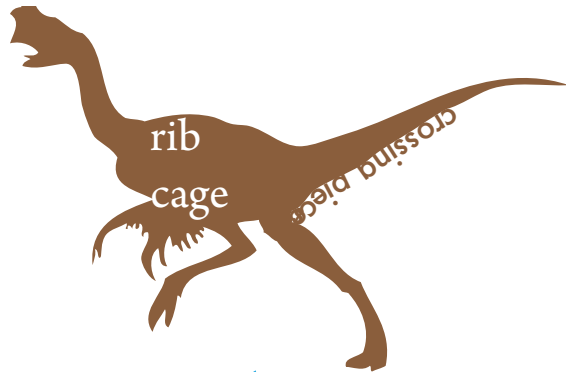
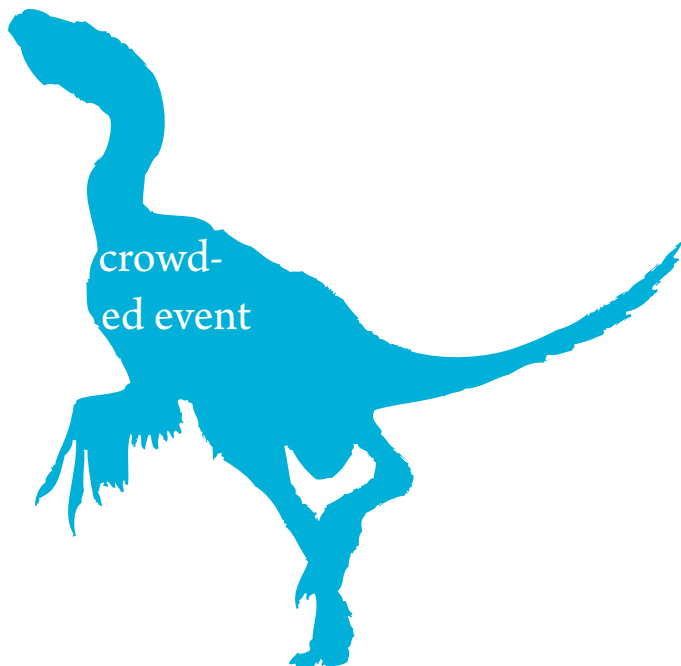
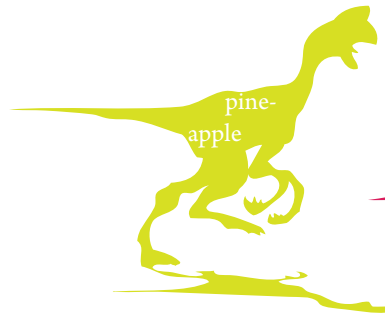
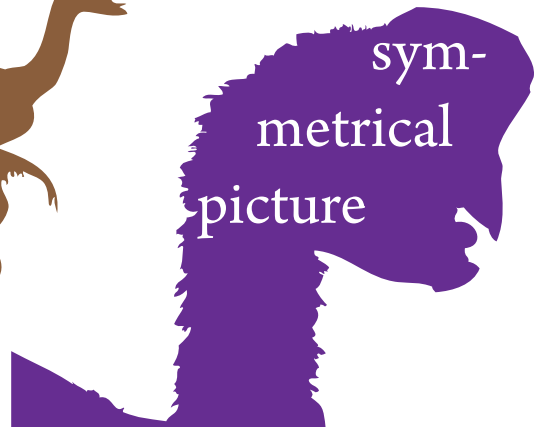
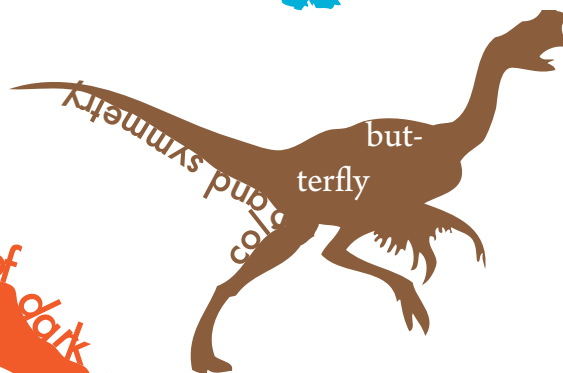
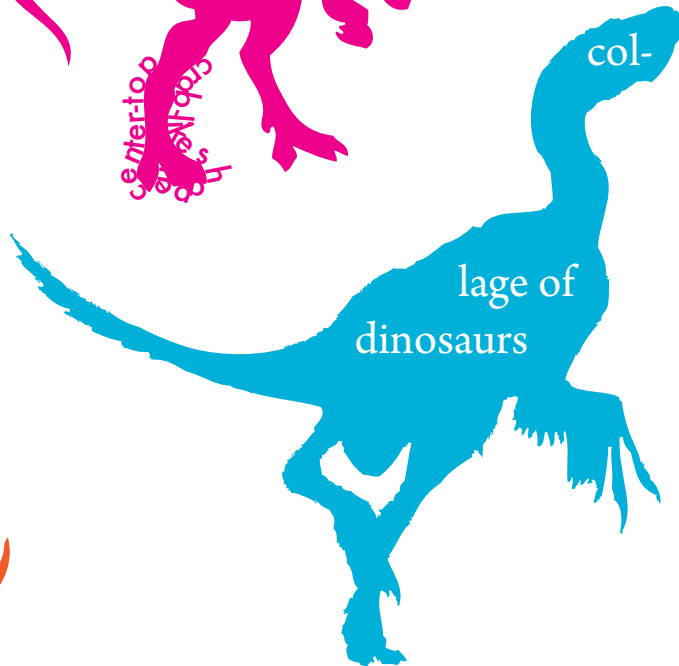
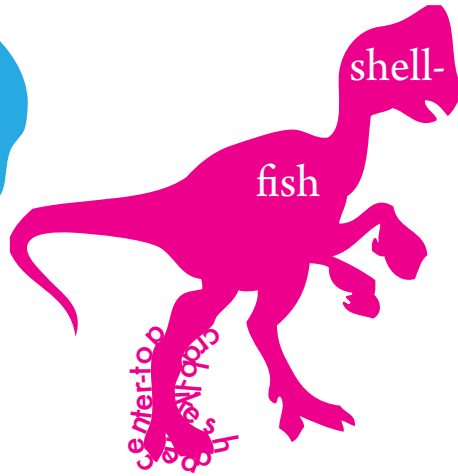
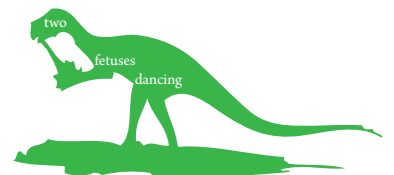
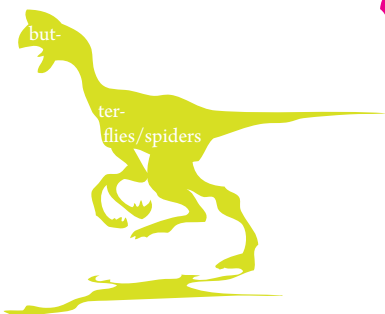
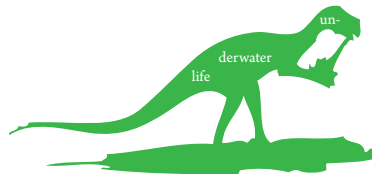
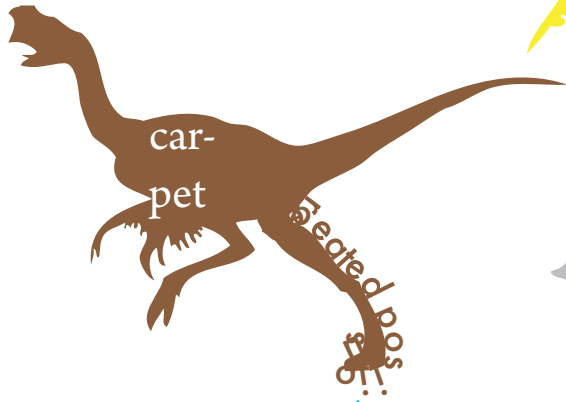


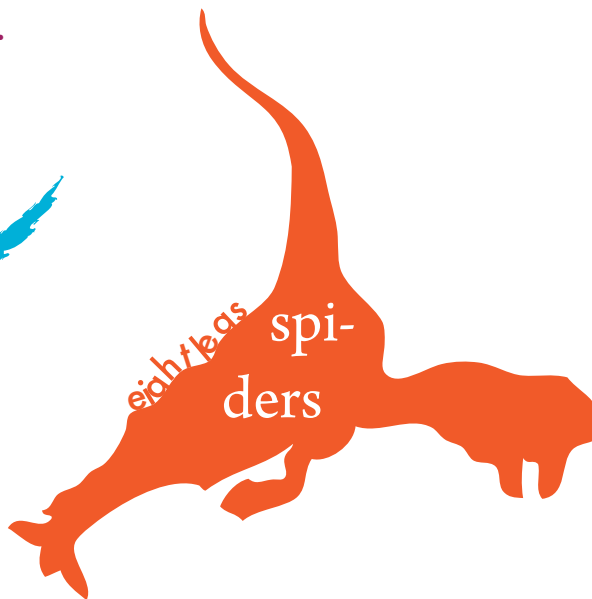
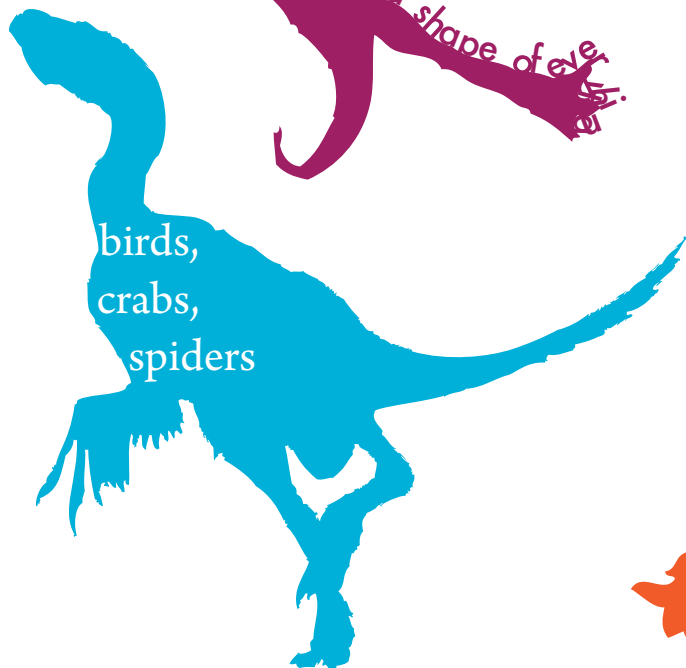
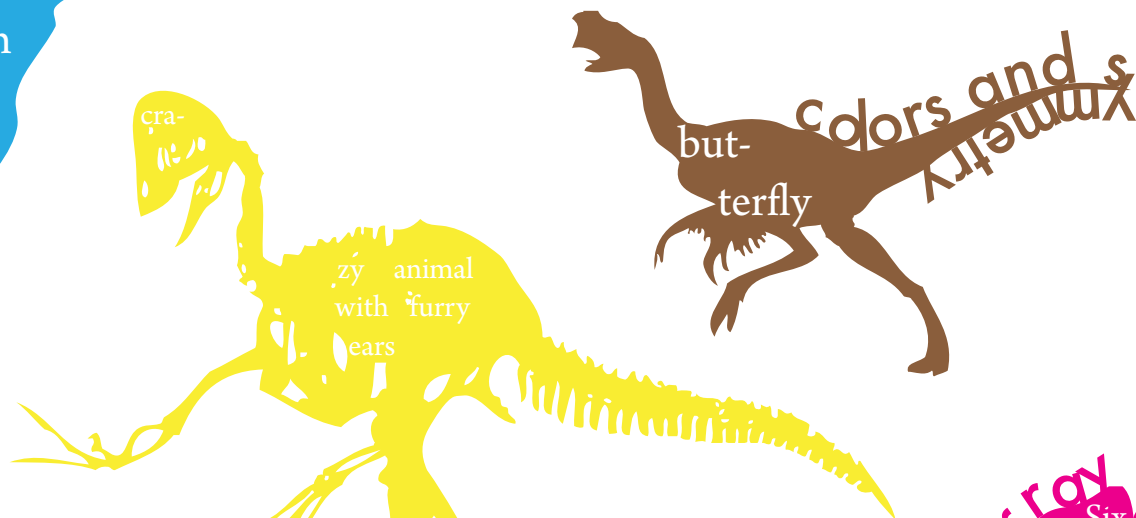
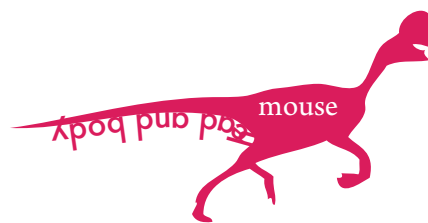
IMAGE 9











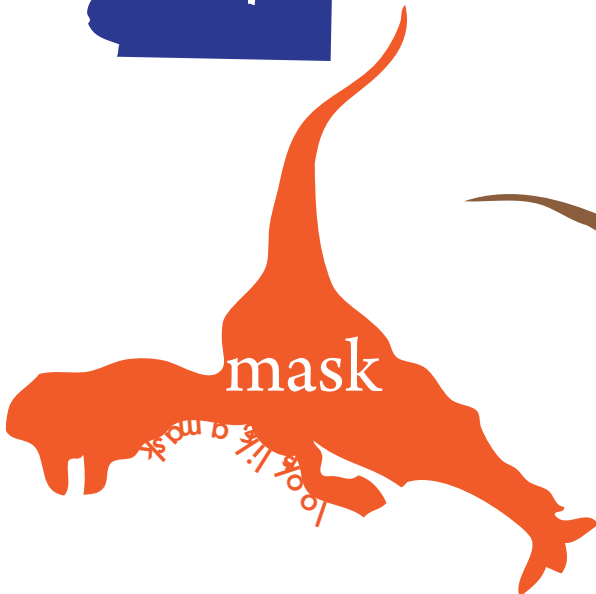
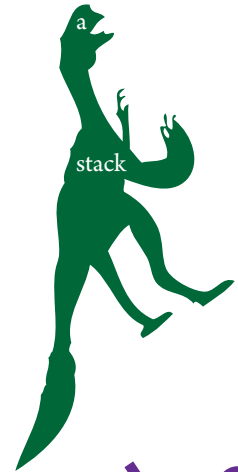
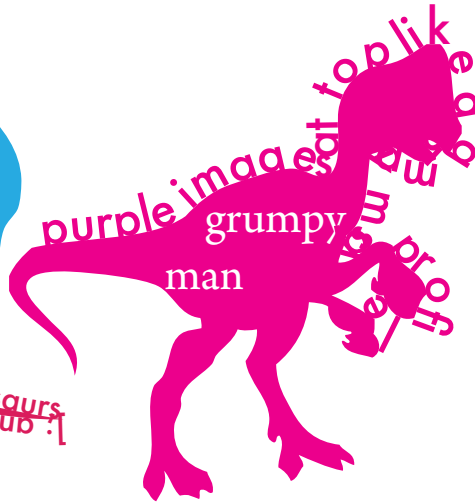
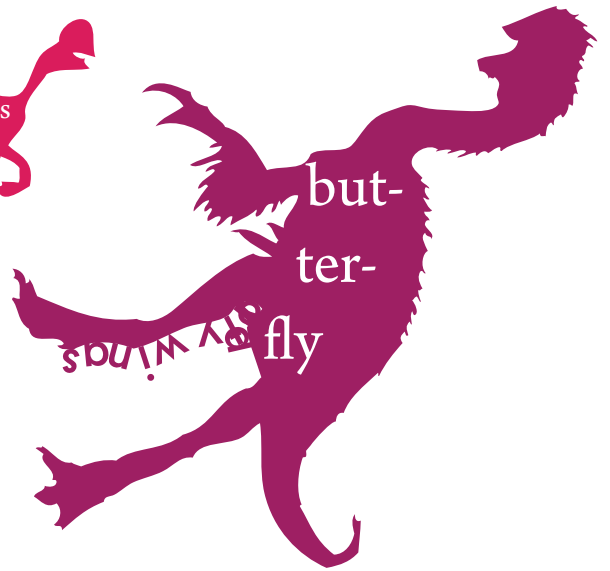
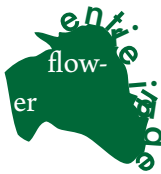
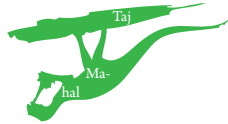
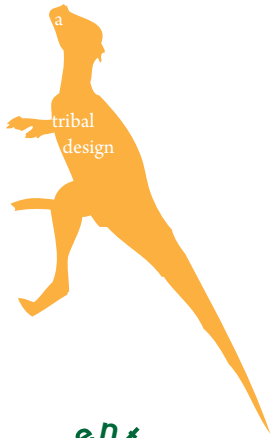
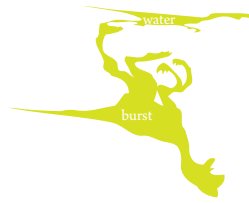
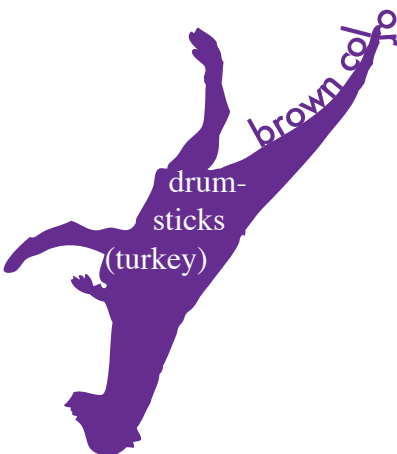
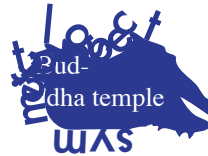
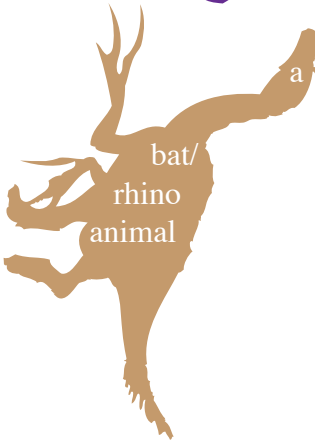
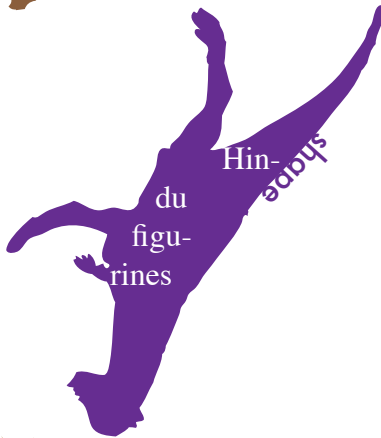
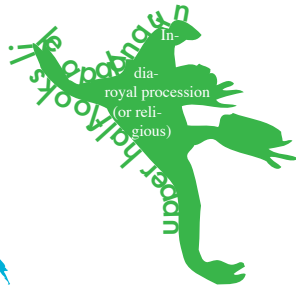
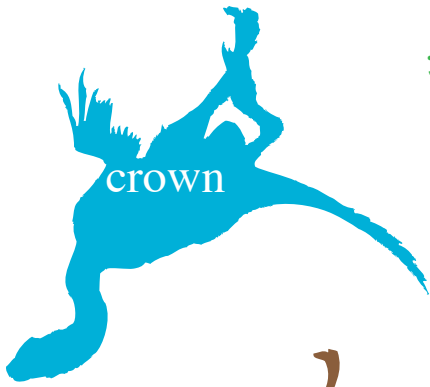




IMAGE 10







Analysis of the Survey Results

History and Approach

This project is one of the ones Chris was the most sure of when he thought of it, but it quickly became one of the ones he was least sure of once he started to put it into practice. He was originally doing it with people on an individual basis, and the whole thing felt fake, like he was simply parodying the Rorschach Test without adding anything new. And the first thing everyone saw was “dinosaurs.”

He was using a series of questions derived from the ones that Rorschach Test testers use to probe their subjects. In the Rorschach Test, everything is evaluated and given points. Chris was trying that, but it seemed too random.

It was when he did the project with the students at West Virginia University that it first clicked. He had everyone in the auditorium answer the questions on their own, simultaneously. And he told them, “I know you see dinosaurs--but what *else* do you see?”

They answered creatively and sincerely. The massive amount of information he got from that lecture class set him straight--no more fake psychologist, no more “I want to understand who you are by looking into your mind as you look into these pictures.” From now on, it was just leaving people alone with their thoughts and the images: “what do you see, and why?” The answers started flowing.

The Cards

The cards themselves do resemble the original Rorschach Test cards reasonably closely, especially in composition. The Emotidon cards are more complex visually--they have more and smaller parts. The original cards are seemingly more obviously suggestive of certain exterior references, like bats or breasts. The colors are more washy in the original.

The first *Emotidon* card is a Therizinosaurus card. It is fairly obvious that it is made of dinosaurs. The claws are very apparent and give it a spiky appearance. There are some internal open spaces.

The second card is a Pachycephalosaurus card. It has a very biological look. It is a little less obviously made of dinosaurs.

The third card is made of Oviraptors. It has two obvious and large heads and lots of thin, spiky lines.

The fourth card is a Therizinosaurus card. Again, it is fairly obvious that it's made of dinosaurs. It has lots of spikes, fewer holes, and a large central negative space.

The fifth card is Pachycephalosaurus and it is less obviously made of dinosaurs.

The sixth card is Oviraptor and again it is less obviously made of dinosaurs. It is very spiky and has little internal space.

The seventh card is the first color card. It is a Therizinosaurus card, and the dinosaurs are again obvious.

The eighth card is less obvious and made of Pachycephalosaurus.

The ninth card is fairly obvious and an Oviraptor.

The tenth card has all the dinosaurs, and looks very complex, which is partly due to the fact that the dinosaurs are all smaller than they are in the other cards.

As a group, the Therizinosaur card seem to be the most universally obviously made of dinosaurs, a characteristic that all the test-takers agreed was distracting.

The Responses

Each card got a lot of repeated responses that were fairly specific to its own particular shape, which is part of what led Chris to realize he was onto something. Of course, it is one thing to get interesting, consistent responses, and another for those responses to have anything to do with dinosaurs--this important point will be dealt with at the end.

The first card evoked multiple responses about spiders, which was common for many of the cards, as well as animals in general, plus some more specific comments: Jesus; a face, especially with a mustache; a velociraptor; horns and claws. The answers had a fairly consistent tone as well as specific content, which was fairly unusual. Their tone was clearly scary and violent.

The second card had multiple responses regarding women and breasts, antlers, a crab (which was common for many cards, but especially this one), a mask, and a butterfly (again, a very common response for all of them). One fairly specific comment that this card got in particular was of knights and swords.

The third card didn't get any repeated responses that were unique to it, but it did get a lot of crabs, butterflies, and scorpions.

The fourth card got a lot of crab comments, but also had multiple references to wigs and hair, and also several to a pelvis/birth canal.

The fifth card got a lot of sword responses, plus several hats or helmets, and quite a few frogs. It was also somewhat war-like in tone.

The sixth card didn't get many unique answers, just lots of crabs.

The seventh card got more than the usual number of butterfly responses, plus an unusual number of dinosaur answers. The dinosaurs are particularly obvious in this one. This was the first color card. Half the respondees--40--said they felt color shock upon first seeing this card. A large number of these people gave "butterfly" as their response, which probably gives a clue as to why its use spiked for this card.

The eighth card got a lot of "dark" or "mysterious" references to things like the devil, the jungle, and masks, as well as faces and Africa/African objects.

The ninth card got a number of butterfly and spider responses.

The tenth card had more repetition than usual, especially for chandeliers, trees, crowns, the Buddha, and India or Hindu things.

When it came to why they saw these things, the answers were fairly specific, making it seem reasonably sure that they really did see these things and weren't just making stuff up. They tended to reply in reference to the shape's composition, and especially its symmetry. They would sometimes recognize a lone object somewhere in the shape that gave rise to their response, but also often felt that the whole image was similar to their reference. They sometimes discussed the negative space. Only very rarely were their answers evocative--the

didn't usually say it "feels like" something, but that it "looks like" something.

Overall

In the end, Chris was quite satisfied with how the images functioned as general stimulants to the imagination without being too specific. One real difficulty he had when originally designing the images was to avoid making them seem too much like a picture, rather than an abstract image. It's a fine line between making an image that is suggestive and making one that is too heavy-handed, but it seems like it worked.

Many of the responses were based on symmetry, and it would be interesting to see if the same thing is true with the Rorschach test. In other words, there are only so many objects in the world that we are familiar with that have a very strong sense of symmetry, and these things tended to pop up in the answers pretty often--butterflies, crabs, spiders, webs, chandeliers. It could be that the test is somewhat self-selecting of its answers, in that objects with an asymmetrical or informal structure wouldn't come to mind as easily as some other objects.

It seems equally clear that the things people saw in the images are not particularly dinosaur related, except as they relate to horns or fighting in some way, so in that sense, it seems like the project has failed to create the psycho-social nexus of dinosaur and mind and culture that Chris originally hoped to invent.

However, it does function as a good analogy for both the investigative process of discovering information about a dinosaur from its fossils, as well as of the process of looking at the role of dinosaurs in culture. All of these processes are awash with brainstorming, discernment, and being open to

new things.

As with many other projects in this series, it tells us at least as much about us, and how our brain functions, as it does about dinosaurs. It tells us that we are very open to suggestion, that we are very visual, that we can see things where there are no things, that we often think of things that (like the responses to this project) are sexual, violent, fearful, or about ourselves (there were so many faces in the responses), so it is little wonder that when we project ourselves onto dinosaurs, many of these same things come across.

However, with all that taken into account, Chris was surprised how much easier it was to interpret the answers as having something to do with dinosaurs once they were placed inside the dinosaur silhouettes for this book! It just goes to show the powerful impact that images can have on words and ideas, and reinforces the importance of understanding the ways dinosaurs are encoded in our minds, and the ways in which they can awaken us to ourselves.