A black and white profile photograph of Ludwig Wittgenstein, looking to the left. He has short, dark, wavy hair and is wearing a dark, high-collared garment. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889-1951)

Gentrain
Stephanie Spoto

Wittgenstein and Logical Positivism

- Wittgenstein, Austrian-born philosopher, first work *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (1921) → work of logical positivism
- Logical Positivism/Logical Empiricism:
 - Movement in 1920s in Vienna
 - Scientific knowledge is the only/best type of knowledge
 - Historical and traditional metaphysical approaches are meaningless and rejected
 - True knowledge based on public experimental and scientific verification
- By 1930s, Wittgenstein moves from positivism towards a focus on what he calls “language games”: “commanding, telling jokes, forming and testing hypotheses, praying and so on—which speakers ‘play’ and in relation to which our utterances, like the moves in a real game, have their places and sense”

The Death of Epistemology

- Concepts like doubt, mistakes, and knowledge itself → we need to put them in the context of the real-life situations where they are often used
- These concepts must engage with behavior, which isn't stable
- Wittgenstein gets sometimes labeled as one of the philosophers announcing the “death of epistemology”

Quote 2

“For good reason, he gets numbered among those philosophers announcing the so-called ‘death of epistemology.’ If epistemology is understood as the endeavor to identify a set of propositions or beliefs which are absolutely certain and serve as the foundation for all other beliefs, then, for Wittgenstein, it is indeed a dead-end. Precisely because knowledge-claims are highly context- bound – significant in some contexts, not in others – it is absurd to attempt [...] to enumerate a set of propositions which per se register certain knowledge” (Cooper, 262).

Quote 3

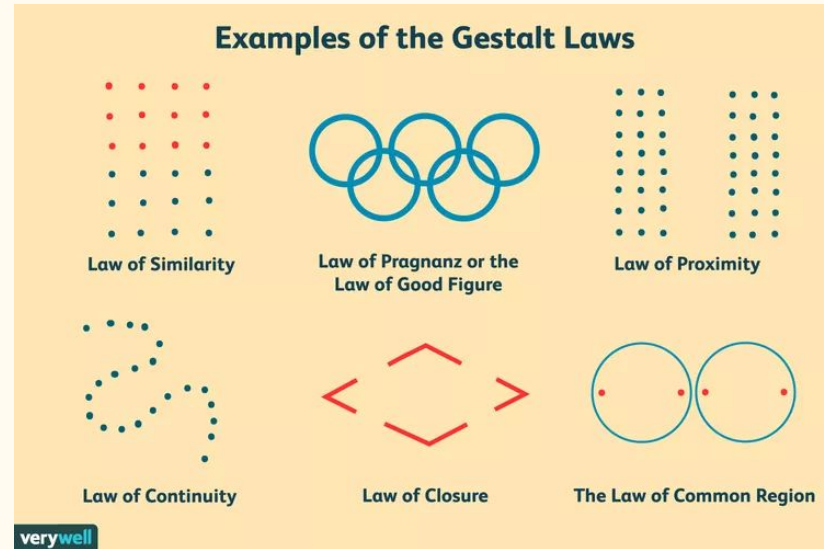
“We just do not see how very specialized the use of ‘I know’ is. For ‘I know’ seems to describe a state of affairs which guarantees what is known, guarantees it as a fact. One always forgets the expression ‘I thought I knew’” (§ 11-12).

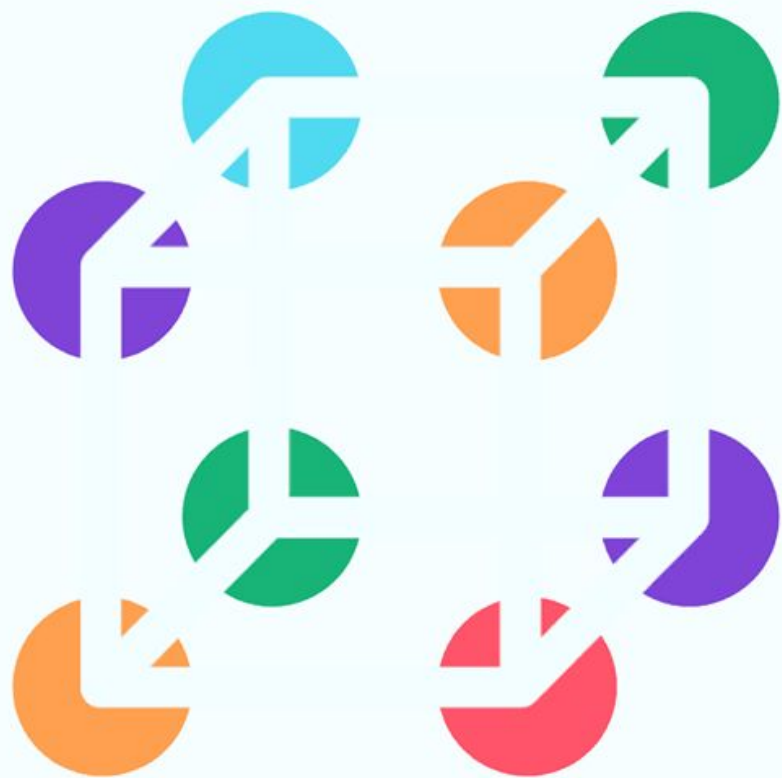
Gestalt perception

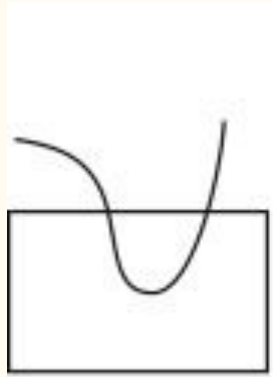
- Developed by German psychologists → interested in studying the laws of perceptual organization → how we organize visual stimuli into patterns
- About interpretation of sense data into knowledge and patterns

These are just a few real-life examples of the six Gestalt principles or laws, which are:

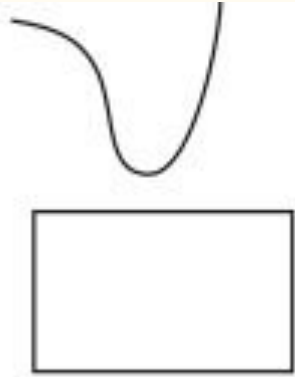
- Law of similarity
- Law of prägnanz
- Law of proximity
- Law of continuity
- Law of closure
- Law of common region







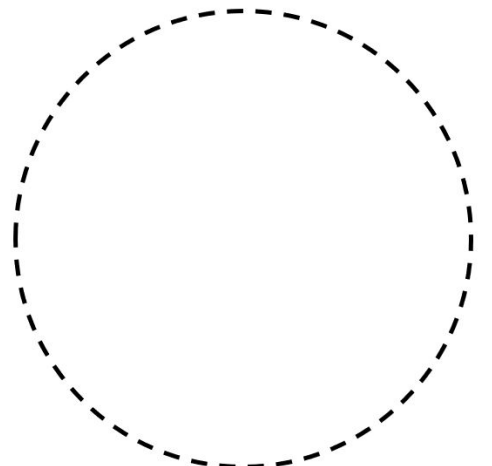
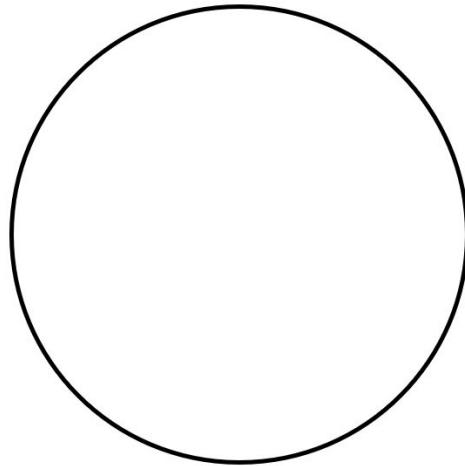
(a)



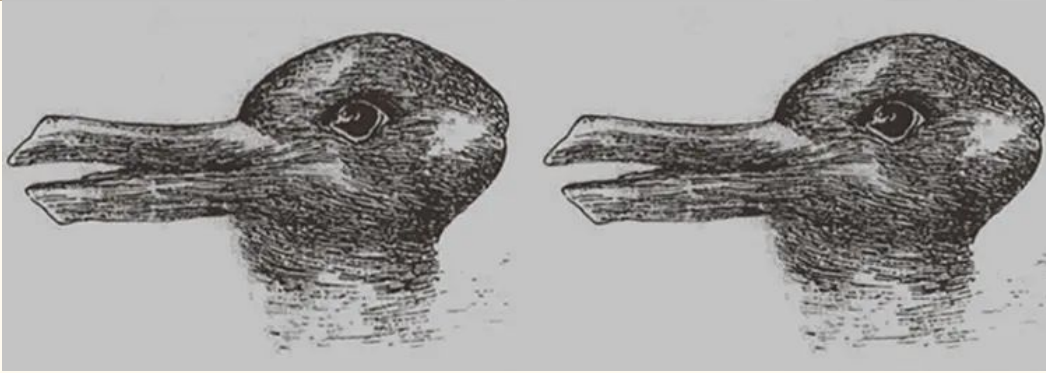
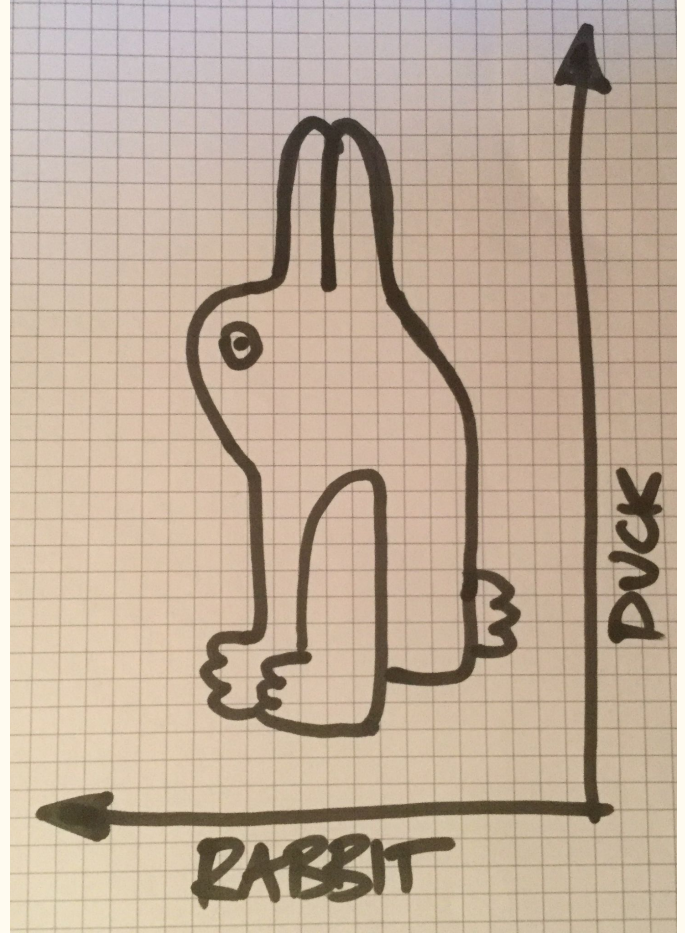
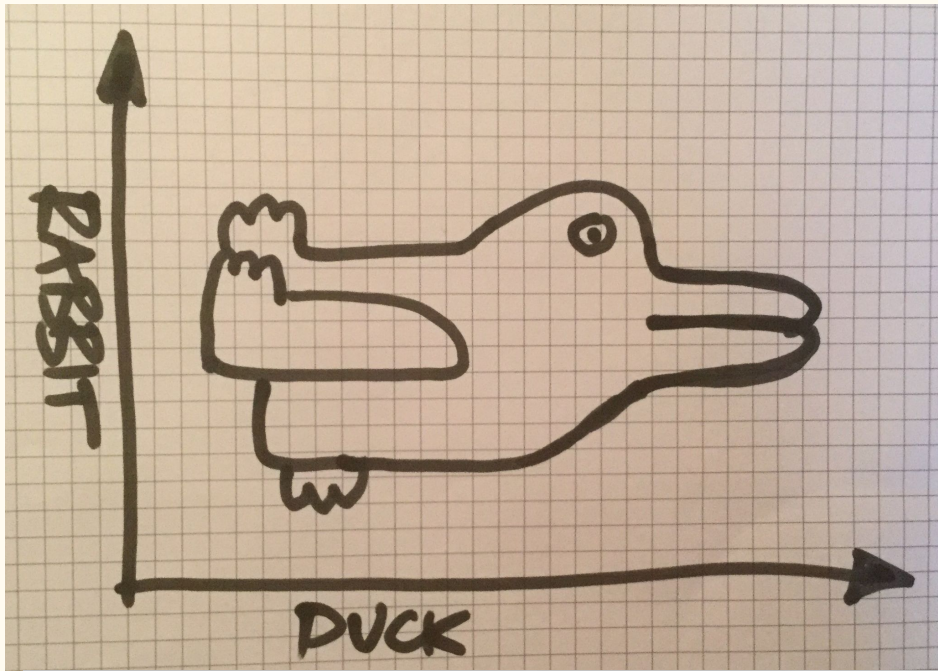
(b)



(c)







Seeing/Seeing as

- Aspect: a part of the thing → to see the duck aspect or the rabbit aspect of the gestalt
- Two types of “seeing”:
 - a. Seems like mere explanation, “What do you see here?” “I see this” → description, drawing, etc.
 - b. “Seeing” something not embodied in the physical object → constructed through organization of experience: “ I see a likeness between these two faces”
 - There is no change in the physical faces, yet we see them differently
 - This is the “lighting up of an aspect” or “dawning” of an aspect → half visual experience and half thought
- Aspects might be interpreted or organized in one way to one viewer and differently to a different viewer
- Wittgenstein, aspects “teach us nothing about the external world” (Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, I, 899).



Aspect Blindness

- What about people who fail to see *something* as *something*?
- I fail to see the figure as a duck. Or a fail to see the figure as a rabbit.
- I fail to see either the old woman or the young woman
- Wittgenstein asks what kinds of consequences this might have?
- Color-blindness is an example given by Wittgenstein
- Disability scholars have turned to this “aspect blindness” to talk about “normative” vs. “non-normative” *seeing*
- I *see* this color as this
- I *see* from this social interaction that there is something wrong

