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**THE BODY IN THE IMAGE – IMAGE IN THE BODY**

*From the Body-Reading of the Image to AI through the Eye of Painting*

**THESIS**

*The Body in the Image – Image in the Body; From the Body-Reading of the Image to AI through the Eye of Painting* is a doctoral dissertation that follows, along a single arc of thought, the reflective entanglement of body and image. It begins from a personal experience: recalling a visual event inscribed in the body that required an instantaneous decision. This experience is not merely a point of departure; it grounds a self-reflective, body-conscious approach.

Visual perception and image-based thinking do not simply accompany or prefigure action; they are an indispensable part of it. Image-making appears as a sensorial–communicative act in which body and image exist in a mutually shaping process: the image is born of bodily experience, while the body—as a perceptual field—acts back upon the image. This mode of thinking is non-linear and non-discursive; it rests on spatial–experiential observation, on concurrent perception and reading. The dissertation examines the embeddedness of the image—into body, consciousness and matter—from philosophical and scientific perspectives, with a focus on phenomenology. A key question throughout is how the image becomes a sensorial, temporal event—an imprint—in which the body appears not as object but as presence unfolding in matter and movement.

The image, as an imprint held in material, preserves event, contact and condensed time—much like the body. The body arises from the fusion of matter and spirit, retaining the traces of time and space—its own narratives—within the malleable dimensions of matter. As Merleau-Ponty writes in *Eye and Mind* that world is made of the same material as the body (*Merleau-Ponty*, 1964).

Painting is not merely representation; it is an act of perception arising from the interaction of body and space, where vision and movement operate in inseparable unity. The painterly gesture is a form of spatial orientation in which the body, as a perceptual field, conditions the emergence of the image. Bodily movement is itself an experience of spatiality—through movement, space becomes touched and activated as visual space. In painting, space is an active medium; vision unfolds as a bodily event, in and as movement.

Analysing the painterly process, the dissertation builds on my own image-making practice and foregrounds philosophical and art-theoretical approaches that address body and

trace from this vantage point. Rigid, exclusive systems often become dead ends in interpreting art. Visual thinking has force precisely because it opens rather than closes: it enables the flow of thought, resists categorisation, seeks connections. The lines of thought here are developed in that spirit, acknowledging that subjective experience and viewpoint are integral to interpretation.

Translating an image into words—giving verbal form to a painting—means stepping away from the logic of images: from a structure of thinking that unfolds in space, generates connections in several directions at once, and is deeply rooted in the body’s experiential memory, in the zone of embodied reflexes. The linear structure of language—a symbolically formed chain of cause and effect—tends to categorise the image and may stigmatise it. Visual thinking is not merely a bearer of meaning that can be rendered in words; it is an autonomous, bodily–sensory form of knowledge, for which verbal expression must seek the closest possible path to the image’s own mode of operation. This is intermodal communication: it opens a passage between the system of visual perception and thought and the linguistic system of symbolic articulation. The dissertation seeks a metaphorical, poetic, “image-proximate” language that follows the rhythm and logic of the image. The language of Merleau-Ponty and Deleuze serves as a parallel reference: not to explain the image, but to think with it.

As argued here, the image constitutes an autonomous epistemological space with its own operational logic—rhythm, trace, layer, symbol, abstraction and—perhaps above all—the desire that motivates its making. Accordingly, painterly experience is not merely practical, but also a cognitive and reflexive system: a visual synthesis in which body, perception and thought reciprocally shape one another, with body and consciousness operating in close concert. Visual thinking always requires presence: contact, imprint—whether on a physical or a mental plane. We experience everything through the body. Every path leads to the body—and every path leads to the image. In a network, in space, in presence.

The dissertation unfolds across six substantive chapters (Chapters. 3–8). It begins with the description of a personal visual experience, then explores the relation of body and image from philosophical, embodied and visual-theoretical directions—tracing this relation from the body-reading of the image to the disembodiment of AI-generated images, consistently through the eyes of painting.

Chapter Three – *The Body as a Site of Visual Decision-Making: The Visioned Decision.* A personal account and a neuroaesthetic analysis initiate a line of inquiry that carries through the subsequent chapters. The starting incident—an instantaneous, visually based choice in a moment of crisis (a “blink decision”)—shows the bodily reaction to a visual stimulus not as

afterthought but as an image-based decision enacted by embodied consciousness. The image mobilises and directs; it anticipates rather than describes. The analysis raises questions of body, affect and pre-verbal perceptual knowledge. Visual thinking appears as a primary, decision-structuring form: the body, as sensory organ, not only receives but generates the image. The chapter draws on neuroaesthetics—especially Damasio’s somatic marker hypothesis—to show how these internal emotional–somatic imprints operate in visual decision-making and become the basis of an individual visual system and painterly thought. It proceeds to a phenomenological examination of the body–image relation.

Chapter Four – *Painting and Space*. The chapter analyses bodily spatial perception and its pictorial projection. Juxtaposing the constructed visual field of Western perspective with movement-based spatial perception in certain Eastern traditions, it argues that space is an active formation: bodily spatial perception grounds vision. Drawing on Merleau-Ponty, Didi-Huberman and Damisch, it examines the ontology of pictorial space through imprint, contact and perceptual structures; the simultaneity of visual and bodily imprinting and the tension between synthesis and simulation reveal the conceptual depth of pictorial space.

Chapter Five – *Movement–Body–Image* explores relations between dance and painterly process; Chapter Six – *Body, Image and Conceptual Movement* offers a body-conscious re-reading of Duchamp’s conceptual turn, where the ready-made communicates as a projection of a body-conscious layer bearing traces of contact and use. The line of thought then turns to performative presence, where the body itself becomes a ready-made—the carrier of presence and meaning in the artwork.

Chapter Seven – *The Disembodiment of the Image: From Duchamp to Algorithmic Images*. In digital imagery, the vanishing of the body becomes central. Following Barthes, Baudrillard and Flusser, the chapter shows how contact with material, the act of trace-leaving and perceptual presence recede. AI-generated images constitute not only a technological shift but reconfigure the cognitive and affective paradigm of visual culture. In this context, painting resists homogenising acceleration: it does not imitate—it asks for time, and for the body. Algorithmic images are born not of bodily sensation but of lexical networks; here, imagery is not lived experience but retrospective simulation. Syntax takes the place of the body; the mediating filter of the body disappears behind the image; the image loses its bodily anchor—its experiential weight and memory.

Chapter Eight – *Pictorial Strategies*. Through six oeuvres (Francis Bacon, Judit Reigl, Maria Lassnig, Joan Mitchell, Peter Doig, Pierre Soulages), the chapter examines the painterly presence of the body—as imprint, gesture, fleeting presence, mnemonic layer or existential

arena. Pictorial strategies here do not present the body as representation but as a bodying image: a breathing, time-inscribed, sensuous space. Painterly image-making is not an instant reply but a practice that asks for time—through contemplation, material engagement, perception and touch. Hence its resistance to immediate verbalisation: unlike linear textual logic, painterly meaning unfolds in a visual field of thought that solicits bodily response. The image becomes an autonomous interpretive space—echoing Merleau-Ponty’s idea that the artist makes the world an image by giving his body to the world (*Merleau-Ponty, 1964*).

The chapters follow the internal structure of painterly thinking and are organised around individual perspectives. Here, the body is not spectacle but medium—the breath of painting inscribed in matter. The analyses seek thematic and sensorial resonances: the void, blackness, contemplative and combative spaces, and transparency delineate a common horizon where the body is no longer object but medium—the embodied presence of consciousness.

This dissertation thus approaches painting not only as a medium but as a perception-based form of thinking—an interdisciplinary field in which body, image and consciousness mutually shape and interpret one another. The painting is a body written into space, time turned into matter, the auratic image-imprint of embodied thought.

### **Formulated Theses**

The propositions arise from an embodied approach to painterly experience. They relate most closely to art informel and free image-making practices—where material, movement, perception and presence co-produce the image—yet extend beyond the strictly painterly to describe a form of visual knowledge that recognises the centrality of body and perception in visual thinking:

1. Visual thinking is a mode of perception distinct from verbal cognition, while providing the experiential ground of language. Vision is born in movement; the image is an autonomous system generating spatial and temporal structures.
2. Painterly thinking is layered, associative and spatially organised: touch, vision, memory, intuition and gesture act simultaneously.
3. The image is an autonomous field of thought—an event embedded in time and space—that creates meaning in dialogue with the body.
4. Visual thinking functions as intermodal communication: it opens a passage between body and world; language arises on the ground of visual experience.

5. The painterly decision is an affective, embodied process: gesture, touch, the resistance of material, and chance or the unexpected generate new solutions, disrupting habitual patterns.

6. The disembodiment of digital and AI-based images is not merely a technical shift but a rupture in perception: the presence grounded in bodily sensation becomes mediate, and the auratic and affective dimensions of embodied image-making fade. Painting offers an affective counterpoint to the algorithmic homogenisation of virtual space by creating a presence bound to material, time and body.

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