

Subcortical contributions to the sense of body ownership

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Abstract

The sense of body ownership (i.e., the feeling that our body or its parts belong to us) plays a key role in bodily self-consciousness and is believed to stem from multisensory integration. The development of experimental paradigms that allow the controlled manipulation of body ownership in laboratory settings, such as the rubber hand illusion, provide an effective tool to investigate the malleability of the sense of body ownership and the boundaries distinguishing self and other. Neuroimaging studies on body ownership converge on the involvement of several cortical regions, including the premotor cortex and posterior parietal cortex. However, relatively less attention has been paid to subcortical structures that may also contribute to body ownership perception, such as the cerebellum and putamen. Here, on the basis of neuroimaging and neuropsychological observations, we provide an overview of relevant subcortical regions and consider their potential role in generating and maintaining a sense of ownership over the body. We also suggest novel avenues for future research targeting the role of subcortical regions in making sense of the body as our own.

Keywords: body ownership, multisensory integration, cerebellum, putamen, amygdala, thalamus, hippocampus

1 **1. Introduction**

2 We perceive our own body as a coherent blend of various sensory impressions. This
3 multisensory perception of one's own body is believed to arise through multisensory
4 integration, whereby different sources of sensory information (e.g., vision, touch,
5 proprioception) are combined to provide a coherent experience of the own body that is distinct
6 from the surrounding environment (e.g.,¹⁻⁹). This phenomenon is often examined in
7 behavioural studies by using multisensory body illusions. Frequently used is the rubber hand
8 illusion (RHI), in which the synchronous, but not asynchronous, stroking of an individual's
9 hidden hand and a false hand in an anatomically congruent position can induce the feeling that
10 the rubber hand is one's own and part of one's own body¹⁰. The subjective experience of a limb
11 or body part as being one's own is referred to as the feeling (or sense) of body ownership, and
12 this bodily experience is intimately related to multisensory bodily perception and multisensory
13 integration^{4,11}. Thus, the RHI has frequently been used to examine the sense of body ownership,
14 both behaviourally and in neuroimaging experiments. Since it was first reported, many studies
15 have replicated and extended the original finding by Botvinick and Cohen¹⁰, providing
16 important insight into the development and maintenance of the sense of body ownership. These
17 findings also paved the way for the development of further multisensory integration
18 experiments involving different body parts, such as the foot (rubber foot illusion¹²) and the
19 whole body (various full-body illusions¹³⁻¹⁶). Such experiments offer a unique opportunity to
20 investigate the malleability of multisensory body representation and the sensory factors that
21 drive the subjective sense of body ownership.

22 RHI literature suggests that the illusion takes place under certain sensory stimulation
23 constraints (or 'rules'), including the temporal synchronicity between the felt and seen
24 touch,^{8,13} the spatial correspondence of the seen and felt orientations of the rubber hand and
25 real hand,^{5,14} the distance between the real and fake hands^{7,15,16} (for reviews see^{11,17}), and the
26 use of a humanoid shape for the physical embodied object¹⁸. When the patterns of sensory
27 information in the different modalities obeys these constraints up to a certain degree of tolerable
28 mismatch, the RHI is elicited, but larger discrepancies that violate these constraints cancels the
29 illusion^{4,19}. Noteworthy, the spatial, temporal, and other congruence rules are similar to the
30 temporal and spatial principles of multisensory integration,²⁰ which is in line with the RHI
31 being a multisensory bodily illusion²¹. In recent probabilistic models of body ownership, the
32 rules and constraints are not considered 'fixed', but instead representing continuous
33 probabilistic functions of how likely it is that the different sensory signals have the same cause

34 (e.g., one's own hand), and therefore should be combined as opposed to segregated, based on
35 the degree of spatiotemporal congruence, sensory uncertainty, and prior experiences^{13,22–26}.

36 By combining body ownership illusions with neuroimaging, it is possible to evaluate
37 the neural processes underlying the sense of body ownership. Three recent meta-analyses^{27–29}
38 of neuroimaging studies on body ownership converge on the involvement of two cortical
39 regions: the ventral premotor cortex (PMv) in the frontal lobe (e.g.,^{5,30–32}) and intraparietal
40 sulcus (IPS) in the posterior parietal cortex (e.g.,^{5,32,33}); and two meta-analyses^{27,29} also
41 observed activation in the anterior or posterior insula (e.g.,^{5,34,35}). Activity in the lateral
42 occipital cortex has also been frequently observed (e.g.,^{31,36,37}). Notably, damage to some of
43 these areas has also been associated with disordered body ownership in clinical reports^{38,39}.
44 Electrocorticography recordings in humans during the RHI suggest that activity in the ventral
45 premotor cortex may reflect the continuous experience of body ownership, whilst activity in
46 the intraparietal sulcus seems to reflect the integration of visual and tactile signals delivered to
47 the real and fake limbs⁴⁰. Electroencephalography studies have associated illusory arm
48 ownership with changes of fronto-parietal cortical dynamics⁴¹ and attenuation of ERPs around
49 330 ms over frontocentral electrodes⁴² in line with engagement of higher order fronto-parietal
50 processes. In sum, the premotor and posterior parietal cortex have been suggested to implement
51 the multisensory integration of visual, tactile, and proprioceptive signals in the RHI, supporting
52 the perceptual illusion^{5,25,31,33,43}. In addition to the frontoparietal cortical areas, the insula has
53 been proposed to play an important role in integrating exteroceptive (multisensory) information
54 and interoceptive signals (i.e., informing about the physiological status of the body and its
55 internal organs⁴⁴) to support the subjective experience of the body as being a part of the self³⁴,
56 along with affective own-body representation^{34,45}. The involvement of the insula in
57 manipulations of body ownership during neuroimaging studies^{5,34,35} and the association
58 between insular damage and disturbed awareness of one's own limbs^{39,46–49} are in line with
59 increasing evidence pointing to the importance of interoceptive signals in creating a coherent
60 representation of one's own body^{3,50–52}.

61 Notable in previous neuroimaging and neurophysiological literature is that it has
62 focused its questions and analyses on cortical areas, especially in the frontal and parietal
63 association cortices. Conversely, surprisingly little attention has been paid to subcortical
64 structures, given that it is not uncommon to observe activations in subcortical regions, and it is
65 unlikely that the subcortex fails to contribute to illusory changes in body ownership and
66 multisensory bodily awareness. The subcortex is phylogenetically older than the cortex,

67 playing essential roles in the regulation of visceral and motor processes, both of which arguably
68 should have a relationship to bodily self-perception and body representation⁵³⁻⁵⁶. Whilst a
69 number of neuroimaging studies do report body ownership-related activity in subcortical areas,
70 the results of different articles are not always consistent in the regions that are reported, which
71 may explain their absence in previous meta-analyses of neuroimaging studies²⁷⁻²⁹. This may
72 be due to the fact that some subcortical areas are small in size and may be more susceptible to
73 noise in an fMRI scanning environment⁵⁷. In the case of the cerebellum, the scanning protocols
74 in some studies were not designed to capture activity in this region (i.e., it falls outside of the
75 field-of-view, e.g.,³⁶). Furthermore, in whole-brain analyses, the spatial smoothing and
76 statistical thresholding procedures are typically optimized for detecting large clusters of active
77 voxels in cortical areas, which may lead to false negatives in subcortical areas where activation
78 tends to be smaller, further explaining its absence from meta-analyses. These factors indicate
79 that subcortical contributions to the sense of body ownership are likely to have been understated
80 in meta-analytic coverage of the phenomenon. This is unfortunate, since there is clinical
81 evidence suggesting that damage to subcortical brain regions or white matter tracts deep in the
82 brain (e.g., basal ganglia and periventricular white matter, cortical and subcortical white matter
83 fibre tracts,⁵⁸ subcortical white matter,⁵⁹ subcortical and cortical-subcortical white matter
84 tracts,⁶⁰) might contribute to disordered awareness of one's own body (e.g.,⁶¹⁻⁶⁴). With this in
85 mind, it is essential to better understand subcortical contributions to the sense of body
86 ownership. In this article we will provide an overview of these regions and their potential role
87 in generating and maintaining a sense of ownership over the body and attempt to integrate these
88 areas into the well-established cortical network¹¹.

89

90 **2. Subcortical brain regions associated with the sense of body ownership**

91 **2.1. Cerebellum**

92 The cerebellum was one of the first subcortical areas to be observed in a neuroimaging
93 study on the sense of body ownership. Ehrsson *et al.*⁵ found that activity in the bilateral
94 cerebellar hemispheres was enhanced when the RHI was induced and maintained. Since then,
95 a large number of fMRI studies on various versions of the RHI and similar full-body illusions
96 have reported cerebellar activations (Figure 1, Supplemental Table 1). For example, follow-up
97 studies using the RHI^{33,37,43,65}, a somatic version of the RHI,³⁰ a RHI based on finger
98 movement,⁶⁶ a rubber foot illusion,⁶⁷ a real limb 'disownership' illusion,³¹ an "invisible hand"

99 version of the RHI⁶⁸ and a full body illusion^{32,45} have all reported cerebellar activation
100 associated with the feeling of ownership over an observed (or sensed) body or body part
101 (Supplemental Table 1). However, these cerebellar activations have received relatively little
102 attention in the broader literature on body ownership and multisensory bodily
103 awareness^{4,11,19,69,70}.

104 This is somewhat surprising, given the cerebellum's role in sensory processing and its
105 anatomical connections with the cerebral cortex. The first point to consider is that the lateral
106 portions of the cerebellum receive visual, tactile, and proprioceptive input⁷¹⁻⁷³, and
107 neuroimaging and clinical studies support a role for the cerebellum in multisensory
108 perception⁷¹⁻⁷⁸. Furthermore, imaging studies have shown that the cerebellum is involved in
109 perceptual and perceptual-cognitive functions in various sensory domains,^{75,79-84} including
110 multisensory integration^{72,74,78,79} and somatosensory processing⁸⁰⁻⁸². With respect to bodily
111 awareness, activation in the cerebellum has also been reported in bodily illusions other than
112 those altering the sense of body ownership, e.g., during illusory arm movement triggered by
113 muscle tendon vibration^{83,84} and integration of visual and kinaesthetic signals⁷³. Thus, the
114 involvement of the cerebellum in body ownership is consistent with its involvement in higher-
115 order sensory processing.

116 The precise anatomical location of cerebellar activity in body ownership studies deserves
117 careful consideration since the cerebellum is not a homogenous structure but made up of
118 different lobules with different patterns of cortico-cerebellar connectivity and potentially
119 different functional roles (e.g.,^{85,86}). Unfortunately, cerebellar anatomy has not always received
120 the attention it deserves in fMRI studies, and cerebellar activations are sometimes reported
121 without further specification of the exact subregion. We examined published studies that
122 reported active cerebellar peaks and summarise the results by displaying the activation peaks
123 on a probabilistic atlas of the cerebellum⁸⁷ (Figure 1). As one can see, fMRI activation related
124 to illusory body ownership is frequently located in lobule VI^{5,30,43,68} or lobule VIIa (Crus I and
125 Crus II)^{31,66,68} of the bilateral cerebellar hemispheres. These lobules are unlikely to be directly
126 involved with primary sensory or motor processing (that would be lobules IV and V) but fit
127 better with involvement in more high-level perceptual functions and multisensory integration.
128 Lobules VI and VIIa are anatomically connected with frontal and parietal areas involved in
129 body ownership illusions, such as the premotor cortex (lobule VI) and the cortices lining the
130 intraparietal cortex and the supramarginal gyrus (lobules VI and VIIa)^{87,88}. Thus, a plausible
131 interpretation is that the co-activation of lobules VI and VIIa and these posterior parietal and

132 premotor areas reflects the engagement of cortico-cerebellar-cortical circuits that links activity
133 in these cortical areas to the specific active sections of the cerebellum which they are connected
134 with during body ownership illusions. This notion is supported by enhanced functional
135 connectivity between lobule VIIa/b and the posterior parietal cortex³¹ and between the left
136 lobule VI and premotor and intraparietal cortex⁶⁸ observed in previous illusory hand ownership
137 fMRI studies. Whilst lobule VIIa also has connections to regions in the prefrontal cortex,
138 superior temporal, and cingulate cortices^{85,87-89}, these are not typically activated during body
139 ownership illusions, so engagement of these circuits seems more unlikely.

140 Lobule VIIa is described as part of the “cognitive cerebellum” in reviews of cerebellar
141 functions,⁹⁰⁻⁹² which is consistent with the notion that body ownership and bodily illusions
142 requires complex integration and interpretation of sensory information in the association
143 cortex, although these previous reviews have not considered neuroimaging studies
144 investigating higher-order bodily perceptual functions and bodily illusions. However, as can
145 be seen in Figure 1, other regions of the cerebellum are also activated during body ownership
146 illusions, such as lobule IV and V, which are connected to sensorimotor cortical areas, and
147 lobules VIIIa and IX of the vermis, which may be connected with temporal cortex and posterior
148 midline structures⁸⁷. More attention is required when considering the anatomical diversity of
149 different cerebellar regions, the co-activation patterns of anatomically interconnected
150 cerebellar and cortical areas, and how the functional connectivity patterns between specific
151 cerebellar lobules and cortical areas change during the RHI and similar body ownership
152 illusions.

153 If the cerebellum is involved in body ownership, we must consider its functional role(s). Given
154 the invariant architecture of the cerebellar cortex and the heterogenous pattern of connections
155 to different cortical areas, it has been proposed that the cerebellum performs a universal
156 computation or information “transform”,^{90,91} although the precise function(s) remains debated.
157 Thus, through a multitude of parallel cortico-cerebellar-cortical loops, the cerebellum could
158 support cortical brain functions by providing a certain type(s) of neural information processing.
159 In contrast to areas in the association cortex, which are densely interconnected with other areas
160 in the association cortex and that receive inputs from different sensory modalities and thus ideal
161 for implementing multisensory integration, different lobules of the cerebellar cortex are not
162 directly interconnected. They are, however, connected to different cortical areas, so a
163 “supporting” role seem plausible. Thus, as Schmahmann⁹² proposed that the cerebellum might
164 support higher cognition by “regulating the speed, capacity, consistency, and appropriateness

165 of mental cognitive processes” similar to how “the cerebellum regulates the rate, force rhythm
166 and accuracy of movements”,⁹² we suggest that the cerebellum may support the timing, spatial
167 patterning, and ‘appropriateness’ (i.e., the suitability under certain circumstances such as
168 matching information contents or semantic congruence) of multisensory integration in the
169 generation of a coherent perceptual representation of one’s own body.

170 Based on this integrative perspective of cerebellar function, Ehrsson and colleagues suggested
171 that the role of the cerebellum in body ownership may be the detection of multisensory
172 synchrony^{11,31,71}. These authors pointed out that cerebellar responses are observed when
173 contrasting synchronous visuotactile stimulation to asynchronous control conditions and that
174 the cerebellum plays an important role in timing functions^{93,94}. This would be in keeping with
175 the role of cerebellum in monitoring mental and external events within the context of time, as
176 well as processing temporal information more generally^{95,96}; patients with cerebellar damage
177 may show difficulties in perceiving time intervals^{93,97,98}. Thus, one possibility is that synchrony
178 detection and temporal sensory processing in the cerebellum supports multisensory integration
179 in higher-level cortical areas such as the intraparietal sulcus and premotor cortex. However,
180 increased cerebellar activity is also observed in RHI studies when synchrony is kept constant
181 in the statistical comparison between conditions and when the spatial congruence was instead
182 manipulated to elicit or suppress the RHI^{5,30,43,66,68}. Thus, multisensory synchrony detection is
183 unlikely to be the only function of cerebellum in body ownership illusions. An alternative
184 broader view is that the cerebellum supports the frontoparietal areas in implementing effective
185 multisensory integration both in spatial and temporal dimensions. The cerebellum would thus
186 contribute to not only the temporal processing of multisensory signals, but also support spatial
187 and other aspects of the multisensory integration processes (influences of prior knowledge,
188 etc). Future model-based fMRI approaches are needed to investigate how neural computations
189 in the cerebellum and cortical areas may differ or are similar; for example, by comparing neural
190 computational functions associated with changes in body ownership in the cerebellum,
191 premotor cortex²⁵ and the posterior parietal cortex³³.

192 A further perspective that has been discussed in the literature is that the cerebellum might play
193 a critical role in multisensory recalibration (or ‘adaptation’, which is another term used⁹⁹), more
194 precisely the spatial alignment of visual and proprioceptive representations of the upper limb⁵.
195 Ehrsson *et al.*⁵ noted greater cerebellar activation in the 10-second period of repeated stroking
196 before the RHI started compared to the period after the illusion had been triggered and was
197 steadily maintained, arguing that the initial activity might reflect visuoproprioceptive

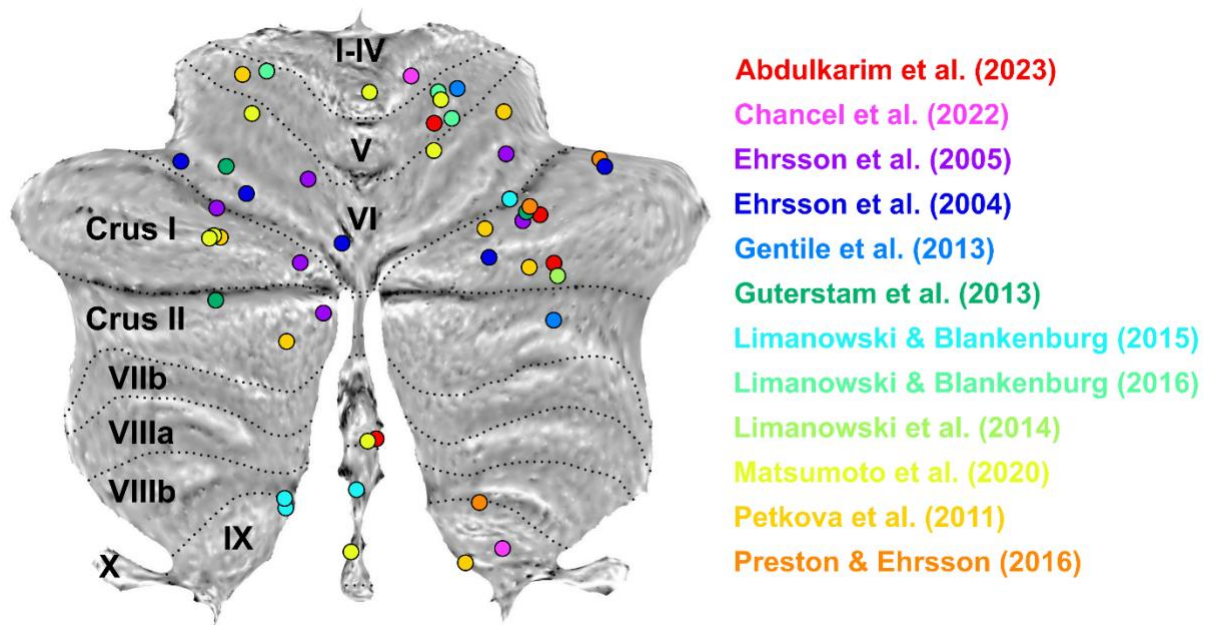
198 recalibration. Chancel *et al.* focused their analysis on the first 12 s of RHI induction and found
199 increased cerebellar activity during this period that was related to the likelihood that the illusion
200 was triggered on a trial-by-trial basis. These findings are consistent with multisensory
201 recalibration in the cerebellum, but, critically, none of these studies included behavioural
202 measures of visuoproprioceptive recalibration, so the link remains speculative. Interestingly,
203 tDCS stimulation over the cerebellum enhances proprioceptive updating of felt real hand
204 position during the RHI elicited by finger movements, according to one recent study¹⁰⁰ which
205 would be consistent with the recalibration hypothesis. However, it has been suggested that the
206 cerebellum may be more important in sensorimotor recalibration when error-based feedback is
207 available during voluntary goal-direct action rather than in “passive” conditions such as when
208 participants experience bodily illusions by visuotactile stimulation, which might speak against
209 the cerebellar recalibration hypothesis^{101–103}.

210 A further possible role of the cerebellum is that it may be involved in generating or detecting
211 multisensory prediction errors. This view is inspired by theories that the cerebellum is critical
212 for error detection^{104,105} and for encoding internal models for sensorimotor control^{82,105,106}.
213 Noteworthy, the cerebellum has been reported to be involved in the generation of sensory
214 predictions and the comparison of expected sensory consequences of movement and afferent
215 sensory feedback from movement^{82,107–111}. Thus, the idea with respect to the RHI is that during
216 this initial period of repeated multisensory stimulation before illusion elicitation, the brain tries
217 to minimize prediction errors generated by the conflicting visual and somatosensory signals.
218 These prediction errors arise as a consequence of internal models in the cerebellum (or cortex)
219 that describe the expected relationships between the different sensory signals from the body;
220 and these prediction errors serve as a learning signal that drives the updating of the central body
221 representation, which provides input to the internal model¹¹². However, fMRI experiments
222 testing this idea are lacking; the temporal evolution of prediction error signals and signals
223 reflecting the emergence of the RHI should presumably have different temporal profiles and
224 could, thus, theoretically, be disambiguated.

225 The stronger cerebellar responses reported by Ehrsson *et al.*⁵ when contrasting the early
226 period before illusion induction to the later illusion phase would be in line with the prediction
227 error hypothesis but is inconclusive. Interestingly, unpublished data from an fMRI study
228 conducted in our lab¹¹² investigated prediction error responses in the RHI. Specifically, this
229 study examined brain responses to omissions of expected sensory stimuli during the RHI. In
230 20% of the synchronous visuotactile stimuli delivered in the RHI condition, there was an

231 unexpected omission of a tactile or a visual stimulus; such omissions generate a prediction
232 error¹¹³ and were associated with cerebellar activation in the right lateral cerebellum (x=28, -
233 58, z=-26; right lobule VI) regardless of omission modality¹¹². The control condition was
234 identical sensory omissions in a spatially incongruent condition where synchronous strokes
235 were applied to different parts of the rubber hand and the real hand, suppressing the RHI and
236 its associated prediction errors. Regardless, it should be emphasised that the results from other
237 fMRI studies fit less well with the cerebellar prediction error hypothesis. For example,
238 cerebellar responses correlate positively with the strength of subjective RHI across
239 individuals^{5,33,37,43,65} and it is not clear why individuals with a strong illusion should have a
240 strong unresolved conflict and more prediction errors; and crucially, when participants look at
241 their real hand being touched in direct view there are cerebellar responses, which is a situation
242 where there is no prediction error (but multisensory integration⁷²).

243 Ultimately, it is possible that different regions of the cerebellum are involved in each
244 of the aforementioned processes (detection of multisensory synchrony, multisensory
245 recalibration, prediction errors), but at present, the relatively small number of experimental
246 paradigms and statistical contrasts used, most of which focus on temporal and spatial
247 congruence, makes it challenging to verify the precise role(s) of the cerebellum and link
248 function(s) to specific structures. Whilst the involvement of the cerebellum in the RHI and
249 similar body ownership illusions is supported in the imaging literature, it deserves future
250 investigation, especially with respect to its relative functional role and functional connectivity
251 to cortical areas. Experiments designed to directly test and separate the potential roles of the
252 cerebellum would be particularly informative.



253

254 **Figure 1: Flatmap representation of the cerebellum and locations of activity reported in published**
 255 **studies on body ownership.**

256 Locations are approximate and some have been shifted to avoid overlap. Details of the studies in terms
 257 of MNI coordinates and contrasts reported in the literature are provided in Supplemental Table 1.

258

259 2.2. Putamen

260 Whilst multisensory perception is important for generating a sense of body ownership,
 261 it is also essential for representing the space near one's body. Studies of non-human primates
 262 have reported cells in the ventral premotor cortex, intraparietal cortex, and putamen that
 263 responded to both somatosensory perception of the body and vision of the area surrounding
 264 it¹¹⁴⁻¹¹⁶. The receptive fields of these bimodal neurons were anchored to the hand, such that the
 265 visual receptive field was updated by changes in the hand position, rather than being
 266 retinotopic. This multisensory representation of space surrounding the body, frequently
 267 referred to as peripersonal space, is believed to be important for guiding interaction with the
 268 external world¹¹⁷⁻¹¹⁹. Activity in the putamen, which has been reported in multiple
 269 neuroimaging studies^{31,32,43,45,120,121} (Table 1), may reflect the updating of these multisensory
 270 receptive fields that encode the space surrounding the body¹²⁰. The putamen contains
 271 multisensory neurons¹¹⁵ and is anatomically interconnected with cortical areas involved in
 272 sensory guidance and hand action^{72,122}. Indeed, studies in non-human primates showed that the
 273 putamen is somatotopically organized and anatomically connected with multisensory frontal

274 and parietal regions¹¹⁵. In particular, the putamen receives projection from somatosensory and
 275 motor cortex¹²², as well as projections from parietal area 7b¹²² and ventral premotor area
 276 6^{122,123}. These observations, combined with fMRI evidence in humans,^{32,72} provide support to
 277 the idea that the human putamen is involved in the integration of visual and somatic signals
 278 from the body.

279 During body ownership illusions, the conscious experience of owning a false body part
 280 is accompanied by a shift in the perceived location of the body part towards that of the illusory
 281 substitute. In the RHI this is typically reflected in ‘proprioceptive drift’, whereby estimates of
 282 the real hand position shift towards the false hand^{10,124}. As conscious perception of one’s body
 283 changes, so too does the internal model of the body’s position in space (also sometimes referred
 284 to as the ‘state estimation’)^{125,126}. Mirroring work in non-human primates, neuroimaging
 285 studies examining multisensory responses to stimulation of the hand suggest that the putamen
 286 displays superadditive responses to vision and touch⁷². Brozzoli *et al.*¹²⁰ built on these findings
 287 by examining brain activity in response to object presentation near the hand. They found
 288 evidence to suggest that the putamen, along with frontoparietal cortical areas, was encoding
 289 visually-presented objects in hand-centred space. That is, activity was associated with the
 290 position of the object relative to the hand,¹²⁷ rather than its objective position in the visual field.
 291 More importantly, they found that similar responses could be observed when objects were
 292 presented near a rubber hand after RHI induction,¹²⁰ suggesting a remapping of the hand-
 293 centred spatial reference frame onto the false hand. Thus, activity in the putamen might reflect
 294 the updating of peripersonal space in line with the perceived limits of the body.

295

296 **Table 1: Summary of putamen activation reported in neuroimaging studies of body ownership.**

297 All relevant coordinates reported in each article are provided. See individual articles for details of
 298 correction methods.

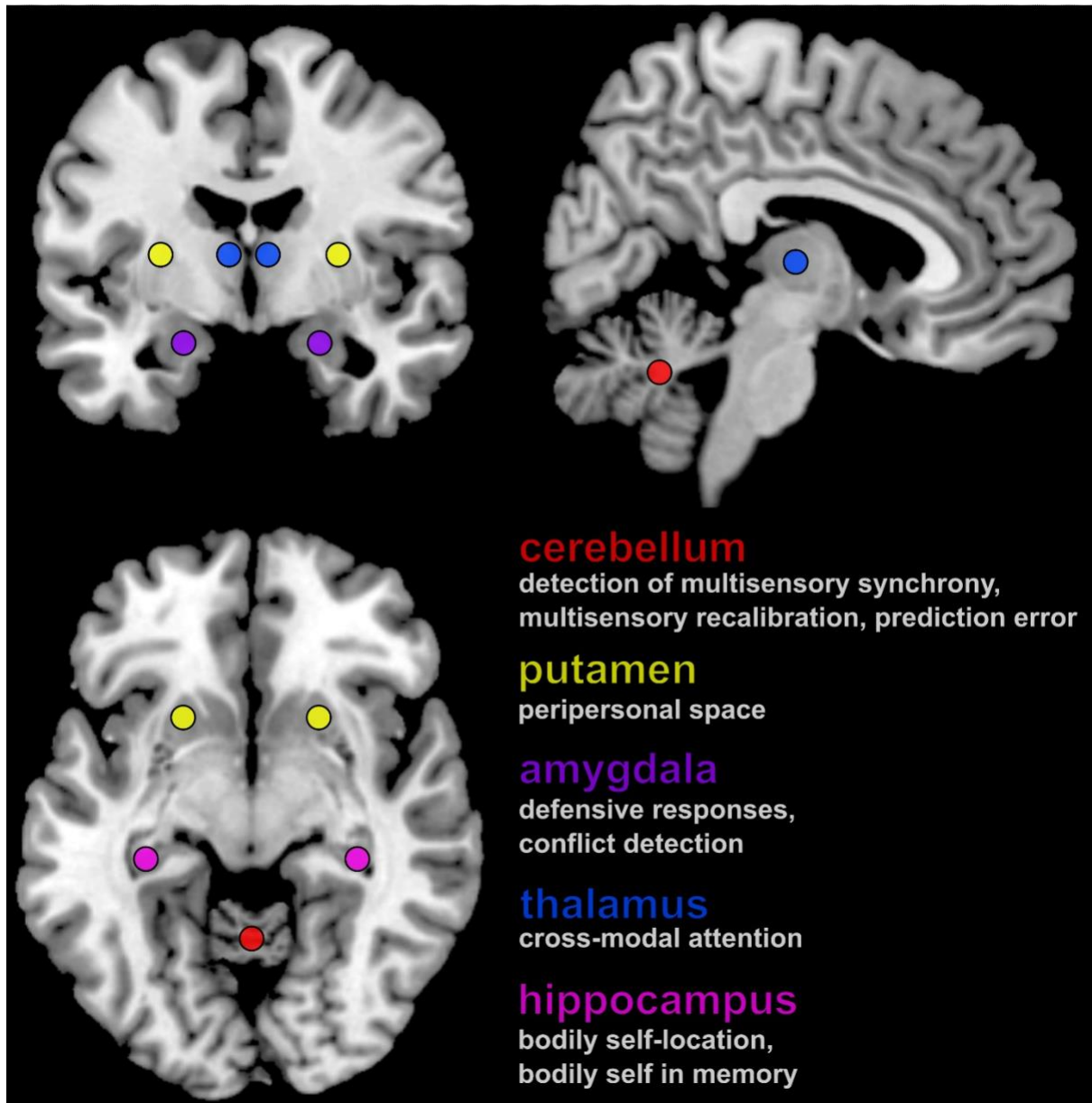
Article	Paradigm	Reported effect	Peak coordinate (MNI)		
			x	y	z
Brozzoli et al. (2012)	Rubber hand illusion	Remapping of hand-centred space onto owned rubber hand	-20	6	0
			20	12	-8

Chancel et al. (2022)	Rubber hand illusion	Illusion detection (yes) vs no detection (no) response	-28	-14	-2
			-24	-8	10
Gentile et al. (2013)	Real hand disownership	Integration of visual and tactile signals from the hand under conditions of full temporal and spatial congruence	-28	6	4
Gentile et al. (2015)	Full body illusion	Multivoxel pattern analysis decoding accuracy (synchronous vs. asynchronous condition)	-28	-16	-6
Limanowski & Blankenburg (2016)	Real hand, rubber hand illusion	Increased activity during synchronous fake arm stimulation compared with asynchronous fake stimulation and compared with real arm stimulation	24	4	-10
Petkova et al. (2011)	Full body illusion	Effect of visuotactile synchrony applied to a fake body vs. block of wood	-22	-8	8
		Effect of visuotactile synchrony in first-person perspective vs. third-person perspective	-26	-8	6
			24	-8	8
		Effect of visuotactile synchrony for visually attached limb vs. visually detached limb	-26	4	-8
		Activity related to subjective illusion strength	30	10	4
Preston & Ehrsson (2016)	Full body illusion	Regression analysis (illusion score with main effect of synchrony)	30	-18	4

299

300 2.3. Other subcortical regions reported in neuroimaging studies of body ownership

301 In addition to the cerebellum and putamen, there is also evidence that other subcortical
302 regions may contribute to the sense of body ownership (Figure 2). Whilst neuroimaging
303 evidence emphasising a role for these areas is limited, we believe that clinical observations,
304 non-human primate research, and theoretical accounts point towards potentially important roles
305 for these regions. At the very least, the following summary might pave the way for more studies
306 specifically targeting these regions of interest.



307

308 **Figure 2: Subcortical brain areas associated with the sense of body ownership, along with possible**
 309 **functions.**

310

311 **2.3.1. Amygdala**

312 The amygdala is a key component of the brain circuits involved in processing of threats
 313 and threat-related emotions such as fear, and activity in the amygdala is rarely reported in
 314 neuroimaging studies of body ownership. One study found increased amygdala activation in
 315 response to physical threat towards the fake body in a full-body illusion¹²⁸. Similarly,
 316 presentation of a virtual spider next to a virtual hand during illusory embodiment was related
 317 to enhanced amygdala activity¹²⁹. Thus, the amygdala might play a role in emotional defence

318 reactions related to ownership of one's limbs. Amygdala activity was also noted in a PET study
319 when the rubber hand was presented in an anatomically impossible position, rotated 90 degrees
320 clockwise, reducing the illusion³⁵. However, such amygdala response was not observed in RHI
321 fMRI studies when the rubber hand was presented in other spatially incongruent orientations
322 that break the illusion, i.e., 180-degree rotation,^{5,43,66} so the amygdala's possible involvement
323 in detecting anatomically impossible postures is unclear.

324 Interestingly, damage to the amygdala may result in faster integration of false limbs
325 into the central body representation⁶⁴. Spengler *et al.*⁶⁴ investigated RHI responses in two
326 monozygotic twin sisters with focal bilateral amygdala damage, and 20 healthy women. The
327 twins showed a faster (almost immediate) illusion onset and increased vividness ratings of the
328 illusion as compared to the healthy controls. These findings were followed up by a volumetric
329 brain morphometry study on 57 healthy participants, showing a positive correlation between
330 amygdala volume and RHI onset⁶⁴; smaller amygdala volumes were associated with a faster
331 RHI onset. Spengler *et al.*⁶⁴ suggested that the amygdala, given its involvement in threat
332 processing, might constitute the focal area of an evolutionary mechanism that protects us
333 against distortion of body perceptions. However, malleability to bodily illusions might
334 conversely be considered to serve an evolutionary function in that they are examples of efficient
335 perceptual processing in the face of sensory uncertainty and perceptual ambiguity^{21,130}.
336 Moreover, bodily illusions are typically not associated with any unpleasant emotions. On the
337 contrary, some participants spontaneously express emotions of surprise, fascination, and joy,
338 so it is not clear to us why a bodily illusion would constitute a threatening perception as
339 suggested by Spengler and colleagues⁶⁴. We also note that the reported illusion onset times in
340 the healthy control group were much longer (mean 134 seconds) than in several other previous
341 RHI studies, where onset times range in the order of 10 to 20 seconds are typically
342 reported^{5,13,15,131}; moreover, from the report it was not clear what specific illusory sensations
343 the participants were instructed to base their onset reports on, so the very long onset times are
344 difficult to interpret.

345 Reader and Crucianelli¹³² proposed an alternative interpretation of Spengler and
346 colleagues'⁶⁴ findings, by suggesting that the role of the amygdala might rather reflect sensory
347 feedback being prioritised over existing knowledge of how one's body is typically
348 experienced¹³³. They proposed that the amygdala may be sensitive to discrepancy between
349 established sensory expectations regarding the real body and incoming sensory information,
350 which could help mediate between bottom-up and top-down processes in the RHI and sense of

351 bodily self. In favour of this, the amygdala is known to be involved in multisensory
352 processing,¹³⁴ and seems to respond more vigorously to novel multisensory input,^{135,136}
353 suggesting a capacity for distinguishing new from prior (or expected) sensory experience.
354 Furthermore, the functional and anatomical connectivity of the amygdala suggests that it is
355 well situated for supporting cortical areas that are commonly associated with the sense of body
356 ownership,^{135–137} such as the posterior parietal cortex and the ventral premotor cortex (e.g.,⁴⁰).
357 As such, the amygdala may be involved in comparing pre-existing knowledge of one’s own
358 body (that the hidden real hand is spatially distinct from the rubber hand) with ongoing sensory
359 feedback (the visuotactile correlations) and provide an internal signal for conflict detection that
360 opposes the illusion, i.e., limiting the influence of sensory information until it is strong enough
361 to override experience¹³³. However, the lack of amygdala activity in fMRI studies focusing on
362 the period during which the illusion develops^{5,33} may speak against this hypothesis. For
363 example, in Chancel *et al.*,³³ analysing the first 12 seconds of illusion induction, no activation
364 in amygdala was observed related to the RHI, visuotactile synchrony, or visuotactile
365 asynchrony (but negative findings in fMRI studies are typically difficult to interpret). Thus, the
366 precise role of amygdala in body ownership is still unclear and require further investigation.

367 **2.3.2. Thalamus**

368 The thalamus is an important ‘hub’ region of the brain, passing information between
369 the peripheral nervous system and the cortex¹³⁸ (see¹³⁹ for a recent review) as well as between
370 cortical areas. The thalamus can be divided into 60 or so nuclei, each with different input
371 pathways from the periphery and various projections as outputs, mainly to the cerebral cortex.
372 For example, somatosensory information from the spinal cortex reaches the ventral posterior
373 nucleus (discriminate touch) and the ventral medial posterior nucleus (thermosensation and
374 nociception) and are from here relayed to different sensory cortical areas such as the
375 somatosensory cortex (touch) and the posterior insula (thermosensation and nociception).
376 Other thalamic nuclei receive input from cortical areas and, in turn, relay this information back
377 to other cortical areas through a set of reciprocal “looped” connections to the cortex, forming
378 cortico-thalamo-cortical circuits (see¹⁴⁰ for a review). The thalamus’ connectivity with primary
379 sensory areas and the superior colliculus has resulted in its consideration as an important area
380 for multisensory integration, potentially by supporting rapid transfer of information between
381 sensory regions¹⁴¹. It may also play a role in guiding selective sensory attention and cross-
382 modal attention,^{142–146} which could similarly support multisensory processing.

383 Interestingly, the first reported activation of the thalamus in response to a body
384 ownership illusion was observed in a situation *not* inducing an illusory sense of body
385 ownership. Tsakiris *et al.*³⁵ observed increased activity in the thalamus when asynchronous
386 stroking was applied during the RHI, i.e., in the control condition that does not typically induce
387 a sense of ownership over the false hand. However, a number of later studies found increased
388 activity in thalamus in cases when illusory body ownership was induced^{32,67,68,128}. Whilst this
389 might be broadly explained by the proposed multisensory processing of the thalamus, not all
390 thalamic nuclei contribute to multisensory processing of body-related stimuli and localising to
391 a specific subregion is likely to be more informative. Whilst the location of thalamic activation
392 across different studies is heterogeneous, thus not permitting the localisation of body-
393 ownership related processing to a particular nucleus, two studies that found activity in the
394 thalamus^{36,68} probably overlap in the lateral pulvinar,^{147–151} suggesting that this might be a
395 subregion involved in processes related to the sense of body ownership.

396 In the primate brain, the lateral pulvinar receives inputs from the superior colliculus and
397 amygdala and displays reciprocal connectivity with areas that include the visual cortex
398 (including extrastriate cortex), premotor cortex, and posterior parietal lobe^{152–157}. Strong, direct
399 evidence for pulvinar involvement in multisensory processing remains limited, but neurons in
400 the lateral pulvinar are responsive to visual and tactile stimuli, and it is possibly involved in
401 proprioception (¹⁵⁵ for review). In general, the lateral pulvinar is most typically considered for
402 its role in visual perception and attention^{149,153,154,158–161}. This may suggest that activity in this
403 area could reflect changes in cross-modal attention towards a salient multisensory experience,
404 e.g., facilitating attention towards visual processing of the fake hand driven by visuotactile
405 integration in cortical areas. Thus, the pulvinar may mediate top-down modulation of sensory
406 signals that shapes sensory processing as part of sensations of body ownership, rather than
407 implement the core multisensory integration mechanisms related to the generation of body
408 ownership sensations directly. Interestingly, in the relevant studies,^{68,128} illusory body-
409 ownership-related activity was also observed in premotor and posterior parietal areas as well
410 as in lateral occipital cortex, so one could speculate the frontoparietal areas may modulate
411 visual processing of the illusory owned limb in the lateral occipital cortex through cortico-
412 thalamic-cortical circuits involving the pulvinar; although this hypothesis needs to be tested in
413 future functional connectivity analyses. Regardless, functional connectivity between IPS and
414 lateral occipital cortex was found, but it was not clarified if this effect was driven by cortico-
415 cortical connections or cortico-thalamic-cortical connections. Ultimately, further work is

416 required to better understand the role of the pulvinar, and other thalamic nuclei. Studies
417 investigating changes in effective connectivity to cortical areas may be particularly
418 informative.

419 **2.3.3. Hippocampus**

420 The hippocampus is involved in associative learning (e.g.,¹⁶²), memory (e.g.,¹⁶³) and
421 spatial navigation¹⁶⁴⁻¹⁶⁶, but lesions and fMRI studies on bodily illusions suggest a potential
422 involvement also in functions related to spatial bodily awareness and sense of bodily self.

423 Guterstam *et al.*,¹²⁸ used a full body ownership illusion to investigate the potential
424 involvement of the hippocampus in the perceptual experience of being physically located at a
425 particular place in the environment. Their results showed an association between left
426 hippocampal activity and the perceived location of the body in the space, suggesting that the
427 human hippocampus might play a crucial role in the interplay between space processing and
428 multisensory body representation¹²⁸. This finding is in line with the idea that the hippocampus
429 is part of a larger network that includes areas of the posterior parietal and posterior cingulate
430 cortices that work in concert to represent perceived embodied self-location³⁶. In addition,
431 electrical stimulation of the hippocampus has also been found to elicit illusory changes in
432 perceived self-location¹⁶⁷.

433 Further support for the potential link between hippocampal activity and the first-person
434 perspective comes from clinical and experimental evidence showing that damage or disruption
435 to hippocampus activity can have dramatic consequences for the ability to recall memories
436 from a first-person perspective¹⁶⁸. This may also be highlighted in disturbances of bodily
437 awareness observed in anosognosia for hemiplegia, as will be discussed below. In addition,
438 healthy participants that experienced an out-of-body illusion during encoding of naturalistic
439 events show an altered pattern of hippocampal activation during recall¹⁶⁸ and increased third-
440 person perspective at recall¹⁶⁹. Further, experimental interruption of the sense of body
441 ownership impairs episodic recognition memory¹⁷⁰ and reduced memory accuracy, reliving,
442 and vividness,¹⁷¹ which is indicative of an influence of body ownership on hippocampal
443 memory processes. Clinically related out-of-body experiences seems to affect the ability to
444 recall events encoded whilst one's own self is displaced outside the real body¹⁷².

445 An area that, to the best of our knowledge, has not been explored with respect to body
446 ownership and body representation research is the potential involvement of the hippocampus
447 in associative learning^{163,173,174} and associative predictions¹⁶² of bodily-related multisensory
448 cues. In the study of bodily illusions and body ownership the focus has been on naturalistic

449 multisensory congruencies, that is relationships between visual and somatosensory information
450 that occur during everyday experiences and are shaped through a lifetime of experiencing
451 statistical regularities of naturally occurring sensory feedback (e.g., what a brushstroke on
452 one's hand look and feel like). However, less is known about the learning of novel associations
453 between arbitrary multisensory cues, and how such learned arbitrarily associations may
454 influence body ownership, and the hypothesis that the hippocampus might be involved in such
455 functions is worth exploring in futures studies. In sum, whilst the hippocampus may not be
456 directly involved in the sense of body ownership, it is likely to contribute to related processes
457 such as sense of bodily self-location, the role of bodily self in memory, and more speculatively,
458 the learning of new associations of multisensory bodily cues.

459

460 **3. Neuropsychological and psychiatric observations**

461 Disturbances in bodily awareness can offer important insights into the processes
462 underlying the development of a sense of body ownership. Right-hemisphere stroke can result
463 in disorders of self-awareness, such as disturbances of body ownership or disturbances of body
464 agency,^{48,62,175} as well as anosognosia for hemiplegia, defined as the unawareness of
465 sensorimotor deficits following stroke¹⁷⁶. Anosognosia for hemiplegia has been linked to
466 distortions in the sense of body ownership³⁹. Traditionally, there has been a relatively strong
467 focus on cortical functions in the neuropsychological literature on disorders of body ownership.
468 For example, subcortical lesions damaging white matter tracts have often been interpreted as
469 interrupting cortical functions of the areas connected by the damaged anatomical pathways
470 (e.g., frontoparietal connections). Still, there is a growing interest in the involvement of
471 subcortical structures themselves and their connections to cortical areas (e.g.,¹⁷⁷). Lesions
472 caused by subcortical strokes are typically relatively large and involve damage to multiple
473 cortical and subcortical regions as well as cortico-cortical and cortico-subcortical white matter
474 connections. Noteworthy, an examination of 85 patients with anosognosia following right-
475 hemisphere stroke¹⁷⁸ showed the involvement of subcortical damage, with areas including the
476 thalamus, basal ganglia, corpus callosum, internal capsule, corona radiata, insula, lateral
477 ventricles, and amygdala. In particular, basal ganglia and thalamus lesions were the most likely
478 to account for unawareness in 15 cases where there was damage confined to a single subcortical
479 area^{178,179}. Additional work on anosognosia showed that this condition is linked to lesions in
480 the rolandic operculum, the insula, subcortical areas including the hippocampus and the

481 thalamus, as well as white matter connections, e.g., basal ganglia and periventricular white
482 matter, cortical and subcortical white matter fibre tracts⁵⁸, subcortical white matter⁵⁹,
483 subcortical and cortical-subcortical white matter tracts^{60,180,181}.

484 Interestingly, people with anosognosia tend to show a dissociation in the experience of
485 their own body from a first and third person perspective, with the latter one dramatically
486 improving body awareness as tested by means of a video reply protocol¹⁸². By implication, this
487 could suggest that some of the subcortical areas importantly involved in anosognosia, such as
488 basal ganglia, hippocampus, amygdala, and thalamus, might also play a role in the first person
489 experience of the body, that is a fundamental aspect of bodily self-consciousness^{19,183,184} as
490 well as an essential condition for body ownership illusions to occur^{11,185}.

491 Disorders of body ownership such as asomatognosia (loss of ownership over a limb) or
492 somatoparaphrenia (delusional attribution of one's limb to another individual) have been
493 associated with damage to the putamen, amygdala, thalamus, hippocampus, and basal
494 ganglia^{59,60,62,186}. Furthermore, it is essential to also consider the importance of white matter
495 structures when discussing the effects of lesions that involve these subcortical regions (see ¹⁸⁷
496 for a recent review). For example, Moro *et al.*⁶⁰ compared lesions in patients with anosognosia
497 for hemiplegia and patients with somatoparaphrenia. They proposed that subcortical grey areas
498 (basal ganglia, thalamus, fornix) and related white matter tracts may be necessary for
499 'rudimentary feelings of limb ownership', which are then integrated with other aspects of self-
500 awareness (such as higher-order self-representations) within cortical areas⁶⁰. Among white
501 matter tracts, the corona radiata is an arrangement of afferent and efferent fibres passing
502 between subcortical regions and the cerebral cortex¹⁸⁸ that may be of particular importance for
503 interactions between subcortical and cortical areas involved in body ownership. Interestingly,
504 Feinberg *et al.*⁶¹ observed that damage to the corona radiata connecting the supramarginal gyrus
505 with the subcortex was strongly associated with altered limb ownership. Whilst the
506 supramarginal gyrus is not often considered a core component of the cortical network involved
507 in body ownership, there is some evidence that it shows increased fMRI activation during
508 illusory hand ownership^{31,120} and multisensory stimulation to one's real hand⁷². Furthermore,
509 its proximity to the intraparietal sulcus and likely connectivity with the premotor cortex for
510 sensorimotor processes might indicate that impaired subcortical inputs to this region could
511 influence the sense of limb ownership. Another patient with damage to the corona radiata was
512 reported in a later article, though none of the other four patients with asomatognosia showed
513 similar damage¹⁸⁹. However, more recently, Spinazzola *et al.*¹⁹⁰ reported that anterior corona
514 radiata damage was significantly associated with asomatognosia in a sample of ten patients.

515 The ventral extension of the corona radiata, the internal capsule, has also been found to
516 be damaged in some patients with disrupted body perception⁶⁰⁻⁶³. Gandola *et al.*⁵⁹ proposed a
517 neuroanatomical account of somatoparaphrenia whereby subcortical damage to white matter in
518 the right hemisphere (including the posterior limb of the internal capsule, the corona radiata
519 and the superior longitudinal fasciculus) and of subcortical grey nuclei (thalamus and basal
520 ganglia) plays a crucial role in causing the disorder of body ownership. By comparing 11
521 patients with and 11 without somatoparaphrenia matched for the presence and severity of other
522 associated symptoms (neglect, motor deficits, and anosognosia), it was possible to identify a
523 lesion pattern involving subcortical grey nuclei as well as damage to the white matter tract
524 linking these structures with cortical sensorimotor and associative areas. These results could
525 explain the occurrence of the feeling of disownership, as a consequence of the deficit in the
526 construction of a coherent body representation including the affected limb. Thus, it has been
527 proposed that the white matter tracts, via their connections to the cortex, can promote the
528 processing and the integration of various bottom-up afferent information arising from the
529 (affected) body part with top-down and pre-existing body representations normally computed
530 in higher-order cortices⁵⁹. Thus, the effects of white matter tract damage suggest that
531 disturbances in the sense of body ownership can arise either from (sub)cortical damage or
532 through damaged connectivity between these cortical areas' regions, in keeping with recent
533 accounts^{177,191}. However, more work will be needed to verify exactly what such effects can tell
534 us about the specific body ownership-related processes performed by subcortical regions.

535 In addition, there are interesting links between subcortical regions and psychiatric and
536 neuropsychiatric disorders. Most notably, some research highlights a potential link between
537 subcortical abnormalities and schizophrenia, a psychiatric condition characterised by
538 disturbances in bodily awareness and sense of self¹⁹² in addition to the classic positive and
539 negative symptoms and cognitive impairments. Individuals with schizophrenia report an
540 increased experience of the RHI in synchronous and asynchronous conditions, which suggests
541 a more malleable body representation and weakened sense of self,¹⁹³⁻¹⁹⁵ blurred self-other
542 boundaries,¹⁹⁶ or impaired processing of bottom-up sensory signals, although it is always
543 difficult to rule out effects related to altered higher cognitive functions such as metacognition
544 when these individuals judge and evaluate their subjective experiences, which is also a core
545 feature of schizophrenia. Interestingly, a recent study involving 1117 patients with
546 schizophrenia showed smaller bilateral hippocampus, amygdala, thalamus and accumbens
547 volumes as well as intracranial volume, but larger bilateral caudate, putamen, pallidum and
548 lateral ventricle volumes in patients compared to healthy controls¹⁹⁷. Functional and

549 neuroanatomical studies also showed an association between the cerebellum and schizophrenia
550 (198 for a review), with changes in connectivity, blood flow, and structure associated with this
551 mental disorder.

552 Another interesting condition that is relevant when discussing the link between body
553 ownership and subcortical areas is Body Integrity Identity Dysphoria (BIID). This is a
554 neuropsychiatric disorder characterised by dissatisfaction with one's body and its
555 functionality¹⁹⁹ and a mismatch between the internal representation of bodily self and the
556 physical state and shape of the body²⁰⁰. Patients with BIID often report a strong desire for
557 amputation of a particular body part that is considered alien (this variant of BIID is referred to
558 as Xenomelia, ²⁰¹), often accompanied with feelings of disownership for that unwanted limb
559 (though these appear to be qualitatively different to those reported in asomatagnosia and
560 somatoparaphrenia). Recent neuroscientific accounts suggest that BIID and xenomelia could
561 results from a disorder in multisensory integration and central body representation,^{201–205} and
562 although the focus in the literature has been on anatomical changes in frontal and parietal
563 cortical areas related to body representation (e.g.,^{201,205,206}), several studies have described
564 anatomical changes also in subcortical structures. Interestingly, Blom *et al.*²⁰⁰ analysed the
565 structural data from 8 participants with BIID using voxel-based morphometry and showed a
566 significantly reduced grey matter volume in the left dorsal and ventral premotor cortices as
567 well as a larger grey matter volume in the cerebellum (lobule VIIa, Crus II) of BIID subjects
568 compared to healthy participants. Recall that we discussed how this cerebellar lobule, together
569 with the premotor cortex, has been found activated in several rubber hand illusion fMRI studies,
570 indicating a possible link between BIID and changes in perception of body ownership.

571 A more recent study focused on the white matter structural connectivity on a larger
572 sample of BIID (n = 16)²⁰⁷. In terms of subcortical structures, Saetta *et al.*²⁰⁷ showed reduced
573 structural connectivity of the right superior parietal lobule with the cuneus and the right orbital
574 frontal cortex with the putamen. They also identified increased structural connectivity between
575 the right paracentral lobule and the right putamen. These results are in line with the changes in
576 the shape of putamen and other parts of the basal ganglia and the left frontolateral thalamus
577 noted by Hängni and colleagues in a group of 13 male BIID patients²⁰⁸. Taken together this
578 evidence suggests that BIID might result from alterations in several interconnected cortical-
579 subcortical networks including both cerebellum and putamen. However, one should bear in
580 mind that BIID is a multifaceted and complex mental disorder that may also involves changes
581 in emotion, body image, desire to be disabled, and affective and erotic attraction to non-able
582 bodies and amputees^{207,209} meaning that it challenging to separate neuroanatomical changes

583 that specifically relate to alterations in body ownership and multisensory body representation
584 from changes in higher-order bodily representation related to affective and sexual aspects of
585 corporeal awareness.

586

587 **4. Future directions**

588 There are further subcortical regions that could be involved in the processing of bodily
589 related sensory information and the sense of body ownership that deserve to be examined more
590 closely in future neuroimaging studies. For example, the cuneate nuclei and the gracile nuclei
591 located in the brain-stem process tactile and proprioceptive information and send these signals
592 further to the thalamus. The cuneate process sensory information from the upper body and
593 upper limbs, and the gracile nuclei process information from the lower body and the lower
594 limbs. Although brainstem fMRI is technically challenging²¹⁰, future studies could investigate
595 bottom-up sensory processing of somatosensory signals^{211,212} in these dorsal column nuclei
596 during altered states of body ownership and explore possible top-down influences. Here, an
597 interesting question for future subcortical studies is how early in the processing steps of
598 somatosensory information from periphery to the cortex does the subjective sense of body
599 ownership modify afferent sensory processing. Only at the level of the cortex, at the level of
600 the thalamus, or even at the brainstem?

601 Another brainstem region that has been largely ignored in the body ownership literature
602 is the superior colliculus. The superior colliculus contains maps of auditory and visual space
603 and tactile maps of body surface and is critically involved in reflexive orientation movements
604 of head and eyes to auditory and visual cues²¹³; output pathways from multisensory neurons in
605 superior colliculus target motor pathways within the same structure that control orienting
606 movements of eyes and head. Importantly, the visual, auditory, and tactile map are not rigid
607 and fixed, but display dynamic plasticity to maintain behaviourally meaningful alignments of
608 the different sensory maps, thus reflecting multisensory representation of the extrapersonal
609 space²¹⁴. Moreover, since the representations of egocentric external space and bodily space
610 including the head are functionally related in bodily self-consciousness,¹⁶⁶ body
611 ownership^{183,185} and bodily self-location,^{34,128} and the superior colliculus is anatomically
612 connected to cortical areas related to body ownership and bodily self-consciousness such as the
613 premotor cortex²¹⁵, one may ask if processing in superior colliculus is related to body
614 ownership. Interestingly, one fMRI study²⁰⁸ reported changes in ipsilateral superior colliculus
615 activity during the RHI and increases in functional connectivity between the superior

616 colliculus, the right temporoparietal junction, bilateral ventral premotor cortex, and bilateral
617 postcentral gyrus during the RHI. Thus, it is possible that sensory processing and dynamic
618 multisensory map alignments in the superior colliculus may contribute to the spatial
619 representations of extrapersonal and egocentric peripersonal space that is relevant for body
620 ownership and bodily self-consciousness more generally; this is a hypothesis that is worth
621 exploring further, but the findings of Olivé *et al.*²¹⁶ also need to be replicated.

622 A further subcortical structure that has been discussed in the recent behavioural
623 neuroscience literature on body ownership is the hypothalamus. The hypothalamus is an
624 important hub for controlling the autonomic functions of the body, including energy levels,
625 metabolism, and thermoregulation²¹⁷. An indirect way in which the hypothalamus may
626 influence the sense of body ownership is via the release of neuropeptides such as oxytocin.
627 Oxytocin is synthesised in the hypothalamus, and it has a dual function; it acts as a hormone
628 peripherally on the body and as a neuromodulator centrally in the brain. Recent studies showed
629 that peripheral levels of oxytocin can modulate the extent to which participants experience the
630 RHI,²¹⁸ and vice versa, intranasal intake of oxytocin can enhance the subjective experience of
631 ownership during the illusion, potentially by promoting processes of multisensory
632 integration^{64,219,220}. A recent study provides further support to the idea that intranasal oxytocin
633 might promote an adaptive balance between the bottom-up and top-down attention system²²¹,
634 a process that is of importance for the RHI as attention can modify sensory processing in
635 different modalities and thus influence multisensory perception. Thus, future combined
636 neuropharmacological and neuroimaging studies could possibly help us to better understand
637 the potential role of the hypothalamus in body ownership and test the hypothesis of a
638 neuromodulatory role related to oxytocin in the perception of the body, as well as the affective
639 dimension of the somatosensory experience related to bodily illusions²²⁰.

640 According to some views, changes in thermoregulation could potentially be considered
641 as a physiological signature of the occurrence of the RHI. In other words, it has been suggested
642 that the body might react to the acquisition of a new body part (rubber hand) by downregulating
643 autonomic control of one's own hand, which is out of view²²² or both hands²²³. However, these
644 findings have been difficult to replicate and current literature suggest that hand temperature
645 changes little during the RHI (e.g.,^{3,52,224,225}). Nevertheless, it would be interesting to explore
646 possible neural links between hypothalamus-related thermoregulatory processes and the sense
647 of body ownership. Thermosensory-affective experiences such as thermal comfort or
648 discomfort and deviations from thermoneutrality are critical for survival and for the

649 physiological integrity of the body²²⁶, so functional links to the sense of body ownership seems
650 plausible. Thus, future ultra-high-field strength fMRI studies could investigate the
651 hypothalamus during RHI experiments involving thermosensory stimuli, deviations from
652 thermoneutrality and thermal discomfort and associated thermoregulatory physiological
653 reactions to test the hypothesis of potential links between thermoregulatory processes and the
654 sense of body ownership. So far, 1.5T and 3T fMRI studies with standard imaging sequences
655 for whole brain coverage have not noted activations in the hypothalamus during the RHI or
656 similar full-body ownership illusions so more targeted imaging studies with MRI sequences
657 and analysis protocols optimal for imaging the hypothalamus will be needed to further explore
658 this hypothesis (e.g.,²²⁷).

659 Indeed, from the methodological point of view, a pressing concern for clarifying the
660 role of subcortical areas, especially small structures in the brain stem and thalamus, in the sense
661 of body ownership is optimising fMRI approaches to detect their activity. For example,
662 imaging of brainstem structures poses a significant challenge, and requires special sequences,
663 coils, and spatial preprocessing steps,²¹⁰ and if one is interested in studying specific thalamic
664 nuclei or other small subcortical structures whole brain 3T fMRI imaging and group averaging
665 of functional images is not ideal, but 7T and single subject analysis based on anatomical masks
666 drawn from each individual participant's structural scans is a better approach. Moreover, the
667 cerebellum is occasionally excluded from the field of view during "whole brain" fMRI
668 experiments, and deep brain structures are particularly susceptible to noise. Thus, ROI-based
669 approaches, ultra-high field fMRI (7 Tesla), or imaging sequences designed to improve signal-
670 to-noise ratio in midbrain areas may be of use (e.g.,²²⁸). Furthermore, recent advances in
671 machine learning can help to tackle difficult segmentation problems observed in small areas
672 with an accuracy higher than both multi-atlas and manual segmentation methods (e.g., see ²²⁹
673 for an automated segmentation of the whole hypothalamus and its subnuclei). Such methods
674 may improve the detection of activity in midbrain regions, which is often lost during
675 neuroimaging pre-processing (e.g., spatial smoothing). Finally, electrophysiological and
676 neurophysiological methods, such as single neuron recording, local field-potential and
677 intracortical EEG recordings in neurosurgical or neurological patients, can provide unique
678 opportunities to investigate activity in subcortical structures of the human brain^{167,230}.

679

680

681 **6. Conclusions**

682 We have outlined the subcortical areas of the brain most commonly associated with the
683 sense of body ownership, namely the cerebellum and the putamen, but also the thalamus and
684 the hippocampus. However, it is clear that more research is needed to further clarify their role
685 as well as to expand on other areas of interest that deserve more attention, such as the
686 hypothalamus and the amygdala. Furthermore, we discussed clinical evidence from the
687 neurological and psychiatric fields, providing important direct and indirect insight into
688 subcortical contributions to body ownership. Overall, we show that it is possible to integrate
689 subcortical areas into the more established cortical network underlying the emergence,
690 maintenance, and update of the feeling that the body belongs to oneself. By highlighting
691 outstanding issues in the field of body ownership we hopefully pave the way for further
692 research on subcortical regions.

693

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700 **Competing interests**

701 None declared.

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