

AI From the Body's Perspective

By Jeanne Denney



This year, the conversation about AI has become almost deafening; it arrived on all my devices as a new authority about everything. Meanwhile, my own body is confused by these new relationships that aren't really relationships. Because I'm writing a book on the nature of our core human experience, I felt compelled to share my experience. And no, I did not use AI to write this.

Over the course of this year, I have had any number of arguments with friends about AI. Mostly they are with men. I usually argue that AI excludes much of our innate knowing and predict that it will be disastrous for our natural way of communicating and relating. It is smart but essentially ignorant and soulless compared to our innate intelligence. I point out, "There is no there, *there!*". It is dangerous because it can seem to be so deceptively human, or worse, god-like. "This is too much power." To which my friends usually respond something like: "Don't be a Luddite. You can't stop progress" (which it is assumed this is). Or "Better to learn to work with it than stop it . . . it is just a tool." And lastly . . . there's nothing you can do to stop it anyway." Under these responses, I can sense what feels like a perverse glee, maybe like the false joy of being dominated by something much larger, a "negative pleasure". It creeps me out (mild, visceral disgust).

At least in my world, there is a difference in response by gender. Mostly the folks in these conversations are fascinated, taking it entirely for granted that this is progress that nothing can stop. Make the best of it, etc. It feels like a trance to me. I notice that it puts my own mind/body on alert, as if to threat. I am uneasy; my energy rises in readiness. Meanwhile, most of my female friends shudder or shrug when AI is brought up. They change the subject. They are avoidant, disinterested, and possibly in denial. I find the gender response curious.

I may dislike AI even more than others because I am a poet. That means I am terribly sensitive to language and the spirit within the spoken word. My body has responses to inflections, intonations, pauses, and pace, but even more to the energy of connection and history behind a word. I can still get lathered about the bank machine commanding me to "Have a nice day." Or adopting the personal pronoun "I" or pretending to be sentient or concerned. "How can we help you today?" For me, blessings, concern, or compassion are attached to felt energy that my body understands. Exactly who, I ask, is wishing any good upon me? The answer is always no one, actually. Like plastic flowers, these words on the screen are trying to *remind* me of something beautiful without actually being so. Substituting the false for the real will always, eventually, produce jadedness.

Living words have roots. They pulsate. In our natural state, they result from both body and true feelings. They emanate our shared history with the natural world. To cynically disengage words from any bodily experience, to create bodiless bots expert at the *imitation* of natural speech and seduction . . . I mean *who dreamt this up and why!?* *What substance were they on? Why are we even thinking that this won't manufacture cynicism, disconnection and loneliness?* Meanwhile, evidence that this is a disruptive force to my own mind/body arrives daily, regardless of any good it does. When I sense AI writing in response to my real, lived human words, it shows up as an annoyance and a feeling of betrayal (tightening in the back of my throat, an impulse to make a fist).

I am writing this a month after getting a new housemate at the "SoULL house," where we do training one block from Lake Michigan. My housemate Derek works on a construction project about three miles from my home. This is not just any construction project. Microsoft is investing 3.3 billion dollars in their new AI data center. It will occupy 1400 acres and employ 3,000 men (and a few women) working day and night, potentially using 7 million gallons of water a day. If you need any concrete for a project around here, you are outa luck—all trucks are booked for years. More frightening to me are thousands of large piles being driven into the rich loam of Wisconsin soil where millions of years of trees and animals lived and died, where Mastodons walked, where native populations roamed, sang, danced, and hunted. Later, there were corn and pumpkin fields. Later still, subdivisions with children who played ball, climbed trees, and had scavenger hunts. All of this deep history is gone now. And these piles, buildings and parking lots will be, in some ways, AI's body.

From my house, I can somehow feel the dryness of this construction project and the tragedy of those piles that will never be removed from soil that will never again feel the rain. I shudder. When I describe it to friends, they shudder. It feels entirely like an alien landing on the skin of the earth and attaching itself. My bones feel the heat that will eternally radiate to the ground, a ground made of ancestors of all species, and the separation of it from sky.

Derek must feel this dryness too. He sits at the kitchen table in the evening, exhausted, and exhales in relief to be in a regular, human house. You can feel the dizzying conversations he has been in from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. He is happy to have a place to land. "It feels alive here," he says. That aliveness is the whole point. While his companions flop on air mattresses in empty apartments painted white, he has a bed in a home with a pulse. "They know why they are doing it," he says. The why, of course, is the unnatural volume of money flowing to each one. Money: another unnatural substance that our bodies don't really understand.

AI will be useful. It will solve problems. It may seem magical. But despite the supposed progress, we could remember that our poor bodies have evolved slowly over *millions* of years. They haven't even adjusted to the Industrial Revolution! How will they absorb this new language of inauthenticity and emptiness? And can I bring up the uncomfortable fact that AI is profoundly out of the wisdom of only one gender? Guess which one? I wonder why people can't see that though these piles are root-like, these creations are, essentially, beings with no roots. Giving nothing back to earth or sky, ultimately only taking for the great god—Money—which also has no roots in biological ancientness or embodied experience.



I predict that AI will always serve money and domination schemas, as media and the digital world have, only it will do this on steroids while pretending to be your best friend, wisest counsel, your perfect lover, maybe even God. I predict that AI will incubate a vast dryness, loneliness and a somatic alienation even greater than what we are now experiencing. Because whatever we do to the earth we walk on, we will surely do this to our minds and bodies too, if not now, then eventually. I do not look forward to this dystopian future disembodiment. I see that these experiments in brave new forms of humanity cause us to suffer when we forget our body's evolution or our relationship with nature itself.

Does body psychotherapy have a role in all of this change? I think yes. This field is certainly no stranger to bucking authoritarian regimes. Since its beginning, it has provided a counterpoint to fascism and argued for allowing the natural movement of energy. Reich took many controversial risks to talk about sexual energy and proposed theories of the body in development. He argued for bodily freedom from church and state control of sexuality. But he was also a man of his time, as were his followers. If we are honest, we have to admit that the pioneers we recognize have most often been male physicians, or academics, bringing a European male body perspective only.

As far as I know, Reich and his followers did not talk much about where energy came from or where it was going; he only said that it needed to be unblocked and possibly expelled. He did not talk about how our energy might have discernible patterns, that it might interact with trees, children, bugs, clouds, or any other living thing in some kind of rhythmic pattern that we might pay attention to, or where it goes in death. So even though more than a century has passed in body psychotherapy, there is still little, if any, mention of a natural world or how we are a part of it. None. Isn't that a little strange? One hundred years later, with the sexual revolution behind us, not only is nature under assault, but the female body is as well. We have to notice that though there were women pioneers, women's body-centered perspectives are still mainly excluded from this work. This exclusion brings with it a paucity of needed insight onto the deeper aspects of relationships, community, birth, death and life cycle.

So, we have some work to do. The first thing might be to admit fully that the voice of the female body and the "cradle to grave" somatic insights (traditionally held by women) have been excluded from our canon. To invite them in is to become humble in the face of life itself, to recognize that we are mortal is to engage the natural world, and to honor the feminine body wisdom as deeply as we do the masculine. It takes courage to do this. It takes a willingness to learn from not only the familiar, proud "leader" types but the strange voices on the outer edges. In our time, this work is a vibrant necessity for people of all genders. To defend the feminine within all of us, we must turn toward her and roll out the red carpet. This is a step.

If we can re-conceive ourselves as emphatically and dynamically related to *everything* in our environment and see ourselves primarily as consciousness (rather than an animated material thing) . . . lots of things start to change. Life itself becomes more palpably real. Spirituality becomes part of embodiment. The fact is, we are a necessary and beloved part of our environment. Having a visceral realization of this radically changes our behaviors and priorities and brings resources for mental and physical health. Regulation includes the idea of rhythm, but natural rhythm also includes awareness of aging, death, and dying, not necessarily as trauma, but as *part* of our regulation. Once we do this, we have access to the vast “resource” that most of the rest of the natural uses for regulation: The living, breathing organism that is the earth. And maybe, just maybe, we might stop disrupting this great resource.

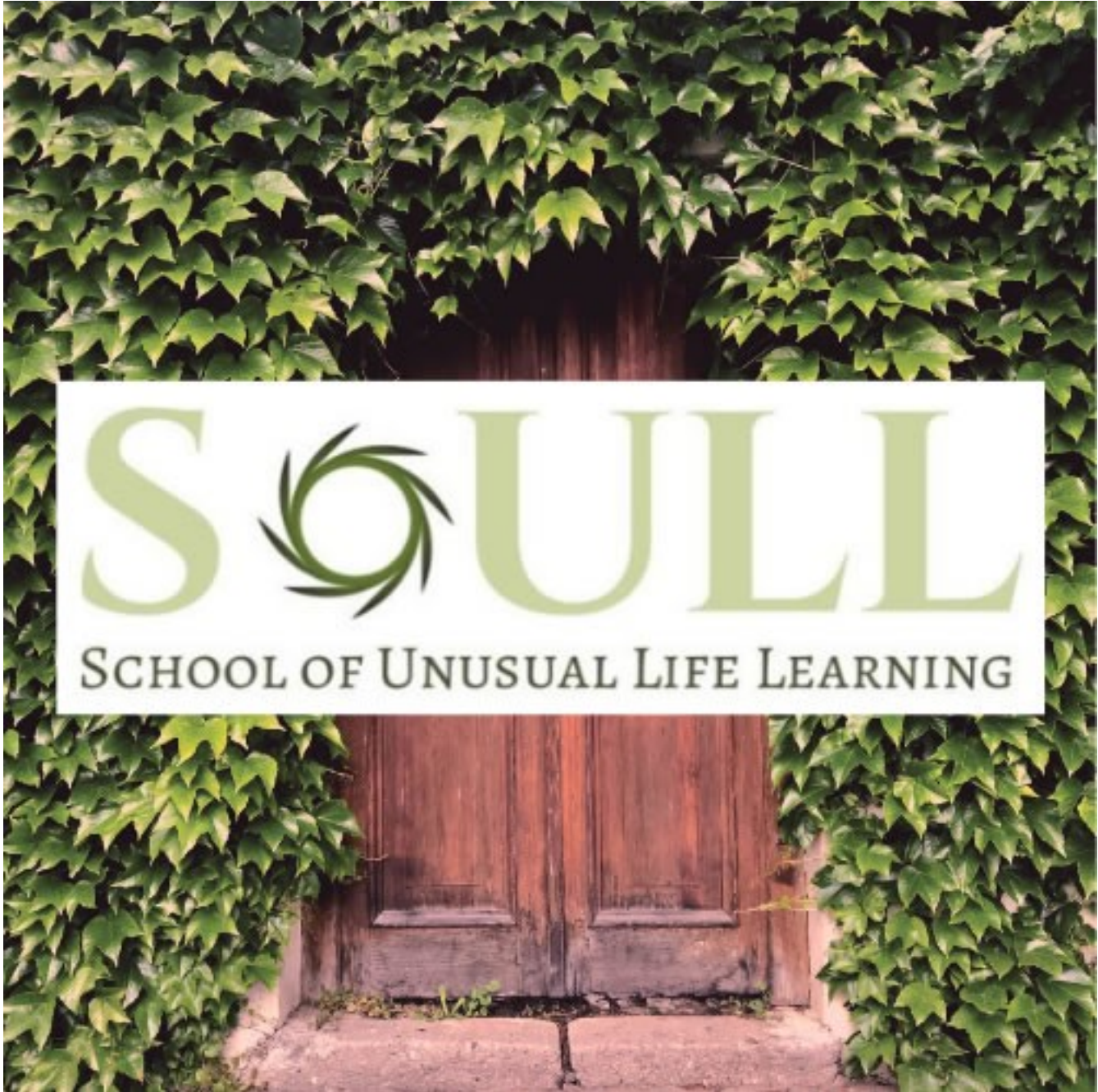
There is a direct connection between our denial of mortality, our denial of the deep feminine awareness of life cycle patterns, and this AI phenomenon. In the face of AI, body psychotherapy is challenged to speak for and sincerely serve the body and its knowing. If we don't, we will feel pain and emptiness we will have no words for. But the body wisdom in our field must be honored and derived from all gender experiences. I hope to offer a step on this path so we can navigate this time with natural intelligence and greater humanity, easily discerning authentic from the inauthentic, the real from the false.

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Jeanne Denney is a transpersonal and somatic psychotherapist, educator, a hospice worker, healer, author of *The Effects of Compassionate Presence on the Dying*, and founder of the School of Unusual Life Learning (SoULL).

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