CLOSING REMARKS
By Susan Van Pelt Petry

Many thanks to all of our presenters for their inspiring stories, projects, and provocations.

Thanks too to all of our listeners and audience for the questions and comments you shared prior to this conversation, affording us the chance to explore some themes and concerns common to many in the arts and humanities and beyond. This forum is proving to be a gathering place of many resources, ideas, and further questions, as evidenced by your contributions to the "Chat." We will collate everything and provide summations and resources and ideas back to you.

As co-faculty fellow for the GAHDT Methods and Practices Amplifier, I am repeatedly struck by the breadth of innovative, creative, rigorous, and relevant research and teaching that is being conducted in our arts and humanities departments and in other disciplines where collaboration or overlap is happening.

As we wrap up this forum and look to our next phase of pedagogy and research, using both in person and online methods, we ask — beyond the bemoaning of the obviously disembodied screen, inequities of access, and other real and obdurate barriers — what is possibly gained, and what shifts in baseline assumptions and presumptions can be altered or upended in order to maximize deep work? I'd like to share some thoughts, grounded of course in what I know best — dance, movement, and the body.

As I listen to our presenters today — learning more about all the possibilities that virtual reality and other collaborative and virtual spaces can bring, how drumming online can still unite and bring people through healing, and how working in virtual spaces can heighten awareness of access for all people — it seems to me that our relationship to technology, digital technology, does continue to evolve in marvelous ways. However, perhaps for the vast majority of us, it has simply served as a vehicle for doing work of various sorts, and we've become inured to the reality of our bodies at and with the screen, and so with this pandemic, where we are having to conduct so many relationships and activities via a screen, we're forced to pay attention in some new ways.

What we've seen today pushes the boundaries of our relationship to digital technologies. I like to see technology — not as a necessary evil, but with a critical embrace. I ask: How can there be fluid, dynamic interplay between human instincts and all our sensorial experiences; technological intelligence and the incessant on/off of binary code; and creative and intellectual aspirations?

This pandemic is urging us all to be techno-realists — somewhere between techno-utopics and neo-luddites — having a stance that critically assesses where and what is happening with technology in our discipline and embraces the process, outcomes, and feedback cycles.

Clearly, priorities and methods have had to shift. For example, I can't teach a large, leaping phrase of movement, but I have taken great pleasure at zeroing in on a more precise level to learn about how to push off the floor with the foot. The engagement, while not something I would permanently wish for, can be differently meaningful and relational. And as we saw with Trevor Marcho's drumming online, the participants could continue to trust rhythm and the feel of it in the body, while having to let go of worrying about the perceived delay. We can't play in ensembles, but solo repertory gets its day, and rigorous, precise work in all of our disciplines that is too often glossed over can now be given time. As we look to various hybrid, distanced models for the autumn, let's go deep in ways that a particular real or virtue space can do best. I might not be able to physically rehearse a duet with my colleague, but we are working deeply on our score, some text, some theory and ideas behind our choreographic decisions. I look forward to guiding my students in some of these practices.

What online learning and research affords us is a happily complex way to navigate and experience and make knowledge. Being in the world of distance learning and research is or can be multimodal, non-linear, implicitly web-like, with shared authorship or co-created, co-located. There seems a way that the big internet is like a big natural phenom like a fungus, and that we are part and parcel of this nature. Can we sink into this messiness and embrace a little of what the post-human suggests — to acknowledge that we as humans are not separate from that "other" called nature but that we are throbbing along as one organism?

How did I get from teaching on Zoom to that? I mentioned the binary code a minute ago, and I offer this: our cellular respiration, which converts nourishment to energy — arguably a lynchpin system for our very lives, has three stages. So, at some very basic level, our source of energy has a one-two-three rhythm: a triplet. This, up against a screen, intrinsically working in a one-two rhythm, a binary, may be why we often feel disengagement, disembodiment, distance, and even discomfort. But this "two against three" (a musical term for layering different rhythms on top of each other) is a fantastic polyrhythm — and if you'll indulge me, as you stare at your screen, sense your own being-ness, your breathing, acknowledge your cellular respiration and play with, not against, this binary code. That is complexity, contradiction, nuance, diversity. — that is what we want in this world.

We live in our bodies
We are in and of our bodies
We are body/mind
We are complex neuromuscular systems
We are movement and thought
We are memory and judgement, fear and instinct

Is this digital — and soon, hybrid — platform asking us to step up to a new kind of awareness? A new level of attention, alertness, where we are learning new ways to feel others, to read nuance, and to give nuance? Can we adapt and move through these screens to become more human not less?

Just as the social justice movement is asking us to sit up, lean in, speak up, and take action, so has this pandemic and the necessary distancing. There are bodies online and there are bodies on the line; as academics, artists, scholars, there is a powerful gathering here to engage online, and to support bodies on the line.

Can you imagine stepping through the screen? Breathing together? Breathing right where you are? Because you can...

Imagine — there are 90+ people here together. If we were sitting in the Blackwell Ballroom, would you pause to feel the collective energy? The collective breath? Here, now, I invite you to sense it — feel free to turn on your screen if you'd like – witness that we are in fact embodied, engaged, energized.

So, next time you have to click on a secure sight, one of those "I am not a robot" statements, take a minute to breath, notice your complex body/mind, your polyrhythmic engagement with the screen and recognize that in others on screen, as well as in person as that time comes.