III

At the time of this project, the most recent and current version of the CAPTCHA program has been implemented as of 2018— Google has titled it "ReCAPTCHA V3" (Akrout et al. 1). RCV3, as I will refer to it, "uses [machine learning] to return a risk assessment score between 0.0 and 1.0. This score characterizes the trustability of the user. A score close to 1.0 means that the user is human" (Akrout et al. 1). This version of CAPTCHA no longer employs text or image tests to differentiate humans from computers. Instead, RCV3 gathers information from the user—human or computer—to determine if they are the former or latter. Google then generates a score between 0.0-1.0 based on the user's interaction within any given website that employs this version of the program, and then sends this information to the website owner. Bluntly, *RCV3 defines humans in terms of ones and zeros* (which is disturbing, so ruminate on that). According to Google's memorandum regarding the release of RCV3, the company is

> "fundamentally changing how sites can test for human vs. bot [computer] activities by returning a score to tell [website owners] how suspicious an interaction is and eliminating the need to interrupt users with challenges at all. ReCAPTCHA V3 runs adaptive risk analysis in the background to alert [website owners] of suspicious traffic while letting [website owners'] human users enjoy a frictionless experience" (Google 2018).[6]

[6] For a more interactive example, see: https://www.google.com/recaptcha/about/.

RCV3 tests human difference vastly different than its predecessors—this is clear. However, even with the aforementioned changes to the program, computers are still able to trick this current program version. As of April 2019—only a few months after the implementation of RCV3—the program has been conquered; Akrout et al.'s results show that their "[reinforcement learning] agent passes the ReCAPTCHA [V3] test with 97.4 accuracy" (1).

Thus, RCV3 will continue to be an inadequate program because its framework is rooted in Western, humanist epistemology. The extent to which this version is inadequate is represented by how quickly RCV3 was conquered by computers, which is due to a reliance on ill-fitting practices and paradigms. So, even though the program "gathers information about the user, including their IP address and cached cookies, while simultaneously capturing behavioral information including cursor movements and mouse clicks made by the user before, during, and after any actual engagement with a CAPTCHA puzzle" (Justie 42), relying on a framework that is ill-fitting is why RCV3 continues to fail. To be clear, I am not suggesting that CAPTCHA is inadequate because humans are becoming computers or vice versa—no. I am not promoting the "fatal attraction of nostalgia and the fantasy of transhumanist and other techno-utopias"—no (Braidotti 90). Nor am I suggesting an "escape from the finite materiality of the enfleshed self"—*no* (Braidotti 91). It is not that the line that separates human from computer is becoming blurred in the 21st century. Instead, I am suggesting that the humanist epistemology in which RCV3 is rooted is no longer representative of the current human condition, and therefore the program continues to be inadequate.

To conclude our work with RCV3 (and CAPTCHA altogether), let me rephrase Kenneth Burke's claim so it is applicable here: "Completely Automated Public Turing test to tell Computers and Humans Apart," no, obviously (see: Figure 3). When RCV3 relies on Western

humanism to tell humans and computers apart, it is destined to fail. It is not the ones or zeros, IP address, or even cursor movements that cause RCV3 to be inadequate. Further, it is not cookies, behavior, or website owners, either. It is what precedes these practices that cause RCV3's inadequacies; it is the Western, humanist conceptual framework that leads to the program's demise. It is fairly simple, actually: When a program is grounded in an ill-fitting conceptual framework, it engenders ill-fitting, thus, faulty, practices. I can only hope that this leads not to RCV4, RCV5, or RCV6, but to a world where we have programs that correspond to our contemporary moment.

Figure 3: The inadequacies of ReCAPTCHA V3 (n.d.)

I am similarly claiming that posthumanist rhetorical theories are inadequate because they rely on a Western, humanist framework. Since the prioritization of technology is a tool to

conceptualize the human condition, why would this not be the case? To use Figure 3 for more than a meme: When we employ inadequate posthumanist rhetorical theories, we get an ill-fitting representation of the human condition—similar to Arnold Schwarzenegger's cyborg hand in *The Terminator*. If our theory prioritizes a facet of "the human, all too human, resources and limitations" that I covered in section one (Braidotti 9), should we expect a different result? I don't believe that posthumanist rhetorical theories will ever be truly engaged if we are exercising a Western, humanist prioritization of technology in our framework. Our theory and definitions—such as practices, information, ecologies, pedagogies, and everything that falls between or beyond these categories—all will be subject to ill-fitting paradigms. This is where I believe that the implications of posthumanist rhetorical theories manifest, and this is why our rhetorical theories will never be truly just. The inadequacies of using a framework that is dependent on its adversary, in this case, humanism, will always be deficient. "Wound into our humanist spiralings" (Boyle 10), we will continue to perpetuate the inadequacies of our moment—even if this is done so unconsciously.

This brings our posthumanist rhetorical theories to an impasse: Does one forgo the advancements made from such theoretical orientations, or should our theories be revised to fix their inadequate framework? I choose the latter because this is what our posthuman moment calls for. If posthumanism is "useful as a term to explore ways of engaging…with the present" (Braidotti 5), we should turn toward amending our unconscious mistakes. What our posthuman moment offers is a chance to affirmatively engage with our world, and how would disengaging theory be representative of that moment? Furthermore, the fact that Western humanism is present within theory only further affirms that our "posthuman era is ripe with contradictions" (Braidotti 51). It is contradiction that urges "ethical evaluation, political intervention and normative action"

(Braidotti 51) within our posthuman moment. In this sense, what is more posthuman than a revision of the theory that is meant to conceptualize this condition? We must engage outside of "the sedimented habits of thought that the humanist past has institutionalized" for the sake of posthumanism, rhetoric, and the overlap between the two (Braidotti 54). We must affirmatively engage with the contradictions of our posthuman moment to revise the consequences of Western, humanist retainment.

To do this, I suggest that posthumanist rhetorical theories be affirmatively positioned in accordance with Lloyd Bitzer's concept of the exigence. Speaking to an exigence, Bitzer states that "any *exigence* is an imperfection marked by urgency; it is a defect, an obstacle, something waiting to be done, a thing which is other than it should be" (6). Even though he positions his conceptualization of an exigence within his rhetorical situation, I nonetheless understand an exigence to be relevant to posthumanist rhetorical theory as well. This is because the Western, humanist prioritization of technology may only be understood as a defect, obstacle, and something other than it should be—should it not? As per what I have outlined throughout this project, is this not an imperfection that requires an urgent response? For "in our real world…exigences abound; the world really invites change" (Bitzer 13), and this change can and should be defined as part of our posthuman moment. We are implicitly acknowledging this as an exigence if, one, it requires affirmative engagement, and two, if it is a contradiction. As such, the faults of our posthumanist rhetorical theories are informed by Bitzer's concept of an exigence. This now "strongly invit[ed] utterance" (Bitzer 5) only leads to further engagement and opportunity in and through a posthumanity with rhetoric abound.

Further, not only should the exigence we speak of be only such, but it should be understood as a *rhetorical* exigence. The concept of a rhetorical exigence is similarly positioned

by Bitzer in regard to the rhetorical situation, but it is of use in this case as well. We should understand posthumanist rhetorical theories' exigence to be rhetorical because "an exigence is rhetorical when it is capable of positive modification and when positive modification requires discourse or can be assisted by discourse" (Bitzer 7). It is the ability for an exigence to be assisted by discourse that makes it rhetorical, which is also true in regard to posthumanist theories. While I wish I could fix theory by physically sawing off its exigence, alas, that is not possible (yet). It must be modified by discourse, and discourse only for that matter. To elaborate from the lens of Bitzer,

> "for example, suppose that a man's acts are injurious to others and that the quality of his acts can be changed only if discourse is addressed to him; the exigence—his injurious acts—is then unmistakably rhetorical. The pollution of our air is also a rhetorical exigence because its positive modification—reduction in pollution—strongly invites the assistance of discourse producing public awareness" (Bitzer 7).

It is only reasonable to assume that technological prioritization falls into this "rhetorical exigence" category because it may *only* be modified by discourse. Just to be clear, even if technology ceased to exist due to physical action, our philosophies and theories would still require affirmative discourse to resolve the faults within their frameworks. There really is not another way to position it; the prioritization of technology in posthumanist rhetorical theories is an imperfection that requires discourse to resolve this rhetorical exigence.

However, to add yet another layer, this rhetorical exigence must also be positioned according to Jenny Edbauer-Rice's ecological model. Similarly, this posthumanist rhetorical exigence must *not* be restricted to the boundaries of Bitzer's rhetorical situation. Is there a way it

could be, anyway? In a truly posthuman moment, conditions in the world are constituted by relations that are in-flux and constantly changing; there is nothing situational about this. These conditions are what prompt and allow affirmative engagement in the first place. If we acknowledge anything in this project as truth, we must also consider this rhetorical exigence to encompass and be encompassed by an ecology. This is best explained through Edbauer-Rice herself, as she turns her focus to "a circulating ecology of effects, enactments, and events by shifting the lines of focus from *rhetorical situation* to *rhetorical ecologies*" (9). In this sense, an "*exigence* is more like a shorthand way of describing a series of events" within an ecology than a situated *thing* (Edbauer-Rice 8). From this lens, our rhetorical exigence, then, "does not exist per se, but is instead an amalgamation of processes and encounters" (Edbauer-Rice 8); moreover, "the exigence is more like a complex of various audience/speaker perceptions and institutional or material constraints" (Edbauer-Rice 8). Locating technological prioritization as an exigence within an ecology recognizes our posthuman moment as such and further accounts for an entire ecology.

Positioning this ecological rhetorical exigence accordingly then activates the entire ecology that it comprises and is comprised of. This is when things become a bit *messy*; when "an ecological, or *affective*, rhetorical model is one that reads rhetoric both as a process of distributed emergence and as an ongoing circulation process" (Edbauer-Rice 13), what was once situated is now up in the air, so to speak. It is moving, in-flux, and affecting/being affected from an ecological orientation. When this happens, an entire ecology of *things* is understood to encompass and be encompassed, and this further disrupts the situation of physical situation. *Posthumanist rhetorical theories' ecological rhetorical exigence becomes a constantly changing, in-motion, and encountered-with ecological process that is fraught with opportunity.* It truly is a

mouthful, but I promise there is a point to this. It is the lack of situation that emphasizes a shift in focus from the specific exigence to the wider ecology in which it encompasses. What I am articulating is a model that opens up opportunities to engage within an ecology through "a process of distributed emergence and as an ongoing circulation process" (Edbauer-Rice 13). Could affirmative engagement function otherwise? Nonetheless, would it be representative of our posthumanist rhetorical moment if it were to function any other way?

By focusing on the wider ecology, we have an opportunity to engage with the included Western, humanist theories and traditions. First, let me recapitulate my claim, and this can be done in three 'steps': (1) Posthumanist rhetorical theories' prioritization of technology should be understood as a rhetorical exigence, (2) this exigence is not situational but ecological, and now (3) an opportunity arises to engage with such ecology that in which the rhetorical exigence involves. This is similar to what Boyle claims in regard to his rhetorical practice and/as posthumanism, which I covered in section two. He explains that "[*Rhetoric as a Posthuman Practice*] understands rhetoric to be an ethic exercising bodies within ecologies of practice. These ecologies include but are ultimately irreducible to those longstanding institutions upon which humanism relies" (Boyle 20). We are saying similar things, just in different ways; he says, "exercising bodies within ecologies," while I say, "engage the wider ecology," in a more general sense. Further, what I have just covered also should not be reduced to such longstanding institutions. In this vein, I am too claiming that humanist paradigms makeup this ecology, but this ecology definitely should not be reduced to such paradigms. This includes the Western, humanist theories and traditions that are exercised/engaged in ecologies (of practice)—the paradigms that have engendered a focus on this ecology in the first place.

Therefore, to revise our posthumanist rhetorical theories, we must affirmatively engage (with) this ecology of "tools and discursive regimes—even as they are crumbling, faulty, ill-fitting—that have wound us into our humanist spiralings" (Boyle 10). That is, upon understanding posthumanist rhetorical theories' ecological rhetorical exigence as an opportunity to engage with the ecology it encompasses, what is revealed are the humanist regimes that are responsible for the prioritization of technology throughout posthumanism in the first place. Included are the problematic encounters with the "other," relations to technologies from a humanist lens, Western rhetorical traditions, and how these manifest in contemporary frameworks. Moreover, this ecological orientation illustrates not only humanist paradigms but the implications of these paradigms. In terms of posthumanist rhetorical theories, the prioritization of technology is a result of the humanist paradigms—and this is the overarching point I am trying to make. When we engage with the ecology that encompasses this rhetorical exigence, we are able to exercise engagement with the paradigms that have engendered this imperfection. In this sense, we have a chance to engage (with) an ecology to affirm posthumanism anew. In a condition that "consists in grabbing the opportunities offered by the decline of the unitary subject position upheld by Humanism" (Braidotti 54), we must practice this orientation to the ill-fitting paradigms of our past.

I believe asking more pertinent questions is the best way to engage this opportunity that posthumanist rhetorical theories offer. It sounds simple; asking pertinent questions, but it is very purposeful. It is the question that allows us to enact a world of possibilities. When paralleled with a framework that exists beyond humanism (as I have just articulated), and especially in terms of rhetorical exigences, these questions are prompted. Moreover, I choose my wording very purposefully as well; "pertinent" is to mean suitable and/or applicable. And what is more

pertinent/suitable/applicable than questions that disengage a humanist framework for a truly posthuman, rhetorically just practice? It is in this sense that a just practice should concern the development of questions before anything else—this is how and where engagement happens.

In terms of posthumanism:

- Why does posthumanism manifest Western, humanist epistemology through the prioritization of technology?
- Why must posthuman theory exist in terms of technological affectability and mediation?
- How has humanism engendered our current technological moment?
- How do contemporary conceptualizations of the human depend on humanist tools and regimes?
- Why posthumanism?

In terms of rhetoric:

- What/who is excluded when rhetoric is theorized in terms of a posthuman framework that prioritizes a Western, humanist relationship to technology?
- Who decides what a posthumanist rhetorical practice *is*?
- Is rhetorical practice fundamentally Western and/or humanist?
- Who is being cited in our rhetorical scholarship? What does this mean? How does this influence our own work?
- Why posthumanism?

When we ask more pertinent questions that are proposed by our posthumanist rhetorical theories, we are practicing affirmative engagement—a *very* posthuman and rhetorical practice of

engagement—that is activated by the contradictions of our moment. This affirmative engagement acknowledges the human condition and, in turn, asks an iteration of "why prioritize technology?" When we ask these questions and similar, we are engaging (with) the humanist "tools and discursive regimes" (Boyle 10) that have been perpetuated throughout our philosophical and theoretical frameworks—the same tools and regimes that are constantly ill-fitting and inadequate. By exercising this practice, we may start to encompass an orientation that generates more apt, just, and deserving posthumanist rhetorical theories in the 21st century.

Conclusion

I must agree with A Tribe Called Quest in that things truly do go in cycles. In their song, "Excursions," Q-Tip says it best: "Back in the days when I was a teenager / before I had status and before I had a pager / you could find the abstract listening to hip-hop / my pops used to say, it reminded him of be-bop / I said, well daddy don't you know that things go in cycles?" (1991). However, the cycle of hip-hop is not what I am referring to here, but instead the landscape of rhetorical theories that I covered in the introduction. In light of this, I will return to Jacqueline Jones Royster and her metaphor. She states that

> "using a metaphor of theory formation as a process of disciplinary landscaping draws attention to the complex work that remains before us but underscores a starting place: What if we treated what we know about the history of Western rhetorics as if it were merely what we *know* best rather than what *is* best? Such a question opens a world of possibility as we look out on a landscape that by many accounts in contemporary work is still only marginally revealed" (166).

It is in this concluding statement that she brings up a few important points. And while I agree with her points that, one, there is much work to be done, and two, there is much more to be revealed regarding rhetoric in general, I would like to highlight her question: "What if we treated what we know about the history of Western rhetorics as if it were merely what we *know* best rather than what *is* best?" (166). My answer to this question is this project.

As I see it, when we treat our rhetorical theories' current landscape as what we *know* best, we come to find out that it really isn't the best. When we rely on a landscape that highlights and minimizes according to Western humanism, we end up with theory that is restrictive and ill-fitting; we end up with faults; we end up with inadequacy—and that is only the beginning. This

is aptly represented in what I have covered regarding technological prioritization in posthumanist rhetorical theories—including reliance, restrictions, consequences, and opportunity. Our theory manifests vast repercussions when we rely on a Western, humanist restrictive landscape as a foundation. This is best understood to result in "inadequacy," as I have covered. And while this is at the broadest level, there are many other repercussions that fall under this umbrella. My point is that inadequacy and alike should be understood as the results of a Western, humanist landscape. When we continue to rely on a landscape that proves to be faulty, we only reveal the restrictive possibilities of rhetoric, and that is entirely unacceptable.

However, when we acknowledge this notion, we have an opportunity to practice an orientation that exists beyond what our current Western, humanist landscape offers. This should be understood as a practice of affirmative engagement—and this is my answer to Royster's question. Therefore, when Royster asks, "What if…," my response is affirmative engagement through asking pertinent questions. As I have mentioned, I believe this is done by responding to posthumanist rhetorical theories' ecological rhetorical exigence with questions about our philosophical and rhetorical concepts, such as why technology is prioritized in posthumanist rhetorical theory. To further solidify this claim in terms of landscaping, we may better recognize the inadequacies engendered by our landscape by asking pertinent questions about the foundation of our rhetorical theories. For example, when we ask questions such as, "why must posthumanist rhetorical theories exist in terms of technological affectability and mediation," we might better understand how our landscape is the fundamental issue with our theories. This is then a practice of "creating new focal points as we creatively design and re-design intellectual space and how we bring meaning to that space" (Royster 165). That is, as we ask these questions and alike, we are practicing affirmative engagement within the problematics of our current moment.

This entire practice is ecologically in accordance with and activating the potentials of similar concepts in the field of Rhetoric. I am referring to concepts that exist beyond the Western, humanist landscape that current rhetorical theories depend upon. When positioned thusly, rhetoric and rhetorical practice are better understood. This is because we are offered a more comprehensive and encompassing, representative and just picture of how rhetoric functions in our current moment. I believe some of the most important future opportunities lie in combination with the following authors and their contributions:

Firstly, when we practice affirmative engagement, we activate an ecology of potentials that require more comprehensive and encompassing understandings of rhetoric. This is exactly what I am referring to regarding our current landscape; we need a *better* picture of what rhetoric is outside of Western humanism. This is where various authors turn, such as Thomas Rickert, Diane Davis, Jenny Edbauer-Rice, and Casey Boyle. It is in their concepts—such as ambience, which asks for "dynamic shifts in a vibrant, robust environment" (Rickert 5); an inessential solidary that offers "a more originary rhetoricity" (Davis 3); a *doing* of rhetoric within ecologies (Edbauer-Rice 13); and posthumanist theories of rhetoric—where complex conceptualizations of rhetoric are proposed. In combination with a practice of affirmative engagement, this is where further opportunities lie. It is here that I see a chance to move rhetoric's current landscape in a more comprehensive direction—one that inevitably exists beyond Western humanism. When we understand affirmative engagement to be in accordance with these concepts, we may better understand a fuller and more complete rhetoric and rhetorical practice in the future.

Secondly, a more representative and just understanding of rhetoric is what follows. Alongside the opportunities positioned by a comprehensive and encompassing rhetoric, I must also mention the possibilities for inclusion of other epistemologies. The wide range of excluded

epistemologies are revealed when we exercise opportunity outside of Western humanism. I am referring to the constructed "other"—understandings, peoples, *things*—that are left out of rhetoric's current landscape. Therefore, we move toward better representing other-than-Western understandings of rhetoric when we practice affirmative engagement. This call reverberates throughout the work by authors like Angela Haas, Scott Lyons, Jennifer Clary-Lemon, and Jacqueline Jones Royster. It is in their concepts—such as "digital and visual rhetorical sovereignty" (Haas 95-96); a rhetorical sovereignty that "cries for revision" (Lyons 366); new materialist understandings, such as "the gift" (Clary-Lemon 2019); and disciplinary landscaping—that such future directions are positioned accordingly. Representation in rhetoric must be where our theory continues to turn; it is truly integral to formulating theories that exist beyond Western humanism. This is where we may begin to justly engage theory anew.

It is obvious that practicing affirmative engagement is many things. It is asking pertinent questions, un-landscaping, recognition, integration, comprehensive, encompassing, representative, just, apt, and overall, it is necessary. Honestly, it is more things than it is not—but that is the point. When we practice affirmative engagement, we are practicing an innumerable amount of unforeseen, unknown, and unfamiliar orientations that are fraught with new chances. We are acknowledging that our current rhetorical theories are not just, apt, or deserving for our current moment. And, instead of accepting this, we are choosing to step into the indefinite, undetermined space of opportunity that lies before us.