(Re)mapping the Rhetorical Situation: Toward a Transactional Networked Ecology

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(RE)MAPPING THE RHETORICAL SITUATION: TOWARD A TRANSACTIONAL NETWORKED ECOLOGY

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(RE)MAPPING THE RHETORICAL SITUATION: TOWARD A TRANSACTIONAL
NETWORKED ECOLOGY

BY

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Ramesh Kumar Pokharel

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ABSTRACT

The existing theories of the rhetorical situation that focus on and around Bitzer’s theory define the rhetorical situation as something “real,” “genuine,” “objective” based on historic reality. I believe that this modernist containment to perceive the rhetorical situation as fixed entities limit our understanding about it in a broader sense, because it cannot capture the changed meaning that naturally exists with the impact of new media and technology. With the advent of new media and technology, the notion of rhetorical situation also has changed and thus there is an exigence of a new theory of the rhetorical situations that better incorporates the new notions. In this context, by researching the concept of rhetorical situation and how it has changed over time, particularly given the impact of new media and technology, I propose “Rhetorical Situation as Trans-situational Networked Ecologies” that has more explanatory power, in which I account for, frame, critique and analyze the fundamental assumptions and beliefs on the rhetorical situations. In order to do so, I analyze these existing notions of rhetorical situation, problematize them from a postmodern perspective, and explore the need of conceiving the rhetorical situation from a new perspective.

The rhetorical situation as trans-situational networked ecologies fundamentally believes that the constituents of the rhetorical situations are not discrete entities, and there are no linear relations between them. Rather the elements of the rhetorical situation have multiple layers of relationships, a networked system connected as an ecology. To sum up, the rhetorical situation involves a plurality of the constituents of the rhetorical situation with complex, recursive, and co-adaptive relations. Rhetorical situation as a complex thing involves the rhetor, audience, subject, occasion, and speech in disjunctive, but networked relationships in an ecology. These components are in constant relationships mutually influencing each other and, thus, co-adaptive.
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

The notion of rhetorical situation traces back to the notion of *kairos* as expressed in the rhetoric of classical philosophers like Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, Quintilian and others. The ancient Greeks used *kairos* in a more or less similar sense of how rhetorical situation is used nowadays. Sipiora (2002) states:

As Fundamental notion in ancient Greeks, *kairos* carried a number of meanings in classical rhetorical theory and history, including ‘symmetry,’ ‘propriety,’ ‘occasion,’ ‘due measure,’ ‘fitness,’ ‘tact,’ ‘decorum,’ ‘convenience,’ ‘proportion,’ ‘fruit,’ ‘profit,’ and ‘wise moderation,’ to mention some of the more common uses. (p.1)

An underlying sense of all these meanings of *kairos* is “the right or opportune time to do something or right measure in doing something” (Kinneavy, 2002, p. 58). This meaning of *kairos* resembles with the meaning of a constituent of the rhetorical situation as generally use today.

Wayne C. Booth (1963) uses the term “rhetorical stance” to mean rhetorical situation. Broadly speaking, rhetorical situation means the context in which a communicative activity takes place.

The basic factors that generate an artifact include the writer or speaker, the audience, the purpose, the topic, the medium or the context or culture in which a writer writes or a speaker speaks. When a writer writes or a speaker speaks, his or her culture, personal characteristics and interest affect what s/he writes or speaks about and how s/he writes or speaks about it. Moreover, writer’s age, experiences, gender, location, political beliefs, parents and peers, education and the background, in other words, affect the writing and speaking. Likewise, the reason for writing, genre, topic, context (situation that generates the need for writing), and audience also affect writing. All these phenomena in totality comprise the rhetorical situation.
A full-fledged theory of rhetorical situation was initiated by Bitzer’s (1968) “The Rhetorical Situation,” and followed by a three decade-long response of theories that reassert, (re)examine, and contend with Bitzer’s model. However, regarding the several notions of rhetorical situation, I have dissonance with some of the writers like Bitzter (1968), Miller (1772), Jamieson (1973), Jamieson (1975), Patton (1979), Kneupper (1980), and Grant-Davie (1997), who tend to define rhetorical situations as something “real,” “genuine,” “objective” based on historic reality. For them, events are inherently meaningful, objectively real, and so are the rhetorical situations. I believe that this modernist containment to perceive the rhetorical situation can be detrimental to understanding it in broader sense as it cannot capture the changed meaning that naturally exists with the impact of new media and technology, consequently limiting the scope of the rhetorical situation. Consequently, this confining tendency makes it stagnant.

I believe that rhetorical situation is not self-contained objective fact, and determinate phenomena, and so argue that rhetorical situation conceived as self-contained and determinate phenomena does not truly capture the fluid and indeterminate nature of rhetorical situation. Rhetorical situation, to me, is a complex thing, not discretely born, rather linked with discursive formation and indeterminate relation because it could be better understood as multiple and plural entity as it fosters indeterminate and various responses. Contrary to the generally conceived notion, I believe that rhetorical situation is purely subjective phenomenon, because rhetorical discourse exists in response to the exigency based on the perception, interest, beliefs, attitude, and motives of the rhetor on given shared common experience and communication culture. To sum up my stance, rhetorical situation as a subjective phenomenon involves a plurality of exigencies and complex relations between the audience and rhetorician’s interest, thereby
making it more interactive with other elements of the situation. I also contend with the classification of rhetorical and non-rhetorical discourse by Bitzer and argue that the use of language is rhetorical in itself, because all the discourses have the power to modify the existing beliefs and to fill the gaps in our knowledge of the world. These gaps in our scholarship lead me to my broad and fundamental question of inquiry regarding rhetorical situation: *In the period of 1968-2013, how has the concept of rhetorical situation and its various naming permutations been variously characterized? Moreover, how does the emergence of new media and technology compel the revision of our notions of the rhetorical situation? What theories can help the revision of our notions of the rhetorical situation? What the rhetorical situation as trans-situational networked ecologies indicate for the discipline of RWS?*

With the advent of new media and technology, the notion of the rhetorical situation also has changed and thus there is an exigency of a new theory of rhetorical situation that better incorporates the new notion of rhetorical situation germinated by the emergence of new media and technology. For example, new media and technology has broken the traditional relation between the writer, audience, exigence, and constraints, and has blurred the division among them to some extent. In this context, I believe the existing modernist notion of rhetorical situation does not fully express the changed meaning that naturally exists with the impact of new media and technology. Consequently, it limits the scope and understanding of rhetorical situation because this confining tendency is likely to make the notion of rhetorical situation stagnant that does not incorporate the changed/changing situation thereby giving only “incomplete” picture. So, in order to make the picture more complete, I propose a new stance to look at the notion of rhetorical situation in order to fit into the changed situation by researching the concept of rhetorical situation and how it has changed over time, particularly given the impact of new media
and technology. In order to do so, I engage in the philosophical inquiry on the rhetorical situations, in which I account for, frame, critique and analyze the fundamental assumptions and beliefs on the rhetorical situations, and finally propose a theory that extends the existing notion of the rhetorical situations and thus expresses the changed/changing meaning. Here, I speculate that theories of rhetorical situation are not monolithic and that we need to understand them more thoroughly, and that scholarship in areas such as new media studies may use the terms other than rhetorical situation and we need to better understand how such terms do or ought to enlarge our conception of the concept.

Keeping in mind the task of exploring how rhetorical situation and its various naming permutations have been variously characterized, I aim to position this project as a meaningful contribution to the scholarship in the discipline of Rhetoric and Writing Studies. In other words, this project inculcates the rhetorical tendency to search for discrepancies from existing “norms,” and seeks to locate the urgency for a new notion that better describes and explains rhetorical situation in our contemporary moment. In order to do so, I first conduct historical work from 1968-2012 to collect various characterizations of rhetorical situation, and then I analyze these existing notions of rhetorical situation, problematize them from a postmodern perspective, and explore the need of conceiving the rhetorical situation from a new perspective. To do the historical work, I map the existing notions of the rhetorical situation, and then remap it thereby illustrating why some existing theories cannot address the change in the notions of the rhetorical situations, and why there is an exigence for a new theory.

Specifically, I engage in an examination of the historical and contemporary situatedness that shapes and reshapes the meaning of rhetorical situation, by bringing in a postmodern reading of rhetoric that include language, subjectivity, reality, space/place, technology theory, and new
media along with their relationships in defining rhetorical situation. It is my strong belief that we cannot have strong Rhetoric and Writing Studies that continues to be relevant to current communication practices without seriously and continuously examining the history relative to our contemporary situation.

This project is built upon Berlin & Inkster’s (1980) critique and evaluation of how current-traditional paradigm construes the elements of communication triangle: reality, the writer, the audience, and the discourse. By bringing in their insights, I map, remap, and (re)examine the concurring Bitzer-Vatz-Consigny position that developed scholarship on rhetorical situation, and the consecutive theories and debate that reassert, (re)examine, and critique their theories, and in some cases call for new approach to understanding rhetorical situation in order to fit into the changed situation, particularly given the impact of new media and technology.

A Brief Literature Review

Understanding the rhetorical situations is the fundamental and the most important thing in order to understand any communicative practice. In his seminal essay “The Rhetorical Situation,” Bitzer (1968) theorizes the rhetorical situation though the concept of it existed before him in different terms. He describes three constituents of any rhetorical situation necessary prior to discourse—exigence, audience, and constraints—which “comprise everything relevant in a rhetorical situation” (p. 8). Bitzer’s conception of the rhetorical situation reflects his realist view of an objective, external reality, and, in this sense, rhetorical situations are “real” or “genuine,” based in historic reality and independent of rhetorical discourse (p. 11). For Bitzer, then, rhetorical discourse is secondary—a response to the “demands imposed by the situation” (p. 5). Thus, he takes as a given that “rhetoric is situational” (p. 3). While Miller (1772), Jamieson
(1973), Jamieson (1975), Patton (1979), Kneupper (1980), and Grant-Davie (1997) follow Bitzer’s model of the rhetorical situation, some others like Vatz (1973), Consigny (1974), Larson (1970), Wilkerson (1970), Baxter & Kennedy (1975), Hunsaker & Smith (1976), Biesecker (1989), Crismore & Vande Kopple (1990), Garret & Xiao (1993), Benoit (1994), Smith Lybarger (1996), Gorrell (1997), and Edbauer (2005) problematize Bitzer’s classification and definition of the rhetorical situation in one or the other. In this context, I situate my project into the exploration of the debate on the rhetorical situation, thereby showing my dissonance and the exigence for new theory thereby borrowing the arguments of the scholars as mentioned above and extending them to fit into the new context given the impact of new media and technology. In the following part, I engage in a brief description and analysis of their arguments in order to situate my position into it.

Three theories of the rhetorical situation as articulated by Lloyd Bitzer (1968), Richard Vatz (1973), and Scott Consigny (1974) in fact lay the foundation to theorize the rhetorical situation along with ongoing debate on it. As I mentioned above, Bitzer’s realist view of an objective, external reality lays the foundation of the rhetorical situation, on the one hand, while on the other, it excites a shower of criticism. While Arthur B. Miller (1972) further elaborates the meaning and significance of exigence as defined and conceptualized by Bitzer, and thus treats exigence as the most important of all constituents of the rhetorical situations, Richard E. Vatz (1973), in “The Myth of the Rhetorical Situation” (1973), critiques Bitzer’s realist conception of rhetorical situations as objective historic facts, suggesting instead an opposing perspective based on a different philosophy of meaning, including a different view of the relationships between rhetoric and “situations” (p. 154) thereby providing contrary notion about the relationship between rhetoric and situations. Vatz believes that “events” do not exist objectively in reality,
but are instead “created” by choosing facts and translating meaning in rhetorical discourse (p. 157). Vatz argue that rhetorical situation is not self-contained objective fact, and contend along the line of Larson (1970) & Wilkerson (1970) to problematize Bitzer’s classification of rhetorical and non-rhetorical discourse and argue that the use of language is rhetorical in itself because all the discourses have the power to modify the existing beliefs and to fill the gaps in our knowledge of the world (Larson, 1970; Nietzsche, 1989).

In “Rhetoric and Its Situations” (1974), Scott Consigny attempts to resolve the “antinomy for a coherent theory of rhetoric” resulting from Bitzer’s and Vatz’s opposing conceptions of the rhetorical situation (p. 176), and assuming that there are “‘the indeterminate phenomena of a situation” (p. 178), he proposes “rhetoric as an ‘art’” (p. 176), which he believes explains how a rhetor can engage and make sense of novel and indeterminate situation (p. 179). While Jamieson (1973; 1975) argues along the line of Bitzer’s concept of the rhetorical situations by bringing in the issues of genres as rhetorical constraints in the discussion of the rhetorical situations, Baxter & Kennedy (1975) complicate and problematize the linear and singular notion of the rhetorical situations. They analyze the connection between the rhetorical situations and the rhetorical response in more depth and critically by asserting that a rhetorical situation cannot be determinate to elicit single response because it is not being, but a process of becoming, “the rhetorical situation as a determinate concrescence of propositions can be viewed as a process of becoming, and more” (p. 160). They stress on the multiplicity of existence of a rhetorical situation that fosters indeterminate and various responses, which make a rhetorical situation a complex thing, unlike Bitzer conceives it, thereby suggesting the complex nature of rhetorical situations when they assert “[t]he rhetor, audience, subject, occasion, and speech,…, can be said to be the members of a multiplicity which, at the outset of a speech, have a disjunctive…
relationship” (p. 160). They conceive of the rhetorical situation “as a process” (p. 161) and “as an epochal whole of becoming” (p. 162) unlike Bitzer conceived it as a finality, hence deconstructing the established conception and providing another view of it. Their deconstructive approach interests me in two ways: first, it helps me understand the rhetorical situation from postmodern perspective and second, based on this approach, I argue for exigence of a new theory.

Hunsaker & Smith’s (1976) critique of Bitzer, Vatz and Consigny for not mentioning the importance of perception along with admitting that their situation based examinations of rhetoric have provided new insight into the nature of issue. They value the importance of perception in constructing the potential issues in a rhetorical situation, but also believe that the cognitive and affective experiences that shape human perception “are not completely private, but are to some degree shared through common experience and communication” (p. 147). Bitzer (1980b) extends the argument for the situational perspective that incorporated the role of the interest of the rhetors and their environment as the fundamental interacting ground which function as the basic conditions and factors to cause rhetorical act as a functional or pragmatic communication. This modification, thus, provides a space for the subjective nature of the exigence when he mentions “every exigence has a component consisting of an interest” (p. 24). In so doing, Bitzer (1980b) asserts that the rhetorical situation integrates both objective and subjective phenomena, “[t]he rhetorical situation is real and objective, however, in the sense that an observer, possessing appropriate knowledge and interests, usually can see its parts and appreciate its force” (p. 24), and thus, because of the different subjective perspectives toward the existence of the exigence, they bring different rhetorical discourses in response to the same exigence.
The overarching argument made by Hunsaker & Smith (1976), and Bitzer (1980b) on the importance of perception and interest of the rhetor and their environment for creating fundamental interacting ground for rhetorical act helps me to argue throughout this project that rhetorical situations are not discrete, objective phenomena. By drawing on their argument, I argue that rhetorical discourse exists in response to the exigency based on the perception and interest of the rhetor on given shared common experience and communication culture. This argument opens up avenues for further arguments of subjective nature of exigencies that the shared experience and communication culture have changed and so does the notion of the rhetorical situation.

Biesecker’s (1989) call for the appropriation of deconstructive insights, and thus the deconstruction of the relation between rhetorical discourse and audience in order to rethink the rhetorical situation, adds a new dimension in the discussion of situation and rhetorical discourse. For her, the relation between rhetorical discourse and its situation is discursive and thus indeterminate, “neither the text’s immediate rhetorical situation nor its author can be taken as simple origin or generative agent since both are underwritten by a series of historically produced displacement” (Biesecker, 1989, p. 121). The discursivity and indeterminacy of the connection between rhetorical discourse and its situation is more evident in the reception of rhetorical texts because it is received differently by different audience. This notion fleshes out her logic of rhetorical situation as articulation, and “the deconstruction of the subject opens up possibilities for the field of Rhetoric by enabling us to read the rhetorical situation as an event structured not by a logic of influence but by a logic of articulation” (p. 126), which is essentially provisional. This notion reads rhetorical discourses as processes entailing the discursive production of audience, “whose identity is produced and reproduced in discursive practices” (p.
127) thereby resituating “the rhetorical situation on the trajectory of becoming rather than Being” (p. 127). I bring in her idea of discursivity and indeterminacy and bind it up Foucault’s notion of discursive formation, and argue that the constituents of rhetorical situations are not discretely born; rather they are linked with discursive formation and indeterminate relation.

Crismore & Vande Kopple’s (1990) explanation of Bitzer’s notion of constraints also very clearly demonstrate the fact that rhetorical discourse exits in plurality as it is an expression of subjective phenomena like beliefs, attitude, interest and motives. They state “[t]he sources of constraints are many: beliefs, attitudes, facts, documents, traditions, images, interests and motives” (p. 50). It elucidates that the rhetor’s personal character, logical proofs, and style causes diverse rhetorical discourses in response to the same exigence suggesting that exigence has indeterminate relation with the rhetorical discourse.

I further argue along the line of Benoit (1994) who critiques Bitzer’s objective situational theory in “The Genesis of Rhetorical Situation” and believes that Bitzer’s situational theory has “yet to be fully assimilated into our current understanding of the nature of rhetoric” by correcting it on the basis of epistemology, the importance of purpose, and the importance of agent and agency, which are lacking in Bitzer’s model of rhetorical situation that ignores the epistemic nature of rhetoric. Rhetorical exigence is epistemic as it is perceived in different ways by different rhetors. This epistemological assumption is related to the rhetor and the rhetor’s purpose, and so depending on the purposes of the rhetors, the same situation generates different rhetorics. Likewise, the nature of a rhetor also influences the discourse produced in response to a certain situation. This assumption also speaks to Smith & Lybarger’s (1996) revision of Bitzer’s relatively autonomous notion of exigence. They argue that rhetorical situation involves a plurality of exigencies and complex relations between the audience and rhetorician’s interest,
thereby making it more interactive with other elements of the situation. They emphasize the important role of perception, when they say, “each auditor will have a perception of the rhetor and the message in addition to a perception of the issues” and so “rhetorical communication is always in a state of flux that requires the critic to move beyond the strict realism of Bitzer” (p. 200). This notion of exigence as more like a complex of various perceptions helps me argue for my position in this project.

In her article “Unframing Models of Public Distribution: From Rhetorical Situation to Rhetorical Ecologies,” Jenny Edbauer (2005), unlike earlier works on rhetorical situation that focus upon the elements of audience, exigence, and constraints, “argues that rhetorical situations operate within a network of lived practical consciousness or structure of feeling” (p. 5). Her article advances a new debate on rhetorical situation. By borrowing Phelps’s (1988) notion of ecology that “is constituted through interdependence and transactions among all levels of a system, both horizontally (the relations of parts within the whole at a given level of organization) and vertically (the relations among elements at different levels)” (p. 3), Edbauer (2005) places the rhetorical elements within the wider context that destabilizes the discrete borders of a rhetorical situation, and thus attempts to provide “a framework of affective ecologies that recontextualizes rhetorics in their temporal, historic, and lived fluxes” (p. 9). For her rhetorical situations are not discrete entities; they are perceived as a circulating ecology of effects, enactments, and events resulting into rhetorical ecologies, where all the elements are networked and connected, which could be called “sites of complex network or net worked process” if we borrow Helen Foster’s (2007) terminologies. As Foster believes “networked process evokes both the growing number of sites and the relational loops” and thus it “encompasses a variety a variety of sites” (p. XV), this ecological notion does not treat the rhetorical situation as a
relatively closed system; rather it perceives the elements as distributed acts thereby placing the situation within an open network. Edbauer (2005) also perceives rhetorical situation as a process when she says “rhetorical situation is better conceptualized as a mixture of processes and encounters” (p. 13). She argues that the standard models of rhetorical situation mask the fluid nature of rhetoric. Her argument about the fluidity of rhetorical situations gets expressed when she says “[r]hetorical situations involve the amalgamation and mixture of many different events and happenings that are not properly segmented into audience, text, or rhetorician” (p. 20). Rather rhetorical situations are trans-situational, and open-ended process.

By borrowing the terminologies from Cooper (1986), Phelps (1988), Edbauer (2005), and Foster (2007), I propose a new theory of rhetorical situations as trans-situational, networked ecologies. In so doing, I situate my discussion on the current notions of rhetorical situation, and argue for extension of the notions of rhetorical situation that incorporates the changing/changed notion. My theory does not only address the exigence for a new stance, but also hopefully contributes to direct our discipline with new insight.

Methodology

My methodology is primarily based on bibliographic research as discussed by Stephen North (1987). I use one of North’s “modes of inquiry” that of “scholars.” “North identifies three major types of knowledge-makers who produce scholarship: historians, philosophers, and critics” (Byard, 2009, p. 25). To map rhetorical situation, I engage in an historical and theoretical mapping. Historical inquiry, as North (1987) says, has two stages—the empirical and the interpretive. As per this inquiry, I first collect their understanding about rhetorical situation, and then in the interpretive stage, I create a narrative chronicling its changes over time. Though the empirical and interpretive stages are interconnected process because interpretation is based on
“the body of the available texts, and the search for further texts” (p. 71), they are “not necessarily or neatly sequential” (p. 71).

Identifying the problem precedes both the empirical stage and the interpretive stage of inquiry. It arises “in the context of the overall narrative, out of some perceived gap or error in the history itself” (North, 1987, p. 72). In this connection, I ask questions like: What have rhetorical situations been? What are they now? Why the existing notion of the rhetorical situations has not been able to express the changed/changing meaning? In order to discuss these problems (questions), I identify, search, and assemble and validate relevant texts on the rhetorical situations (which are known as empirical stage). On the basis of this empirical inquiry, I move on to the interpretive stage of my historical inquiry on the rhetorical situations, where I search for pattern(s) in texts; explain the pattern(s), which creates a narrative; relate new narrative to existing narratives (a dialectical narrative); and finally draw conclusions and implications.

Based on the historical inquiry as mentioned above, I engage in the philosophical inquiry on rhetorical situation, which is going to be the major part in my dissertation, in which I account for, frame, critique and analyze the fundamental assumptions and beliefs on the rhetorical situations, and finally propose a theory that extends the existing notion of rhetorical situation, and thus expresses the changed/changing meaning given the impact new media and technology. In this philosophical inquiry or “theorizing,” to use Bizzell’s term, I make a speculation about what is a new stance to understand the new notion of the rhetorical situations. However, I believe, this “theorizing” won’t simply be a just a talk on theory for the sake of theory, rather I attempt to formulate a new model (rhetorical situations as trans-situational networked ecologies) that hopefully theorizes the notion of the rhetorical situations from a new perspective which incorporates new situations caused by recent developments of new media and technology in
order to complete the meaning of rhetorical situations. Finally I argue that rhetorical situations as trans-situational networked ecologies expand our understanding of the rhetorical situations, and it can also be fruitfully used in the design and development of scholarship in the field as well as pedagogies for rhetoric and writing studies majors.

Since debate is the nature of philosophical knowledge, I believe that the logic and form of philosophical knowledge are dialectical and dialogic that “takes the form of a free-ranging, never-ending debate” (North, 1987, p. 96). Guided by these assumptions, I propose a working theory that completes the notion of the rhetorical situation incorporating the new context and keeps the debate going, which, I believe, contributes to the field of Rhetoric and Writing Studies. The philosophical inquiry that I am going to use looks like this: 1. Identifying Problems; 2. Establishing Premises; 3. Making Argument(s): The Communal Dialectic; 4. Drawing Conclusion(s): Dissemination to a Wider Audience (North, 1987, p. 99).

Along with philosophical inquiry, I engage rhetorical inquiry as a methodological frame because it better suits my purpose in this project as Foster (2001) asserts “Rhetorical inquiry… begins with some dissonance or motivating concern that serves as a catalyst to the questions that direct inquiry” (p. 6). The process of rhetorical inquiry follows these steps: 1. Identifying a motivating concern; 2. Posing questions; 3. Engaging in heuristic search; 4. Creating a new theory or hypotheses; and 5. Justifying the theory (Lauer & Asher, 1998, p. 5).

Along the line of rhetorical inquiry, I first identify my motivating concern. The study of the rhetorical situation is highly valued in the study of rhetorical theory because it is very important aspect to understand any communicative activity. Though the history of rhetorical theory talked about rhetorical situation to some extent as through the discussion of “kairos” and “rhetorical stances,” which convey the meaning of rhetorical situation, it is only with Bitzer
(1968) a full-fledged theory of rhetorical situation came up. Following Bitzer, there is a shower of theories on it, which assert, (re)examine and contend Bitzer’s model, but still lacking a theory that incorporates the changed notion of the rhetorical situation. This fact motivates me for this project.

Based on the primary research questions, I engage in heuristic search in the line of literature review, mapping rhetorical situation (Chapter II), defining new media and technology, and examining how new media and technology have changed the notions of the rhetorical situation (Chapter III), analysis of the theories in relation to the rhetorical situation (Chapter IV), and theory-building and justification of the theory by situating in the field of Rhetoric and Writing Studies (Chapter V). First, I situate my research on mapping rhetorical situation (Chapter II). Then I discuss the exigence for a new theory in order to address the changes brought by new media and technology, and propose a theory (Chapter V).

**Postmodern Theoretical Framework**

In order to show my dissonance with the current notions and exigence for a new approach, I bring postmodern theory into this project as a fundamental tool as it provides me a broad theoretical lens to study how signifying systems organize the self, society and everyday life, and how knowledge is always contingent, partial and situated, and thus, particularly, how the notion of rhetorical situation is plural and fluid. I explore this notion in examining the relationships between/among the constituents of rhetorical situation that are reshaped by new media and technology.

As I have already mentioned, many of the scholars in Rhetoric and Composition use or subscribe to a notion of rhetorical situation that characterizes the modernist containment, does not necessarily capture the changed meaning of rhetorical situation, particularly given changes
that the new media and technology have brought. My assumption is that it is appropriate to rethink and re-examine the notion of rhetorical situation from a new stance that corresponds to the changed/changing situation, and propose a new model. To propose a new stance to study rhetorical situation, I primarily rely on Michel Foucault’s (1972) theoretical approach as discussed in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* in general and his notion of “Discursive Formations” in particular to map the relations between the constituents of rhetorical situation. As Foucault believes in the interplay of rules and relations of different entities that define a notion, I plan to examine the constituents of the rhetorical situation not as distinct watertight compartments, but as a relational discursive formation. As Foucault’s asserts “[w]e must question those ready-made syntheses, those groupings that we normally accept before any examination, those links whose validity is recognized from the outset” (p. 22), I question those divisions or groupings of the constituents of rhetorical situation, and propose a new stance that defines rhetorical situation in new terms. My methodology to analyze a discourse on the rhetorical situation speaks to what Foucault strongly believes about how we should comprehend a discourse:

> We must be ready to receive every moment of discourse in its sudden irruption; in that punctuality in which it appears, and in that temporal dispersion that enables it to be repeated, known, forgotten, transformed, utterly erased, and hidden, far from all view, in the dust of books. Discourse must not be referred to the distant presence of the origin, but treated as and when it occurs. (p. 25)

Analyzing a discourse according to the framework of rhetorical situation as formulated by Bitzer and discussed by many others can sometimes lead to insufficient and inappropriate analyses because it does not address the changed meaning of rhetorical situation given the impact of new
media and technology. So, I analyze the rhetorical situation of a discourse when it occurs because the situation in which it occurs may not rightly be analyzed by prototypical definition of the rhetorical situation. But while doing so, the prototypical constituents of rhetorical situation must not be rejected definitively of course, but only remain in suspense because I believe a new approach can emerge by suspending the old notion for a while and (re)examining it from a new light.

Foucault’s notion of “discursive formations” describes different entities of a notion/object as “systems of dispersion” (p. 37) that discovers dispersions themselves “between these elements, which are certainly not organized as a progressively deductive structures” (p. 37), but not the discursive unity that attempts to see homogeneity, regularity, successive appearance, simultaneity, reciprocity, links and hierarchies. The attempt to describe the systems of dispersion but not the discursive unity (which is characterized as a defining regularity of a kind) is known as “discursive formation.” The rules that govern this dispersion are the rules of formation that include the “conditions of existence (but also of coexistence, maintenance, modification, and disappearance) in a given discursive division” (p. 38). As Foucault believes, a statement itself has no consistent linguistic unit, I argue that by bringing in his notion of “discursive formation” the constituents of rhetorical situation do not always consistently constitute rhetorical situation because “discursive formation really is the principle of dispersion and redistribution” (p. 107). I (re)examine the rhetorical situation not as a developing totality, but as a distribution of gaps, voids, absences, limits, and divisions by using discursive formation.

Jenny Edbauer’s (2005) “framework of affective ecologies” and Helen Foster’s notion of “networked process” and Janice Lauer’s notion of “dissonance” help me to (re)conceptualize the meaning of the rhetorical situation from a new light. As Edbauer “argues that rhetorical
situations operate within a network of lived practical consciousness or structure of feeling” (p. 5), rhetorical situations as discrete entities are perceived as a circulating ecology of effects, enactments, and events resulting into rhetorical ecologies, where all the elements are networked and connected. This ecology could be called “sites of complex network or networked process” in Foster’s (2007) terminologies. As Foster believes “networked process evokes both the growing number of sites and the relational loops” and thus it “encompasses a variety a variety of sites” (p. XV), this ecological notion does not treat rhetorical situation as a relatively closed system; rather it perceives the elements as distributed acts thereby placing the situation within an open network. By borrowing their arguments, I argue that rhetorical situations are trans-situational, open-ended and networked process.


**Chapter Division**

While this part of my dissertation serves as the opening chapter, in Chapter II (Mapping Rhetorical Situation: 1968-2013), I answer my first research question: In the period of 1968-2013, how has the concept of rhetorical situation and its various naming permutations been variously characterized? And the inquiry question to answer this primary research question is: What are the theories of rhetorical situation from 1968-2013? I use these chapters to build a background that functions as a springboard to study the new stance on rhetorical situation. To
map rhetorical situation, I engage in postmodern mapping. In this connection, I study scholarship about rhetorical situation that is commonly used by scholars in Rhetoric and Writing Studies. I continually revisit and question the past to ensure that we are not working with faulty assumptions. While so doing, I study how a theory of the rhetorical situation changes in response to the reality (ies) it seeks to describe. In Chapter II, I engage in more historical/theoretical mapping of rhetorical situation, I also do interpretive mapping along with historical/theoretical mapping.

Chapter III (Defining New Media and Technology: How does it change the notions of Rhetorical Situation?) defines new media and technology, and how it changes the notions or rhetorical situation. With the advent of new media and technology, the notion of rhetorical situation also has changed and thus there is an exigence of a new theory of rhetorical situation that better incorporates the new notion of rhetorical situation germinated by the emergence of new media and technology. For example, new media and technology has broken the traditional relation between the writer, audience, exigence, and constraints, and has blurred the division among them to some extent. In this context, I believe the existing modernist notion of rhetorical situation does not fully express the changed meaning that naturally exists with the impact of new media and technology. Consequently, it limits the scope and understanding of rhetorical situation because this confining tendency is likely to make the notion of rhetorical situation stagnant that does not incorporate the changed/changing situation thereby giving only “incomplete” picture. This chapter answers my second primary question: How do the emergence of new media and technology compel the revision of our notions of the rhetorical situation?

Chapter IV (Analyzing Theories of Rhetorical Situation: Where Are We Now?) is a theoretical discussion to lay a foundation for suggesting a new theory of rhetorical situation. I

In Chapter V (Rhetorical Situations as Trans-situational Networked Ecologies), based on the analysis done in Chapter II and III, I primarily analyze my dissonance of the existing notion of rhetorical situation, and the exigency of a new theory. Then, I offer a theory of rhetorical situation that has more explanatory power than any current theory presently available. To do so, I answer the following question in this chapter: What are my dissonances with some of existing notions of the rhetorical situations? Why do these notions not work and thus need to be revised, and why some (if any) can be developed to propose a new theory? What needs to be (re)theorized, relative to the rhetorical situation, to make it a viable concept for our contemporary moment? This chapter also serves as my concluding chapter (Justification and Significance of the New Theory in RWS), where, I discuss the justification of my theory and its significance for scholars, teachers, and students in the discipline of Rhetoric and Writing Studies. This chapter answers my fourth primary question: What the rhetorical situation as trans-situational networked ecologies indicate for the discipline of RWS?
CHAPTER II

MAPPING THE RHETORICAL SITUATION: 1968-2013

This chapter will answer my first research question: In the period of 1968-2013, how has the concept of rhetorical situation and its various naming permutations been variously characterized? And the inquiry questions to answer this primary research question will be: What are the theories of rhetorical situation from 1968-2013? I use this chapter to build a background that functions as a springboard to study the new stance on rhetorical situation. Along with historical/theoretical mapping of rhetorical situation, I will engage in interpretive mapping which will function as a transition into a new theory that I plan to purpose later. To map the rhetorical situation, I will engage in postmodern mapping. In this connection, I will study scholarship about the rhetorical situation that is commonly used by scholars in Rhetoric and Writing Studies. I will continually revisit and question the past to ensure that we are not working with faulty assumptions. While so doing, I will study how a theory of the rhetorical situation changes in response to the reality (ies) it seeks to describe.

The concept of the rhetorical situation traces back to the notion of *kairos* as expressed in the rhetoric of classical philosophers like Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, Quintilian and others. The ancient Greeks use *kairos* in a more or less similar sense of how rhetorical situation is used nowadays. Sipiora (2002) states:

As Fundamental notion in ancient Greeks, *kairos* carried a number of meanings in classical rhetorical theory and history, including ‘symmetry,’ ‘propriety,’ ‘occasion,’ ‘due measure,’ ‘fitness,’ ‘tact,’ ‘decorum,’ ‘convenience,’ ‘proportion,’ ‘fruit,’ ‘profit,’ and ‘wise moderation,’ to mention some of the more common uses. (p.1)
An underlying sense of all these meanings of *kairos* is “the right or opportune time to do something or right measure in doing something” (Kinneavy, 2002, p. 58) that very aptly resembles with the meaning of a constituent of rhetorical situation as used today. Wayne C. Booth (1963) uses the term “rhetorical stance” to mean rhetorical situation. Booth defines “rhetorical stance” in the article with the same name:

> [A] stance which depends on discovering and maintaining in any writing situation a proper balance among the three elements that are at work in any communicative effort: the available arguments about the subject itself, the interests and peculiarities of the audience, and the voice, the implied character, of the speaker. I should like to suggest that it is this balance, this rhetorical stance, difficult as it is to describe, that is our main goal as teachers of rhetoric. (p. 141)

Here, he very clearly asserts that a writing situation consists of an argument about the subjects, audience, and the speaker, and the balance of these three elements in any communicative effort is what he calls the rhetorical stance. Booth believes that the proper balance is lost in unbalanced stances—the pedant’s stance, and advertiser’s stance—which can be termed as the rhetorical perversions. He explains them as “[t]he first perversion,…springs from ignoring the audience or over-reliance on the pure subject. The second,…comes from undervaluing the subject and overvaluing pure effect: how to win friends and influence people” (Booth, 1963, p. 143). Both of these perversions (unbalanced stance) are in fact result of ignoring the audience. Hence Booth attaches much importance on the audience as the major constituent of rhetorical situation when he says “good writers always to some degree accommodate their arguments to the audience” (p. 144), especially to the interest and peculiarities of the audience.
Though Bitzer does not mention that he drew on the notion of *kairos* and “the rhetorical stance,” he may have been indirectly influenced by them to coin the “rhetorical situation” in his essay “The Rhetorical Situation” because he indirectly asserts that there were some notions of rhetorical situation in undeveloped form when he says “This essay…should be understood as an attempt to revive the notion of rhetorical situation…” (p. 3). By asserting that he wants to revive the notion of rhetorical situation, he indirectly admits that there were some notions of rhetorical situation as in the concept of *kairos* and “the rhetorical stance.” He makes it clearer in the following statements:

> No major theorist has treated rhetorical situation thoroughly as a distinct subject in rhetorical theory; many ignore it. Those rhetoricians who discuss situations do indirectly—as does Aristotle, for example, who is led to consider situation when he treats types discourse. None, to my knowledge, has asked the nature of rhetorical situation. (p. 2)

To sum up, Bitzer was not working in a vacuum because there were similar ideas in circulation, *kairos* and “the rhetorical stance,” for example, were circulated and likely influenced his thoughts. He only assumed that the existing notions of rhetorical situation was not fully developed, and so he wanted to “provide at least the outline of an adequate conceptions of it, and to establish it as a controlling and fundamental concern of rhetorical theory” (p. 2) in order the make the picture more complete.

In the parts that follow, I do historical and thematic mapping of the notions of rhetorical situation in the period of 1968-2012 as to what are the theories of rhetorical situation, and discuss how has the concept of rhetorical situation and its various naming permutations been variously characterized in this period. To achieve this end, I divide it into three headings and
subheadings based on time and theme. I see a connection between time and theme. While the first heading, Bitzer-Vatz-Consigny and More Debate from 1968 to 1974, concentrate of the fundamental debate among Bitzer, Vatz, and Consigny along with some other theorists in this period who in some ways focus their argument around Bitzer-Vatz-Consigny debate, the second heading maps the notions of rhetorical situation as a departure from Bitzer-Vatz-Consigny debate. The third heading maps the concepts of rhetorical situation from a different perspective: rhetorical situation as ecologies of a networked, complex system.

II. I: Bitzer-Vatz-Consigny and More Debate from 1968 to 1974

The debate on rhetorical situation begins with Bitzer (1968), when he theorizes the rhetorical situation in his germinal essay with the same name. Bitzer’s theory of the rhetorical situation values its importance in the rhetorical theory, which was ignored by many, and expresses a need to conceptualize it in more systematic way. Three theories of the rhetorical situation as articulated by Lloyd Bitzer (1968), Richard Vatz (1973), and Scott Consigny (1974) in fact lay the foundation to theorize the rhetorical situation along with ongoing debate on it. Underlying each theory of the rhetorical situation is a different theory of meaning and where it resides, with implications for both the morality of rhetoric and the disciplinary conception of rhetoric. Ultimately, Consigny’s theory of rhetoric as an art of topics resolves the opposition of Bitzer’s and Vatz’s theories of the rhetorical situation.

II. I. I: Bitzer’s Theory of the Rhetorical Situation

In “The Rhetorical Situation” (1968), Lloyd F. Bitzer sets out to theorize rhetorical situation with the belief that “the presence of rhetorical discourse obviously indicates the presence of a rhetorical situation” (p. 2). However, even as rhetorical discourse “is a reliable sign of the existence of situation, it does not follow that a situation exists only when the
discourse exists” (p. 2). In other words, not every rhetorical situation is accompanied by rhetorical discourse, as sometimes the opportunity to speak on a matter is missed (p. 2).

Bitzer (1968) describes three constituents of any rhetorical situation necessary prior to discourse—exigence, audience, and constraints—which “comprise everything relevant in a rhetorical situation” (p. 8). He defines exigence as “an imperfection marked by urgency; a defect, an obstacle, something waiting to be done” (p. 6). In order to be rhetorical, an exigence must be “capable of positive modification… require[ing] discourse” (p.7). For Bitzer, any rhetorical situation has “one controlling exigence… [which] functions as the organizing principle: it specifies the audience… and the change to be effected” (p. 7). In addition, rhetorical situations always require audiences, as rhetorical discourse “produces change by influencing the decision and action of persons who function as mediators of change” (p. 7). Similarly, every rhetorical situation contains a set of constraints made up of persons, events, objects, and relations that are parts of the situation; these can be “beliefs, attitudes, documents, facts, traditions, images, interests, [or] motives” (p. 8). Bitzer describes the two classes of constraints as those originated or managed by the rhetor and his method (Aristotle’s “artistic proofs”) and other situational constraints which may be operative (Aristotle’s “inartistic proofs”) (p. 8).

Bitzer makes quite explicit that the rhetorical situation is antecedent to and “invites” rhetorical discourse: “it is the situation which calls the discourse into existence” (p. 2). Similarly, the rhetorical situation “dictates” the responses and “constrains the words which are uttered”: “So controlling is situation that we should consider it the very ground of rhetorical activity” (p. 5). The implication is that, for Bitzer, rhetorical discourse is not a moral act; the ethical imperative in rhetorical discourse is independent of the rhetor, determined entirely by the exigence of the rhetorical situation. Instead, rhetors are “obliged to speak” or “required by the
situation” to create discourse (p. 5). Rhetors are thereby relieved of moral responsibility because “exigence amount[s] to an imperative stimulus” which prescribes a fitting response that is “strongly invited—often required” (pp. 5; 9). Indeed, the “speaker’s intentions [are] determined by the situation,” which “invites” and “prescribes” a specific, fitting response (pp. 9-10). Thus is the power of the rhetorical situation to both invite and constrain a fitting response from the rhetor (p. 11).

Bitzer’s conception of the rhetorical situation reflects his realist view of an objective, external reality:

The exigence and the complex of persons, objects, events and relations which generate rhetorical discourse are located in reality, are objective and publicly observable historic facts in the world we experience, are therefore available for scrutiny by an observer or critic who attends to them. (p. 11)

In this sense, rhetorical situations are “real” or “genuine,” based in historic reality and independent of rhetorical discourse (p. 11); for Bitzer, events are inherently meaningful because events (i.e. rhetorical discourses) have logical connection with rhetorical situation. They have a cause and effect relationship as the rhetorical situation causes the birth of rhetorical discourses.

Additionally, rhetorical situations exhibit structures of stronger or weaker organization, depending on the number of exigencies and situations at play (p. 12). Finally, as objectively real, rhetorical situations “come into existence, then either mature or decay or mature and persist” (p. 12). Bitzer notes that rhetorical forms develop as a response to those rhetorical situations that recur over time (p. 12).

For Bitzer, then, rhetorical discourse is secondary—a response to the “demands imposed by the situation” (p. 5). Thus, he takes as a given that “rhetoric is situational” (p. 3). By this he
means that rhetoric “obtain[s] its character-as-rhetorical from the situation which generates it”—rhetoric responds to and is essentially related to a rhetorical situation (p. 3) because “[a] particular discourse comes into existence because of some specific condition or situation which invites utterance” (p. 4).

Bitzer summarizes that rhetoric being situational means: 1) rhetoric comes into existence as a response to a situation; 2) speech is given rhetorical significance by the situation; 3) the rhetorical situation must exist as a necessary condition of rhetorical discourse; 4) many rhetorical situations exist and pass without rhetorical response; 5) “a situation is rhetorical insofar as it needs and invites discourse capable of participating with situation and thereby altering its reality”; 6) “discourse is rhetorical insofar as it functions (or seeks to function) as a fitting response to a situation which needs and invites it; and 7) “the situation controls the rhetorical response” (pp. 5-6). Therefore, Bitzer formally defines rhetorical situation as:

a complex of persons, events, objects, and relations presenting an actual or potential exigence which can be completely or partially removed if discourse, introduced into the situation, can so constrain human decision or action as to bring about the significant modification of the exigence. (p. 6)

In other words, “the world really invites change—change conceived and effected by human agents who quite properly address a mediating audience” (p. 13).

Bitzer thus contributes to the knowledge of the field by being the one to pull together these disparate but connected concepts to develop a theory of rhetorical situation that shows his controlling and fundamental concern of rhetorical theory. He conceives of rhetoric as a practical discipline—one which responds to an exigence through discourse that urges an audience to action: “a work of rhetoric is pragmatic; it comes into existence for the sake of something
beyond itself” (p. 4). Thus, “rhetoric is a mode of altering reality… by bringing into existence a discourse of such a character that the audience… is so engaged that it becomes mediator of change” (p. 4). In this sense, rhetoric is always persuasive.

II. I. II: Treatment of Exegeencies: Bitzer and Miller

While Arthur B. Miller (1972) further elaborates the meaning and significance of exigence as defined and conceptualized by Bitzer, and thus treats exigence as the most important of all constituents of the rhetorical situations, Richard E. Vatz (1973), in “The Myth of the Rhetorical Situation” (1973), critiques Bitzer’s realist conception of rhetorical situations as objective historic facts, suggesting instead an opposing perspective based on a different philosophy of meaning, including a different view of the relationships between rhetoric and “situations” (p. 154) thereby providing contrary notion about the relationship between rhetoric and situations.

Miller’s (1972) notion of exigence agrees with the meaning of kairos when he suggests that a rhetor should speak to an exigence when it has “ripened” which truly grasps the temporal nature of an exigence. Talking about the relationships between a rhetor and exigence, Miller asserts “in addition to perceiving the foregoing horizontal dimension, the rhetor must also attempt to perceive the qualitative, or vertical, dimensions of the exigence” (p. 111). However, “the rhetor has creative latitude to interpret the significance of the exigence” (p.111) within the limits specified by each exigence. It is in fact the freedom of opinion inherent in a rhetor that makes the difference in the ultimate or perceived nature of the exigence which depends on the constraints of the perceiver (p. 112). While Bitzer limits rhetorical discourse only as a response to the exigence as a fixed entity, Miller makes it more flexible within the limits based on the rhetor’s “creative latitude.” Miller summarizes his argument about exigence:
The antecedent of every rhetorical situation is the exigence from which the situation derives its significance. This exigence specifies the limits of the topic of communication and simultaneously provides opportunities with those limits for adapting to hearers. Rhetors elect given options for communication depending on their own constraints and their judgments of the constraints of their hearers. (p. 118)

II. I. III: Classification of Discourse: Larson and Wilkerson

Richard L. Larson (1970) problematizes Bitzer’s classification of discourse into two binaries: rhetorical and non-rhetorical, and suggests a third class of discourse: “discourse that was thought to be rhetorical when produced, but is not truly so because (as events turn out) it could not have modified the exigence” (p. 165). To him the distinction between rhetorical and non-rhetorical discourses as done by Bitzer is tricky and problematic, as, upon close observation, all discourses are rhetorical as they are produced in response to an ongoing rhetorical situation, whether those be “scientific” or “poetic” (non-rhetorical as classified by Bitzer). All the discourses, Larson (1970) believes, have the power to modify the existing beliefs and to fill the gaps in our knowledge of the world. Larson asserts that Bitzer’s definitions suggested “ubiquitousness of rhetorical discourse in the lives of readers and listeners, and emphasize the need for men to recognize the workings of this force that shapes human lives in so many ways” (p. 168). It implies that there are some common features in seemingly unrelated discourses, and thus it is necessary to differentiate rhetorical from non-rhetorical discourses more deftly and succinctly because it helps understand what rhetorical is and how it is changed over a period of time.
K. E. Wilkerson (1970) also disagrees with Bitzer’s classification of rhetorical and non-rhetorical discourses as he finds the distinction arbitrary because the discourse Bitzer labeled as non-rhetorical could be rhetorical in its essence. Regarding the rhetorical discourse that comes in response to the rhetorical situation, Wilkerson (1970), like Kneupper (1980), adds another causal dimension of the “communicative abilities within both speaker and audience” (p. 90). He develops it as an alternative framework of rhetorical theory that suggests a departure from Bitzer’s notion of exigence by asserting that situation cannot be solely determinant to the response, rather it “involve[s] the speaker’s conscious selection, use and control of certain features of the communicative process in human interaction” (p. 91).

II. I. IV: Bitzer-Vatz-Consiny Debate

Whereas Bitzer conceives of rhetorical situations as intrinsically meaningful events that invited, prescribed, and constrained a rhetorical response, Vatz argues instead that “meaning is not intrinsic in events, facts, people, or ‘situations’ [sic] nor are facts ‘publicly observable’” (p. 156). According to Vatz, people learn of events through communication that involves a two-part process of choosing what to communicate and then translating “chosen information into meaning” (pp. 156-157). He argues that “The very choice of what facts or events are relevant is a matter of pure arbitration”—thus, events are given “salience” or “presence” according to which facts are chosen (p. 157). Drawing on Murray Edelman, Vatz notes that people must choose to report only a fraction of the information that reaches them (p. 156).

The act of choosing facts is then followed by a creative or interpretive act, “the rhetorical act of transcendence,” which translates information into meaning (p. 157). Thus, for Vatz, “events become meaningful only through their linguistic depiction” (p. 157). This reflects his view that “events” do not exist objectively in reality, but are instead “created” by choosing facts
and translating meaning in rhetorical discourse (p. 157). Whereas Bitzer argued for the rhetorical situation as antecedent to and determining of rhetoric, Vatz instead argues that rhetoric is antecedent to and determining of the rhetorical situation (p. 157)—“a cause not an effect of meaning” (p. 160). In other words, the reality of the rhetorical situation does not exist externally, but is instead created by and through rhetoric. In response to Bitzer, Vatz therefore argues that “No theory of the relationship between situations and rhetoric can neglect to take account of the initial linguistic depiction of the situation” (p. 157).

This view of the rhetorical situation as created by rhetoric through arbitrary choice and the translation of information into meaning has both academic and moral consequences (p. 157). The academic consequences of this view are the elevation of rhetoric as a discipline. This departs from Bitzer, who justified rhetoric pragmatically, as a merely practical discipline that responded to real-world rhetorical situations to effect a change in the audience. For Vatz, however, a conception of “meaning as a consequence of rhetorical creation” means that one’s “paramount concern will be how and by whom symbols create the reality to which people react” (p. 158). Drawing again from Edelman, Vatz argues that meaning is “established by a process of mutual agreement upon significant symbols” (p. 159). Thus, it follows that “the rhetorician can best account for choices of situations, the evocative symbols, and the forms and media which transmit these translations of meaning” (p. 158). For Vatz, then, this philosophy of meaning and reality as created through rhetoric “requires a disciplinary hierarchy with rhetoric at the top” (p. 158). He concludes that “when meaning is seen as the result of a creative act and not a discovery… rhetoric will be perceived as the supreme discipline it deserves to be” (p. 161).

Similarly, his view of the rhetorical creation of meaning and reality has ethical implications for the rhetor. Vatz characterizes Bitzer’s view of the rhetorical situation, which
“requires” and “prescribes” a fitting response, as thereby determining the moral action and freeing the rhetor of any ethical responsibility (p. 158). In Vatz’s opposing view, the rhetor’s “choice, interpretation, and translation” of information is moral in that the rhetor bears responsibility for the “decisions to make salient or not make salient these situations” (p. 158). In short, the rhetor is morally responsible for selectively choosing to create—through rhetoric—one reality or situation instead of another. Thus, Vatz’s conclusions for “the relationship between rhetoric and situations” are the converse of Bitzer’s in nearly every respect (p. 158-159).

Contrary to Bitzer, Vatz argues that “situations are rhetorical,” that “utterance invites exigence,” that “rhetoric controls the situational response,” and that “situations obtain their character from the rhetoric which surrounds… or creates them” (p. 159).

In “Rhetoric and Its Situations” (1974), Scott Consigny attempts to resolve the “antinomy for a coherent theory of rhetoric” resulting from Bitzer’s and Vatz’s opposing conceptions of the rhetorical situation (p. 176). He proposes instead a more “complete view of the rhetorical act” which “account[s] for actual rhetorical practice” (p. 176). To do so, he builds upon and integrates the theories of both Bitzer and Vatz, attempting to characterize how a rhetor effectively functions in rhetorical situations.

To begin, Consigny (1974) argues that Bitzer “correctly construes the rhetorical situation as characterized by ‘particularities,’ but misconstrues the situation as being thereby determinate and determining” (p. 176). In opposition to Bitzer, he notes that particular situations are not clearly rhetorical, but instead present “an indeterminate existential situation, in which [the rhetor] must make the best of the ‘factualities’ he encounters” (p. 177). In his view, the rhetor “must find strategies for shaping the indeterminacies, thereby formulating concrete problems which can be potentially solved” (p. 177). Consigny here draws on Aristotle’s distinction of rhetorical
situations as those which have “no clear principles or formulated propositions” (p. 177). Thus, while a situation includes particularities, these exist indeterminately and require a rhetor to shape them and formulate concrete problems to be solved rhetorically. According to Consigny, the rhetor is therefore charged to “ask good questions and to formulate or discover relevant problems in an indeterminate situation” (p. 177).

Similarly, Consigny (1974) notes that “Vatz correctly treats the rhetor as creative, but… fails to account for the real constraints on the rhetor’s activity” (p. 176). He opposes Vatz’s conception of the rhetorical situation as “created solely through the imagination and discourse of the rhetor” (p. 178). Consigny argues instead that the rhetorical situation exists independently of the rhetoric—it “involves particularities of persons, actions, and agencies in a certain place and time” (p. 178). In his view, these situational particularities act as real constraints on the rhetor if the rhetoric is to be effective (p. 178). Thus, in contrast to Bitzer’s view of a determining rhetorical situation and Vatz’s alternate view of the arbitrary rhetorical creation of situations and meaning, for Consigny “the rhetor must work through… the pragmata of the situation in such a way that an issue emerges from his interactions with the situation” (p. 178). In other words, Consigny views meaning and reality as constructed in the interaction of rhetor and situation, rather than in one independently of the other.

Much like Vatz, Consigny therefore conceives of the rhetor’s role as ethical in that the rhetor has a “responsibility to discover and formulate… purposes and central problems” (p. 178). Here, both Vatz and Consigny argue that a rhetor selectively and ethically chooses among available information. However, whereas Vatz characterizes this choice as arbitrary and antecedent to the existence of a situation, Consigny instead argues that the discovery and
formulation of purposes and problems is grounded in “the indeterminate phenomena of a situation” (p. 178).

Consigny, then, is primarily concerned with how a rhetor makes sense of and effectively responds to an indeterminate rhetorical situation (p. 179). To be effective and relevant, a rhetor must be able to “enter into an indeterminate situation and disclose or formulate problems… [and] present the problems in such a way as to facilitate their resolution by the audience engaged with him in the rhetorical process” (p. 179). This relates to Bitzer’s conception of audience as a constituent of the rhetorical situation. Just as Bitzer conceives of a rhetorical situation that invited or required a rhetor to create discourse to move an audience to action, so, too, does Consigny conceive of the rhetor’s task as moving an audience to action (p. 179). However, whereas Bitzer views exigence as a constituent of the rhetorical situation, Consigny instead argues—much like Vatz—that the rhetor creatively “discloses issues and brings them to resolution” (p. 179). For Consigny, “when the audience reaches a decision or judgment, it renders” the problem solved, transforming and unifying the indeterminate situation (p. 179).

Consigny notes that neither Bitzer nor Vatz conceived of a “special capacity” for their respective rhetors to function in situations; Bitzer’s rhetor responds naturally to the exigence of the rhetorical situation, whereas Vatz’s rhetor is “free to create ‘problems’ at will” (p. 180). To address how a rhetor thus discloses and manages exigencies in an indeterminate situation, Consigny “propose[d] a mediating third factor, namely, rhetoric as an ‘art’” (p. 176). His view of rhetoric as an “art” explained how a rhetor can engage and make sense of novel and indeterminate situations (p. 179).

Bitzer conceives of rhetoric as a merely practical discipline, responding to rhetorical exigencies to effect a change in the audience. Vatz, on the other hand, conceives of rhetoric as a
supreme discipline atop the hierarchy of disciplines, one which creates both meaning and reality through rhetoric. In contrast to Bitzer and Vatz, then, Consigny argues for rhetoric as a heuristic art—a “truly ‘universal’ power or capacity to function in the various rhetorical situations which constantly arise” (p. 180). This art is also “managerial” in that it “provid[es] the rhetor with means for controlling real situations and bringing them to a successful resolution or closure” (p. 180). Thus, Consigny proposes a rhetorical “art” as the essential power by which rhetors make sense of situations and effectively formulate and address problems to an audience (p. 180). To become effectively engaged, the art must meet two conditions: integrity and receptivity. By integrity, Consigny means that the art of rhetoric is “universal” and allows the rhetor to “function in all kinds of indeterminate and particular situations” (p. 180). By receptivity, he means that the art of rhetoric allows the rhetor to become engaged in situations, thereby discovering “relevant issues” and “achiev[ing] an effective resolution or management of the situation” (p. 181). It is therefore important for a rhetor to be “responsive to… the given situation, those aspects and order which the rhetor discloses through engagement, which may cause him to alter his strategy (p. 178). Thus, the art of rhetoric allows a rhetor to face novel situations and receptively engage them to determine and resolve problems (p. 181).

Specifically, Consigny proposes rhetoric as an art of topics or commonplaces, which serve “as an instrument or device… to discover through selection and arrangement, that which is relevant and persuasive in particular situations (p. 181). For him, a “command of topics provides the rhetor with a means for exploring and managing indeterminate contexts” (p. 176). Thus, the topic is an “essential instrument for discovery or invention” which the rhetor must master (pp. 181-182). In addition, the topic functions as the “realm in which the rhetor thinks and acts” (p. 182). For Consigny, then, the topic itself is the “site” or “situation” in which and from which
the rhetor must act—“the instrument with which the rhetor thinks and the realm in and about which he thinks” (p. 182). Again, meaning and reality exist in an interaction of rhetor and situation through the art of topics.

For Consigny, then, a “coherent view of the rhetorical act” requires both meanings of rhetoric as an art of topics: a “dynamic interrelation” of topic as both instrument and realm of action (p. 182). This full conception of the rhetorical art of topics, with both meanings of topic, is precisely what distinguishes Consigny’s theory from those of Bitzer and Vatz. According to Consigny, Bitzer “ignores the topic as an instrument,” leaving the situation to determine the actions of the rhetor (p. 182). Similarly, “Vatz ignores the topic as situation,” allowing the rhetor to “create problems arbitrarily and at will” (p. 182). In contrast, Consigny thus resolves and integrates Bitzer’s and Vatz’s opposing views of the rhetorical situation, conceiving of topic as both instrument and situation, thereby requiring and making possible the effective engagement of the rhetor in the situation (p. 182).

II. I. V: Jamieson’s Generic Constraints and the Rhetorical Situation

Kathleen M. Hall Jamieson (1973), in “Generic Constraints and the Rhetorical Situation” buys Bitzer’s notion of the connection between rhetorical discourse and rhetorical situation with a slight departure from that of Bitzer in relation to that nexus as she brings in the question of genre in the discussion of rhetorical situation. She asserts that genres constrain rhetorical situation. She argues that “perception of the proper response to an unprecedented rhetorical situation grows not merely from the situation but also from antecedent rhetorical forms” (author’s emphasis) also because “[t]he chromosomal imprint of ancestral genres is evident at the conception of new genre” (p. 163). But while so doing, she also admits how the audience and
situation constrain genres, “Genres are shaped in response to a rhetor’s perception of the expectations of the audience and the demands of the situation” (p. 163).

Going one step further, Jamieson (1973) argues that genre should not have procrustean function to constrain new rhetorical discourses in the traditional frame of genre, but should liberate them based on changing contexts:

Genre should not be viewed as static forms but as evolving phenomena. One should approach study of genres with a Darwinian rather than a Platonic perspective. While traditional genres may color rhetoric they do not ossify it. Rhetors perpetually modify genres. New genres do emerge. (p. 168)

While so saying, she seeks for the need for the revision and change of classificatory assumptions of genres that impinge and impose on any work of rhetoric.

However, Jamieson (1975) in “Antecedent Genre as Rhetorical Constraints” argues how rhetorical responses are constrained by antecedent rhetorical genres because, as she argued above, there exists “chromosomal imprint of their ancestral genre” (p. 412). She illustrates that the same rhetorical situation elicits two radically different types of response because of the antecedent generic constraints. As “[a]ntecedent genres are capable of imposing powerful constraints” (p. 414), Jamieson suggests that rhetors should choose an appropriate genre to respond to an exigence in consonant with situational demand because she believed that “[a]n understanding of genre, useful in all critical encounters, is indispensable in some” (p. 415).

II. II: A Departure from Bitzer-Vatz-Consigny Debate from 1975 to 2003

Whereas the writers discussed above argue around Bitzer-Vatz-Consigny debate primarily in some ways, there are some scholars from 1975 to 2003 who concentrate more on the departure from Bitzer-Vatz-Consigny debate. For example, while Jamieson argues along the line
of Bitzer’s concept of the rhetorical situations by bringing in the issues of genres as rhetorical constraints in the discussion of the rhetorical situations, Baxter & Kennedy (1975) complicate and problematize the linear and singular notion of the rhetorical situations. In this part, I examine what some of the major departures are, and how the scholars in this period discuss on the notions of the rhetorical situation as a departure from the previous debate.

II. II. I: A Departure from Bitzer

Gerald D. Baxter and Bart F. Kennedy (1975) in “Whitehead’s Concept of Concrescence and the Rhetorical Situation,” drawing on Alfred North Whitehead’s philosophy of organism (“the subject emerges from the world” (p. 162)) and concrescence (rhetorical situation), analyze the connection between the rhetorical situations and the rhetorical response in depth and critically. Baxter & Kennedy (1975) assert that a rhetorical situation cannot be determinate to elicit single response because it is not being, but a process of becoming, “the rhetorical situation as a determinate concrescence of propositions can be viewed as a process of becoming, and more” (p. 160). They stress the multiplicity of existence of a rhetorical situation that fosters indeterminate and various responses, which make a rhetorical situation a complex thing, unlike Bitzer conceived it, thereby suggesting the complex nature of rhetorical situations when they assert “[t]he rhetor, audience, subject, occasion, and speech,…, can be said to be the members of a multiplicity which, at the outset of a speech, have a disjunctive relationship” (p. 160). They conceive of the rhetorical situation “as a process” (p. 161) and “as an epochal whole of becoming” (p. 162) unlike Bitzter who conceived it as a finality, hence deconstructing the established conception and providing another view of rhetorical situation.

Whereas Baxter & Kennedy brought in a deconstructive picture the rhetorical situations as conceived by Bitzer, John H. Patton (1979) aims at the clarification and elaboration of the
situation theory of Bitzer. By asserting that situation causes rhetorical discourse, Patton (1979) explains Bitzer’s point in positive terms and so extends his argument:

Rhetorical situations may or may not produce discourse; whether rhetorical discourse occurs depends upon various factors, some of which lie within the rhetors’ emotional and cognitive structures. Such factors are in addition to, which is not to say apart from, the existence of the situation itself. (p. 41)

He argues for indeterminate nature of the rhetorical situations to cause rhetorical discourse thereby attaching much importance to the rhetors’ interest to create the discourse, while equally focusing on rhetorical exigences as necessary conditions to cause the rhetorical discourses, “rhetorical exigences exist as necessary conditions, not as sufficient conditions, in the situational approach” (Patton, 1979, p. 44). While he explains Bitzer’s theory of the exigence, Patton also makes a departure from Bitzer when he asserts the subjective elements (“the rhetor’s perceptual capacities or inclination”) to define the exigences in causing the discourse.

By buying Patton’s views on the role of the rhetor’s perceptual capacities in causing the discourse, Charles W. Kneupper (1980) in “Rhetorical Creativity: The Person, the Situation and the Art” argues “The material conditions are necessary but not sufficient conditions for rhetoric” (p. 162), and thus attaches the significance to the role of the person as definer of situation, “Although situations may be objectively present, the meaning attributed to situation is both personal and social,” and “it remains ultimately the power of the person to define the situation and to choose whether to communicate/share the attributed meaning with others” (p. 162).

Kneupper, like Vatz but more subtly, objects to the supposedly minimized role of the agent as found in Bitzer’s model, especially in terms of perception and creativity in rhetorical action. The person makes a choice to communicate and how to communicate based on “an intricate meshing
of definitions” of self, exigence, audience, constraints, purpose, and probabilities. Thus, to him, rhetorical response is very complex phenomenon.

While many critics, as stated above, critique Bitzer for discounting the role of the rhetors in defining the exigences, Bitzer (1980b) extends the argument for the situational perspective that incorporated the role of the interest of the rhetors and their environment as the fundamental interacting ground which function as the basic conditions and factors to cause rhetorical act as a functional or pragmatic communication. This modification, thus, provides a space for the subjective nature of the exigence when he mentions “every exigence has a component consisting of an interest” (p. 24). In so doing, Bitzer (1980b) asserts that the rhetorical situation integrates both objective and subjective phenomena, “[t]he rhetorical situation is real and objective, however, in the sense that an observer, possessing appropriate knowledge and interests, usually can see its parts and appreciate its force” (p. 24), and thus because of the different subjective perspectives toward the existence of the exigence, they bring different rhetorical discourses in response to the same exigence.

Intended to provide more perspicuous and more coherent notion of rhetorical situation, Alan Briton (1980), in “Situation in the Theory of Rhetoric,” attempts to analyze the relation between rhetorical situation and rhetorical act, and whether or not the rhetorical situation a matter of objective facts. Briton sees three different kinds of relationship between rhetorical situation and rhetorical act: a causal connection, a “meaning-dependence,” and a normative. Unlike some critics, he does not see the causal connection between them, “the causal reading of the relation between rhetorical situation and rhetorical act is not so clearly emphasized in Bitzer’s account” (p. 235). For her, “‘meaning-dependence’ is the most fundamental aspect of the relationship between situation and act in Bitzer’s theory” (p. 235). She defines “meaning-
dependence” as “the essential character of the act as rhetorical depends upon its connection with the situation” (p. 234) which essentially emphasizes on rhetorical relation between them. The normative connection is also equally fundamental relation between them as it suggests the rhetorical situation only “demands” or “calls for” or “requires” a fitting discourse, but does not necessarily cause it.

By critiquing Bitzer’s objective situational theory, William L. Benoit (1994) in “The Genesis of Rhetorical Situation” believes that Bitzer’s situational theory has “yet to be fully assimilated into our current understanding of the nature of rhetoric” by correcting it on the basis of epistemology, the importance of purpose, and the importance of agent, which are lacking in Bitzer’s model of rhetorical situation. Bitzer’s situational theory is based on the fact that “the constituents of rhetorical situations are objective, real, historic, and observable or detectable” (Bitzer, 1981a, p. 101) which ignores the epistemic nature of rhetoric. Benoit (1994), by rejecting the Bitzer’s objective nature of exigence, believes that rhetorical exigence is epistemic as it is perceived in different ways by different rhetors. By using persuasive discourse, and thus creating knowledge about it, rhetoric can answer the questions that do not have empirical verification. This fact about rhetorical construction is lacking in Bitzer’s situational theory. So, Benoit says, “Bitzer’s objective view of reality ignores an important epistemic function rhetoric can perform” (p, 345). This epistemological assumption is related to the rhetor and the rhetor’s purpose. Depending on the purposes of the rhetors, the same situation generates different rhetorics. Likewise, the nature of a rhetor also influences the discourse produced in response to a certain situation.

In “Bitzer’s Model Reconstructed,” Craig Smith and Scott Lybarger (1996) also critique Bitzer’s definition that locates exigencies in the external conditions of material and social
circumstances, and treats it as singular phenomenon. By revising Bitzer’s relatively autonomous notion of exigence, they argue that rhetorical situation involves a plurality of exigencies and complex relations between the audience and rhetorician’s interest, thereby making it more interactive with other elements of the situation. They emphasize the important role of perception, when they say, “each auditor will have a perception of the rhetor and the message in addition to a perception of the issues” and so “rhetorical communication is always in a state of flux that requires the critic to move beyond the strict realism of Bitzer” (p. 200). In this way, the exigence is more like a complex of various perceptions.

Based on the belief that examining rhetorical situations as sets of interacting influences from which rhetoric arises help in providing a better method of examining causality, Keith Grant-Davie (1997) intends “to review the original definitions of the term [rhetorical situation] and its constituents, and to offer a more thoroughly developed scheme for analyzing rhetorical situations” (p. 264). Accordingly Grant-Davie (1997) explains Bitzer’s definition of a rhetorical situation, “a rhetorical situation is a situation where a speaker or writer sees a need to change reality and sees that the change may be effected through rhetorical discourse” (p. 265). Talking about the constituents of rhetorical situations, he adds rhetors as a constituent in Bitzer’s model, and makes some changes and improvement by proposing three amendments in Bitzer’s model. In her model, exigence demands more comprehensive analysis; all the constituents are plural; and rhetors like audiences are part of rhetorical situations. By deriving the logic for the order of questions from the version of stasis theory explained by Jeanne Fahnestock and Marie Secor, she orders the essential questions addressing the exigence of a situation, and thus engages in more comprehensive analysis of the exigence. While Bitzer’s definition of the exigence pivoted around the question “Why is the discourse needed?” she, in her scheme, proposes this order
based on stasis theory: what the discourse is about, why it is needed, and what it should accomplish. In her model, rhetors as a constituent of rhetorical situation mean those people, real or imagined, who are responsible for the discourse and its authorial voice, and audience means those people, real or imagined, with whom rhetors negotiate through discourse to achieve the rhetorical objectives, and constraints are factors in the situation’s context that may affect the achievement of the rhetorical objectives.

In “The Rhetorical Situation Again: Linked Components in a Venn Diagram,” Donna Gorrell (1997) reviews Bitzer’s theory along with the modifications suggested by Richard Vatz and Scott Consigny, and proposes her approach by using Venn diagram “that synthesizes the Bitzer-Vatz-Consigny models with the communication, or rhetorical, triangle” (p. 395). Her approach, by focusing on the dynamic interaction of the situational components, adds to both models. Gorrell (1997) likes Consigny’s model as the most productive model, and buys his arguments about the rhetorical situations, “they can be discovered and managed by means of heuristics, such as topics, which allow the rhetor to develop meanings and relationships beyond those available in a circumstance of rhetor determining situation and in one of situation controlling rhetor” (p. 399). By combining the Kinneavyan-Aristotalian model and the Bitzer-Consigny model, Gorrel’s model overlaps and links rhetor, audience and reality by the help of the Venn diagram. These components are in dynamic play, interacting with each other constantly, and the overlapping creates a common ground in the central part, which “is the textual common ground where meaning is constructed” (Gorrel, 1997, p. 400). “The larger the overlap of circles, the greater the chances of a successful text” (p. 402), and the expansion of the central part suggests the increase of the rhetorical effectiveness of the text. Thus her model suggests that the more the components come closure in a dynamic play, the better rhetorically
‘fitting’ response it generates, and the less they join in this process, the more chance of adversarial, mere and failed rhetoric. The crux of her argument is that “the fitting response to any rhetorical situation results from the interactions of all its components—rhetor, audience, and reality. Anything less is not a true rhetorical situation” (p. 411). Besides this, her model suggests the synthesis of the components and its responsiveness to the variety of situations. While many scholars’ notions of the rhetorical situation as discussed above can be seen as an unequivocal emphasis on Bitzer, because Bitzer is a pivotal force to generate discussion on the rhetorical situation either as a commend or as a critique on him, some others, like the ones I discuss below, focus on Bitzer-Vatz-Consigny debate as a whole.

II. II. II: Hunsaker & Smith’s Critique on Bitzer, Vatz, and Consigny

David M. Hunsaker & Craig R. Smith (1976) in “The Nature of Issues: A Constructive Approach to Situational Rhetoric” critique Bitzer, Vatz and Consigny for not mentioning the importance of perception along with admitting that their situation based examinations of rhetoric have provided new insight into the nature of issue. Hunsaker & Smith (1976) value Consigny’s classical system of topics as an alternative to Bitzer’s and Vatz antithetical model, but believe that though useful, Consigny’s “system fails to encompass all aspect of the rhetorical situation” (p. 145). They “argue that the perceptions of the rhetor and auditor are crucial to an adequate understanding of rhetoric as art” (p. 145). Hunsaker & Smith assert:

While we recognize the generating power of a rhetorical exigence, we also recognize the ability of a communicator to manipulate perception of that exigence, as well as the variety of audience perceptions of exigence and communicator, and the capacity of an auditor to perceive selectively. (p. 145)
They value the importance of perception in constructing the potential issues in a rhetorical situation, but also believe that the cognitive and affective experiences that shape human perception “are not completely private, but are to some degree shared through common experience and communication” (p. 147).

II. II. III: A Deconstructive Approach to the Rhetorical Situation

As influenced by Derridian notion of differance, Barbara A. Biesecker (1989) calls for the appropriation of deconstructive insights and deconstructs the relation between rhetorical discourse and audience in order to rethink the rhetorical situation. Biesecker (1989), by adding a new dimension in the discussion of situation and rhetorical discourse, argues that rhetorical discourse also influences the constituent elements of the situation. For her, the relation between rhetorical discourse and its situation is discursive and thus indeterminate, “neither the text’s immediate rhetorical situation nor its author can be taken as simple origin or generative agent since both are underwritten by a series of historically produced displacement” (Biesecker, 1989, p. 121). The discursivity and indeterminacy of the connection between rhetorical discourse and its situation is more evident in the reception of rhetorical texts because it is received differently by different audience. This notion fleshes out her logic of rhetorical situation as articulation, and “the deconstruction of the subject opens up possibilities for the field of Rhetoric by enabling us to read the rhetorical situation as an event structured not by a logic of influence but by a logic of articulation” (p. 126), which is essentially provisional. This notion reads rhetorical discourses as processes entailing the discursive production of audience, “whose identity is produced and reproduced in discursive practices” (p. 127) thereby resituating “the rhetorical situation on the trajectory of becoming rather than Being” (p. 127).
Crismore & Vande Kopple’s (1990) explanation of Bitzer’s notion of constraints also very clearly demonstrate the fact that rhetorical discourse exits in plurality as it is an expression of subjective phenomena like beliefs, attitude, interest and motives. They state “[t]he sources of constraints are many: beliefs, attitudes, facts, documents, traditions, images, interests and motives” (p. 50). It elucidates that the rhetor’s personal character, logical proofs, and style causes diverse rhetorical discourses in response to the same exigence suggesting that exigence has indeterminate relation with the rhetorical discourse.

Unlike Crismore & Kopple, and many others, Mary Garret & Xiaosui Xiao (1993) resituate and revisit the notion of the rhetorical situation from a fresh perspective that adds new dimension in the study of the rhetorical situation, and thus makes a significant expansions and refinements in the notion of the rhetorical situation. While the role of the discourse tradition was ignored in most treatments of the rhetorical situation, they focus on the notion of “discourse tradition,” in shaping and influencing both speaker and audience’s perceptions of an exigence, and revert Vatz’s model, which focused on the rhetor, by seeing the audience rather than the rhetor as the pivotal element “in determining exigency, constraints, and the ‘fittingness’ of the rhetor’s response” (p. 30) thereby “placing much greater stress on the interactive, organic nature of the rhetorical situation” (p. 31). Their case study of the nineteenth century Chinese response to the two Opium Wars shows that “the discourse tradition functioned as a powerful aspect of the rhetorical situation” (p. 37) as the case study evinces the perception of exigency, and the construction of the response to it “depended in large part on the discourse tradition” (p. 37) because discourse tradition shapes, influences, and conforms audience’s opinions about forms of discourses, the proper style, and the right modes of argumentation. Garret & Xiao’s treatment to the role of discourse tradition treated the audience as the active center of the rhetorical situation:
Usually, though not always, the rhetor is not separate from the audience but arises out of the audience….In the same way, the rhetorical exigencies are expressions of the situational audience’s unsolved questions, concerns, anxieties, frustrations, and confusions, which need modification by discourse. The constraints, on the other hand, reflect the audience’s expectations for an appropriate discourse in a given circumstance.

(p. 39)

II. III. A Networked Complex System from 2004 to 2012

With the advent of new media and technology, and its integration into all forms of communication in particular and human life in general, the notions of the rhetorical situations have changed. This change gets reflected in some writings. In this part, I synthesize, and discuss how some essays written on the rhetorical situation treat the notions of the rhetorical situation, particularly given the impact of new media and technology.

By drawing from Mark C. Taylor, Byron Hawk (2004) in “Toward a Rhetoric of Networked (Media) Culture: Notes on Polarities and Potentiality” provides a solution of Bitzer-Vatz-Consigny debate on the prominence of situation or discourse thereby defining rhetorical situation as complex adaptive systems where there is a dynamic interplay between the polarity of situation and discourse in the networked (media) culture. In this way, Hawk perceives rhetorical situation always as complex adaptive systems which “remain open to their environments and adapt accordingly…produce strange loops among their individual parts that create” (pp. 835-836). Hawk believes that the notion of rhetorical situation is not that simple and straightforward as discussed in Bitzer-Vatz-Consigny debate; it is much more complex and thus the complexity of rhetorical situation can be better understood by complexity theory, because “[a]ll the elements of a rhetorical situation are effects of their place in an economy of differences—they each form
polarities with the others and evolve co-adaptively” (Hawk, 2004, p. 837). Like “[e]nvironment, rhetoric, texts, and audiences are complex adaptive systems…[they] are networks linked to other networks” (p. 837), rhetorical situation is also complex adaptive systems, each system linked to other networks. As Wably (2007) believes complexity theory as a new concept of social system can more adequately constitute an explanatory framework to make the social system better understood, the gist of complexity theory that any entity of social system “linked with a range of linked concepts” (Wably, 2007, p. 450) better explain the relation between the constituents of rhetorical situation and resolve the ongoing Bitzer-Vatz-Consigny debate.

To bring in complexity theory as an explanatory framework, the constituents of rhetorical situation, unlike as they are perceived in Bitzer-Vatz-Consigny debate, are not discrete entity; they are rather interconnected, networked, an entity linked with a range of linked concepts, and thus can be better understood as an ecology. In this context, to argue for the causal relationship between the situation and discourse or vice versa is based on faulty assumptions. No entity alone is prominent to cause the other; rather all the constituents of rhetorical situation are connected as a web, at least partially or mutually constituting each other.

In her article “Unframing Models of Public Distribution: From Rhetorical Situation to Rhetorical Ecologies,” Jenny Edbauer (2005), unlike earlier works on rhetorical situation that focus upon the elements of audience, exigence, and constraints, “argues that rhetorical situations operate within a network of lived practical consciousness or structure of feeling” (p. 5). Her article advances a new debate on rhetorical situation. By borrowing Phelps’s (1988) notion of ecology that “is constituted through interdependence and transactions among all levels of a system, both horizontally (the relations of parts within the whole at a given level of organization) and vertically (the relations among elements at different levels)” (p. 3), Edbauer (2005) places
the rhetorical elements within the wider context that destabilizes the discrete borders of a rhetorical situation, and thus attempts to provide “a framework of affective ecologies that recontextualizes rhetorics in their temporal, historic, and lived fluxes” (p. 9). For her rhetorical situations are not discrete entities; they are perceived as a circulating ecology of effects, enactments, and events resulting into rhetorical ecologies, where all the elements are networked and connected, which could be called “sites of complex network or net worked process” if we borrow Helen Foster’s (2007) terminologies. As Foster believes “networked process evokes both the growing number of sites and the relational loops” and thus it “encompasses a variety of sites” (p. XV), this ecological notion does not treat the rhetorical situation as a relatively closed system; rather it perceives the elements as distributed acts thereby placing the situation within an open network. Edbauer (2005) also perceives rhetorical situation as a process when she says “rhetorical situation is better conceptualized as a mixture of processes and encounters” (p. 13). She argues that the standard models of rhetorical situation mask the fluid nature of rhetoric. Her argument about the fluidity of rhetorical situations gets expressed when she says “[r]hetorical situations involve the amalgamation and mixture of many different events and happenings that are not properly segmented into audience, text, or rhetorician” (p. 20). Rather the rhetorical situations are trans-situational, and open-ended process.

To sum up, the rhetorical situations are not discrete, linear, and singular entities; rather they are networked ecologies of a complex system. Since new media and technology has contributed to this change, in chapter III, I will define new media and technology in considerable length and also discuss how and why new media and technology has changed the notions of the rhetorical situation.
CHAPTER III

DEFINING NEW MEDIA AND TECHNOLOGY: HOW DO THEY CHANGE THE
NOTIONS OF THE RHETORICAL SITUATION?

Humans had technologies before they invented language. For example, humans had skills or tools for hunting food before they learned to use human language systematically. People have used technology as a medium to do something in a better way and communicate across space and time from time immemorial, as Nye (2006) says, “One way to define ‘technology’ is in terms of evolution” (p. 1). Technology is so much attached with evolution that it is “not foreign to ‘human nature’ but inseparable from it” and “technologies have been used for social evolution” (p. 2). Technologies are characterized as social evolution, and as an ever-changing, ever-advancing site, because they always facilitate human lives with the supply of tools and methodologies to meet their necessities, which humans continually redefine to suit their needs (p. 2). However, there are mutual relationships between necessity and technology: most of the time necessity engenders technologies, and sometimes technologies (tools) generate necessity. So, “Technologies are not just objects but also the skills needed to use them” (p. 4), hence both object and process. The ancient Greeks used the word “techne” instead of technology which had to do with skills in the arts that meant rational faculty used in making something, and a productive quality exercised in combination with true reasoning.

Over time, technology has advanced and become more complex thereby making human consciousness more complex. Consequently, linear media such as print failed to capture the structure of our thought. As an intellectual predicament of the second half of the twentieth century, we experienced flickering focus, a deferral of meaning between the signifier and the signified. On this backdrop, geared up by advanced technology (digital technology), new media,
as a new medium of human expression, was born as “a sign of our current confusion about where these efforts are leading and our breathlessness at the place of change” (Murray, 2003, p. 3). Though communication scholar, Marshall McLuhan, first used the term “new media” in 1953, “the term really emerged in the late 1990s when it began to be used as an all-encompassing description for emerging and digital technologies” (Smith & Hendricks, 2010, p. 4). So, new media is usually associated with the spread of information digitally that is characterized by computer-mediated forms of production, distribution and communication. Smith & Hendricks (2012) argue that new media surpasses just digital communication and just the technology that made it possible. For them:

It has become associated with converged, computerized, networked, interactive and compressible technologies and information. If we go with this all-encompassing definition, we are primarily talking about only the technology that truly makes it new media. For many, the definition goes even further. It is not just the technology, but it is the way in which we interact with the technology that truly makes it new media. (p. 5)

Like Smith & Hendricks, Kember & Zylinska (2012), in *Life after New Media*, extends the definition of new media even further. They make a significant shift in the way new media is perceived and understood “as a set of discrete objects…to understanding media [new media] predominantly in terms of processes of mediation” (p. xiii). For them, new media as processes of mediation “is a complex and hybrid process that is simultaneously economic, social, cultural, psychological, and technical” (p. xv). This can be a big debate on new media scholarship, but I am not going to explore this issue here because of my research limitation. I will define new media only in terms of its technological feature that could be useful in our discipline.
We cannot move along without new media and technology because new media and technology is inevitable in our lives, and has so much impacted our lives that we have become cyborg both physically and mentally. As a powerful means to master the complexity of life, new media has enabled us to understand complex world around us, and, thus, helped us to “refigure our bodies, our cultures, ourselves in hopeful ways” (Murray, 2003, p. 5). Many scholars have felt the need to define new media and technology. So, there have been many efforts to define and explain new media and technology. However, “[e]fforts to understand, explain, and analyze the new media are demanding and endlessly complex” (Dennis, 1998, p. xi), because, as Lievrouw & Livingstone (2002) believe, new media has been defined in terms of technological, economic, behavioral, and critical/cultural issues that deal with system features and services, industry structure and ownership, psychology of media users, and content and forms, respectively. I divide this chapter into two broad parts: definition of new media and technology, and the impact of new media and technology in changing the notions of the rhetorical situation. While in the first part, I delineate the definitions of new media primarily in terms of technology, in the second part, I discuss how new media and technology has changed the notions of the rhetorical situation, and attempt to answer my inquiry question for this chapter: How do new media and technology change the notions of the rhetorical situation?

As the title suggests, this chapter will define new media and technology, and how it challenges the notions of the rhetorical situation explored in chapter 2. With the advent of new media and technology, the concept of the rhetorical situation also has changed, which leads to an exigence of a new theory of the rhetorical situation that better incorporates the new notion of rhetorical situation germinated by the emergence of new media and technology. For example, new media and technology have broken the traditional relation between the writer, audience,
exigence, and constraints, and have blurred the division among them to some extent. In this context, I believe the existing modernist notion of rhetorical situation does not fully express the changed meaning that naturally exists with the impact of new media and technology. Consequently, the modernist notion limits the scope and understanding of the rhetorical situation because this confining tendency is likely to make the notion of rhetorical situation stagnant that will not incorporate the changed/changing situation thereby giving only “incomplete” picture.

III. I. Defining New Media and Technology

When we define new media in terms of the technological aspect, it refers to a number of system features and services new media inherently has. Lister et al.’s (2009) list that sums up the features of new media can be useful to define it. According to them, new media refers to the following: new textual experiences (new kind of genre and textual form); new way of representing the world; new relationships between subjects (users and consumers) and media technologies; new experiences of the relationship between embodiment, identity and community; new conceptions of the biological body’s relationship to technological media; new pattern of organization and production; computer-mediated communication; new ways of distributing and consuming; virtual ‘realities’; a whole range of transformations and dislocations of established media (pp. 12-13). From these enumerations of the characteristics of new media, they derive some defining concepts that are essential qualities of new media: digital, interactive, hypertextual, virtual, networked, and simulated (p. 13). In what follows, I will define new media and technology under some headings, and discuss and explain these essential qualities.

III. I. I. Computerization—the Heart of New Media and Technology

As Lievrouw & Livingston (2002) argue, “Undoubtedly, most definitions of new media and ICTs [information and communication technologies] to date have focused on their
technological features” (p. 5), computerization in particular and technology in general is the pivotal force to give birth to new media. New media (the Internet, Web sites, computer multimedia, computer games, CD-ROMs, DVD, and electronic books, for example) is usually defined as something that created a massive transformation of the old media (television, film, and publishing) on the basis of computer-based production, storage, and distribution of information. The basis for this transition to computer-based production, storage, and distribution is technology. Dizard’s (2000) statement reconfirms the argument that computerization is the heart of new media and technology:

This new media pattern is qualitatively different from earlier ones [old media] in several ways. One technology—computerization—is now the module for all forms of electronic information: sound, video, and print….Computers are forcing a massive restructuring of older media services and, at the same time, creating a new set of competing services. (p. 28)

Computer-mediated forms of production, distribution, and communication as a massive restructuring agent of a new media has changed the face of old media in such a way that it has transformed television sets “from passive receivers of distant pictures into multimedia interactive instruments, capable of handling all types of video, print, and sound services” (Dizard, 2000, p. 28).

Manovich (2001) also believes that the use of computers for distribution and exhibition of information and communication is what identifies a new media, different from old media, as a new media. He explains the difference between old media and new media with examples in this way:
texts distributed on a computer (Web sites and electronic books) are considered to be new media, whereas text distributed on paper are not. Similarly, photographs that are put on a CD-ROM and require a computer to be viewed are considered new media; the same photographs printed in a book are not. (p. 19)

New media has, thus, revolutionized the production, distribution, and communication of information more profoundly than the previous ones, and it is able to do this with the use of computer thereby affecting all stages of communication (acquisition, manipulation, storage, and distribution), and all types of media (texts, still images, motion picture, sound, and spatial construction). In the center of these changes that new media brought is its ability for networking, and using all forms of computing. Further defining new media, Manovich (2003) says, “new media are the cultural objects which use digital computer technology for distribution and exhibition. Thus, Internet, Web sites, computer multimedia, computer games, CD-ROMs and DVDs, virtual reality, and computer-generated special effects all fall under new media” (pp. 16-17), and, for mass exhibition and distribution, it uses digital data that could be manipulated by software based on the principle of numerical representation, modularity, automation, variability, and transcoding.

It is necessary, here, to talk about how new media uses digital data—known as digitization—to store, process, transmit, and retrieve the data in more advanced way that in non-digital (analogue) text. Goggin (2012) explains digitization in very lucid way:

Simply put, the stuff of media [new media]—words, texts, images, sounds, sensations and design—can be converted to a stream of ones and zeros (binary code). This fundamental encoding of what otherwise is non-digital...into digital form has profound implications. It allows media [new media] to be stored, transmitted, communicated,
retrieved, inspected and enjoyed across what were thought to be previously distinct areas of the media [new media]. (p. 14)

As mentioned above, new media use digital data that make mass exhibition and distribution of information possible. It involves conversion, processing and storing of all input data in numbers which “are ‘dematerialized’; …can be compressed into very small spaces; …can be accessed at very high speeds and in non-linear ways;… can be manipulated far more easily than analogue forms” (Lister et al., 2009, p. 18). Thus, by assigning numerical value to phenomena, the data is decoded and received as screen displays and as sound.

However, without intending to discount the value of digitality in the making of new media, Wysocki (2004) defines new media in terms of materiality instead of digitality in order to give justice to the importance of materiality in new media, because she believes “to look at texts only through their technological [digital] origin is to deflect our attentions from what we might achieve mindful that textual practices are always broader than the technological” (p. 19). For her, materiality of texts comprises of the making process and the contexts which makes the texts easily accessible not only for its composers but also the readers. It is materiality that helps “readers/consumers/viewers stay alert to how any text…doesn’t function independently of how it is made and in what context” (p. 15). Thus, any text that has been designed with sufficient focus on the context and process of making thereby not effacing its materiality can count as new media. For Wysocki, materiality is important aspect of new media also because it gives agency to the reader as she asserts it “helps us see where openings for agency are within the new media texts we compose” (p. 15), because the various materialities of new media help the readers understand how it is read and understood, and how the compositing process, how words and visual representation, for example, function and relate. As discussed above, computerization as a
primary feature of new media that distinguishes it basically from old media, and defines its inherent qualities, also contributes to its definition as a multimodal site which I discuss next.

III. I. II. Multimodality

Since new media uses the most advanced technology in processing, storing, distribution, and exhibition of digital data controlled by software, it is natural to expect that it will fully obey the principles of modularity, variability, and automation. However, it does not always do so; it can be seen as a multimodal site that combines both traditional and modern means of presenting data and genres. In this context, Manovich (2003) stresses this mix: “new media today can be understood as the mix between older cultural conventions for data representation, access, and manipulation and newer conventions of data representation, access, and manipulation” (p. 19). This mix is possible also because new media is fundamentally multimodal.

Selfe (2004a) believes that new media is “created primarily in digital environments, composed in multiple media (e.g., film, video, audio, among others), and designed for presentation and exchange in digital venues” (p. 43). Sorapure (2006) echoes Selfe, Kress, van Leeuwen, and Ball, when she talks about multimodality of composing in new media, “composing in new media usually involves bringing together multiple modes—text, image, sound, animation, and/or video—in order to convey a meaning or create an effect” (p. 4). While so doing, new media challenges containment of alphabetical systems of the print (old media) which privileges only reading thereby making the readers only receivers of information thereby demanding the multiple literacies of seeing, listening, writing, and even allowing readers to manipulate the information. The physical/material/aesthetic characteristics of new media make it appealing, because, as Selfe (2004a) says, “they are often richly textured with combination of visual elements, sound, and words; they are interactive and often hypertextual, and they can be
aesthetically pleasing…” (p. 44). Unlike old media, new media, thus, attaches more importance on visuals and sound and makes it richly textured. While so doing, it demands visual literacy from both the authors and readers. By visual literacy, Selfe (2004b) means:

the ability to read, understand, value, and learn from visual materials (still photographs, videos, films, animations, still images, pictures, drawings, graphics)…as well as the ability to create, combine, and use visual elements (e.g., colors, forms, lines, images) and messages for the purpose of communicating. (p. 69)

Multimodality better expresses the mode of communication today, because it can express various modes and communicative experiences in a most truthful way, and visual literacy is one color we cannot ignore to make communication complete. In this context, both Kress (1999) and Hocks (2003) value the importance of visual rhetoric in new media. Like Hocks (2003) says, “Its [visual rhetoric] importance has been amplified by the visual and interactive nature of native hypertext and multimedia writing” (p. 629), Kress (1999) also suggests the increasing emphasis on the visual presentation of information, and the challenge to alphabetical texts by visual text in new media:

The visual is becoming more prominent in many domains of public communication.

From a different perspective this is to realize that written language is being displaced from its hitherto unchallenged central position in the semiotic landscape, and that the visual is taking over many of the functions of written language. (p. 68)

Visual literacy has become an essential aspect of new media and technology (Selfe, 2004a; Selfe, 2004b; Kress, 1999; Costanzo, 1994; and Reynolds, 2004), and, in her article “The Movement of Air, the Breath of Meaning: Aurality and Multimodal Composing,” Selfe (2009) adds a dimension in multimodality, i. e. aurality, while talking about “the need to pay attention to both
writing and aurality, and other composing modalities, as well” (p. 618). While Costanzo (1994) argues that “the visual composition of a message, whether a movie or an advertisement, represents a large part of its meaning” and “computers seem to reinforce this notion by drawing more attention to the visual aspects of text” (p. 15), Reynolds (2004) asserts that “new technologies are generating more attention to visual culture” (p. 63). Reynolds also talks about how new media and technology has contributed to the ubiquity of visual literacy as “screen culture:”

The terms visual literacy or visual rhetoric are becoming more common as well; that is, the ability to “read” images critically, analyze the way they work, and choose or design images that communicate effectively….There’s a direct correlation, of course, between the rise of (visual-based) electronic technologies—screen culture—and the scholarly or pedagogical interest in visual literacy. (p. 64)

New media and technology, thus, creates a differently configured communicational world by making it so much inherently multimodal that “[e]ven visual modes, such as television and billboards, are interwoven with speech, writing and sign” (Aitchison & Lewis, 2003, p. 1). This new communicational world provides many choices to design new media text in any mode, genre, ensembles of modes and genres in any occasion. This flexibility opens up “new possibility of arrangements, the new grammars of multimodal texts” (Kress, 2003, p. 117). In this way, new media and technology has liberated only mono-modal traditional text thereby making it multimodal, as Kress (2003) says:

Where before, up until twenty or thirty years ago, writing carried all the communicational load of a message, and needed to have grammatical and syntactic structures that were equal to the complexities of that which had to be represented in that single mode, now
there is a specialization, which allows each of the modes to carry that part of the message for which it is best equipped. (p.117)

In this way, new media uses alternative, blended, diverse, mixed, or experimental discourses, and makes it hybrid, and intertextual essentially thereby overlapping or intersecting print with digital, and multimodal text.

Thus new media and technology have ruptured the traditional notion of genre by creating a multimodal genre in mixed genre mode. Even in predominantly written mode in new media, the question of genre no longer rests, because there is always a shift from one genre to another, which I call “genre-switching” or “mode-switching,” and mixing of many genres (modes) that breaks the traditional norms of writing mode. And through this mix, new media enhances plural perspectives in reader. In this context, Brooke (2009) argues that:

one of the things that new media interfaces do stylistically is to help us from the abstracted, single perspective of the reader of a static text or the viewer of a painting to the multiple and partial perspectives necessary for many forms of new media. (p. 114)

The possibility of mixing traditional and modern means of presenting data in new media, and its composition putting up together multiple media like print, speech, still images, video, and sounds rhetorically, materially, or technologically thereby making it a multimodal site also inherently makes it an interactive space, which I discuss below. Whereas the writers discussed above talk about the technical aspects of multimodality in new media, Janice Lauer (1993) details its contribution to rhetoric and composition as a discipline to enrich with heuristic power, epistemology, and questioning capability. She asserts:

Multimodality gives rhetoric and composition heuristic power, creating dialogic inquiry that enables the field to raise new questions about writing in our time. Such a rhetoric as
an art is radically democratic because it redistributes the knowledge of social practices that characterize act of insiders, thus enabling both the critical examination of culture and the invention of new social possibilities. (p. 44)

However, Shipka (2001) wants to liberate multimodal definition of new media and technology from its association only with the “terms like multimodal, intertextual, multimedia, or media-rich as synonyms for digitized products and processes” (p. 10), and, thus, broadens it “to include everything from conventional essays, to painting, photographs, video, and hybrid that we have yet to imagine” (p. 11). She believes that new media and technology’s association only with the terms listed above limits its scope to “text that can be composed, received, and reviewed onscreen” that risks “missing or undervaluing the meaning-making and learning potentials associated with the uptake and transformations of still other representational systems and technologies” (p. 11). Palmeri (2012) also buys Shipka’s views on incorporating “old” technologies to design multimedia text in new media.

With the introduction of more and more advanced technology, new media has ever been using more advanced computerized technology, has been able to make it multimodal in more advanced way resulting into making it more interactive and participatory in a creative way. So, Yancey (2004) says new media and technology “bring us together in new ways” (p. 100). In the heart of this advancement and change there is motional quality of new media. It is because of its motion toward ever-burgeoning advancement; new media can be seen as a motional site, which I will discuss in what follows.

III. I. III. Interactivity

By nature, humans have tendency to engage with new technologies, and try to see what they can do to make life easier by making new media and technology more participatory in such
a way that we push them beyond their limits. Tribe (2001) rightly captures the participatory ability of Internet here, “The Internet is particularly ripe with the potential to enable new kinds of collaborative production, democratic distribution, and participatory experience” (p. xi). As a result, new media technology has made communication and information mass communication and mass information in real sense of the term, and interactive because it has made communication and information more easily accessible for the mass.

Murray (2003) argues that “the awe-inspiring representational power of the computer derives from its four defining qualities: its procedural, participatory, encyclopedic, and spatial properties” (p. 6), which fundamentally defines new media. The most obvious property of new media is its encyclopedic capacity that enables it store enormous data at a location, both actual and, more importantly, symbolic (as on a Web site), available for random access. Murray (2003) believes that:

This spatializing quality is based upon the other two properties of the digital medium, the two most basic and defining attributes: its processing power, which allows us to specify procedures which will be not merely recorded but executed; and its participatory quality, which will allow it to receive input, to allow manipulation of its process and data by the user. (pp. 6-7)

The procedural and participatory attributes of new media are what defines “interactivity” as the fundamental experience of new media. The spatial feature of new media as represented by a Web site, specially, provides participatory experiences with so much ease of availability and interactivity that “it will allow us to say more complicated things to more people with greater understanding” (Murray, 2003, p. 11) thereby being “a pool of human knowledge, which would
allow collaborators in remote sites to share their ideas and all aspects of a common project” (Barners-Lee et al., 2003, p. 792).

Wysocky (2004), talking about new media texts, also takes “interactivity” as “a buzzword for describing something about readers and digital texts” though “not as an isolated property inherent to digital texts” (p. 17). She believes that it is “interactivity” that makes online texts different from print texts apparently, and “interactivity” for her speaks to the relations readers have with new media, which is fundamentally different from the readers’ relations with old media, because readers have linear relations with old media while they have recursive interaction with new media as the role of readers might change in the process of interaction with new media. While Selfe (2004a) stresses on new media’s fundamental nature of interactivity, Lister et al. (2009) discusses ideological aspect of interactivity in new media. For Lister et al., “the term [interactivity] stands for a more powerful sense of user engagement with media texts, a more independent relation to sources of knowledge, individualized media use, and greater user choice” (p. 21) that liberates users from author centered old media text thereby making new media “user-centered” technology, where users have ability to directly intervene in and change the content as they wish, as Johnson (1998) says “technologies are constantly tested and refigured by those who use them” (p. 10) in order to fit them in changed context and users. While explaining the user-centered approaches, Johnson (1998) says:

[user-centered approaches should rethink the user as being an active participant in the social order that designs, develops, and implements technologies. Users as producers have the knowledge to play an important role in the making of technologies; users as practitioners actually use the technologies and thus have a knowledge of the technologies
in action; users citizens carry user knowledge into and arena of sociotechnological
decision making. (p. 64)

Johnson’s examination of user-centered technology thus very much rightly expresses the notion
of interactivity in new media, and because of interactivity, “the audience for new media becomes
a ‘user’ rather than the ‘viewer’ of visual culture, film and TV or a ‘reader’ of literature” (Lister
et al., 2009, p. 22).

New media and technology highly values online interactivity “primarily as an attribute of
technological functions of the medium such as hyperlinking, activating media downloads, filling
in feedback forms and playing online games” (Warnick & Heineman, 2012, p. 51). It helps
sequencing and reciprocal communication in the context in which communication occurs and
functions as a significant rhetorical appeal thereby engaging and activating user responses
of activating user responses and as a mode of address that can influence users and can itself be
rhetorical in its effects” (p. 53), which, in turn, make the responses persuasive.

Sally J. McMillan (2002) developed taxonomy of three types of online interactivity that
have enabled analysts to identify communication patterns in online exchanges: user-to-user, user-
to-system, and user-to-document (p. 174). Very importantly, we can see the users in the center of
all these online exchanges having a kind of crucial role in making the interactivity possible.
Users’ engagement here is also possible, because intertextuality “offers a wide repertoire of ways
to engage attention, such as the use of embedded hyperlinks to external resources, as readers
become complicit in constructing the meanings of the text they encounter” (Warnick &
Hypertextuality also enhances interactivity in new media by allowing “a web of connection which the user explores using the navigational aids of the interface design” (Lister et al., 2009, p. 26). Johnson-Eilola (1994) defines hypertext as “a computer-based organizational scheme that allows them [writers and readers] to move from one section of text…to related sections of the text quickly and easily” that “consists of a network, or web, of multiply connected text segments” (p. 197) that resonates Ted Nelson’s original definition of hypertext as nonsequential writing. However, Rice (2006) argues that “web-based developments over the last few years have shifted Ted Nelson’s original definition of hypertext as nonsequential writing to a more multimedia method of expression centered around HTML tags” (p. 151). While Johnson-Eilola’s (1994) definition of hypertext is associated primarily with textual experience related to writing and reading, and Bolter’s (2001) defines it as a only linking, “hypertext consists of discrete units—pages, paragraphs, graphics—and the link between them” (p. 29), Rice’s (2006) definition of hypertext is a departure from both Johnson-Eilola and Bolter, as he believes “technology…has outgrown the vision of hypertext as only linking” (p. 151). In this context, Catherine F. Smith (1994) adds a dimension to Johnson-Eilola’s definition by defining hypertext “as intellectual experience” (p. 266) thereby providing an alternative view of hypertext. She views:

- hypertext as mental activity and examines it in relation to the philosophy of mind, the cognition of comprehension, and the computational modeling of discourse processes…it is a technology for defining meaningful units of information (nodes) and making meaningful connections (link) among them. (p. 267)

This definition broadens the scope and meaning of hypertext from just a textual experience to cognitive experience or human thinking, whereas Dryden (1994) further extends it to an
expanded notion of literacy, “Hypertext...by virtue of its associative, multilinear branching and linking, offers a powerful medium for an expanded notion of literacy” (p. 285) that integrate electronically the media of print, video, and sound and provides space for a rich interplay of text, which I will discuss in some paragraphs below.

Braaksma et al. (2002) buys Dryden’s view of hypertextuality as multilinear linking. While talking about the composing process of hypertext, they mention that it is a hierarchicalization process that makes it distinct from the linearization process of the composition of linear text. Johnson-Eilola’s (1997) postmodern definition of hypertext truly captures the essence of hypertextuality, “The text [hypertext] is no longer a linear or hierarchical string of words...but now an explicitly open space of text that can apparently be entered, navigated, deconstructed, reconstructed, and exited in nearly infinite ways” (p. 147).

Defined as connected through webs or pathways, hypertext can be seen also as an interaction between and among texts, because through a number of pathways to other units of text, hypertext allows different texts to interact with each other in non-linear fashion. This non-linear connection as a fundamental quality of hypertext makes it sophisticated that differentiates it from computer and networks, as Selfe & Hilligoss (1994) argue, “Unlike computers and networks, hypertext is not a physical thing but a sophisticated idea developed in a number of widely available computer programs” (p. 5). The digital technology as discussed earlier makes it possible to access the texts from different pathways instantaneously and recursively. Lister et al. (2009) says “Such technology offers the idea that any data location might have a number of instantly accessible links to other locations built into it. Equally the many interventions and manipulations enabled by this facility create the qualities of interactivity” (p. 26). In this way,
hypertext as a multifarious notion is the essence of new media. Johnson-Eilola & Hea (2003) truly captures its meaning in the following lines:

Hypertext has always been a multiple and conflicted term, shifting and configuring at the nexus of local tendential forces. Hypertext coalesces, it seems, around a wish of what we want text to be—contingent, anchored, slipping, caught in net, Disappearing. In this time and in this place (themselves slipping away), we use hypertext as a deconstructive hinge, as an opening into which we find (and lose) ourselves. For although we want to avoid claiming a foundation or core truth for hypertext, we also want to make a space that can help us think about the future of hypertext as well as its past. (p. 416)

Since “hypertext binds together a variety of positions, tones, voices, authors, and context” (Brooke, 2009, p. 4), it creates space for multiple interactions of these entities thereby causing symptomatic “broader changes in the range of informational, communicative, and expressive potentials embodied in new media” (p. 5). This idea of hypertext contributes to other qualities of new media, i.e. networked and collaborative. Because new media and technology facilitates group writing, conferencing, and peer review, it is highly networked and collaborative. While Costanzo (1994), in this connection, gives the example of interactive fiction as perhaps the most fascinating instance of collaboration between the user and the computer, which I will explore more in the second part of this chapter, Zeni (1994) talks about a new hypertext environment, Storyspace, that “supports planning, organizing, and collaborative response to work in progress,” in which, “Students create writing windows with links to other texts….play with organization by rearranging these spaces and design paperless essays for readers to navigate” (p. 81).

As a networked tool, users use new media and technology to collaborate and promote active learning. Duin & Hansen (1994) see “computer networks as a means for students to
acquire literacy,” because “[a]s students write, interpret, and negotiate texts via computer networks, they are participating within a context that promotes active learning” (p. 89). While Duin & Hansen (1994) call the literacy learnt this way “situated literacy,” because it is “situated within the computer network” (p. 89), Forman (1994) names it computer-supported literacy, and defines it as “the ability to work in groups effectively, to learn collaboratively, to create a high quality written product, and to make intelligent choices and uses of technology that assist in collaborative composing” (p. 132). In the heart of both the words and definitions, there exists the notion of collaboration and networks. Duin & Hansen (1994) define computer networks in this way:

Computer networks are no more than electronically linked computers through which users can readily share, send, and receive files. Yet they can liberate students, who discover new ways of sharing and receiving information, of reacting and responding to their own texts and those of others. (pp. 89-90).

Digital technologies have also created an interactive space known as virtual space. Virtual space refers to “an alternative or parallel space—a space that it is believed that we or they inhabit for some, or most of the time” (Gillen & Merchant, 2013, pp. 9-10). Gillen & Merchant believe “this space is variously conceived of as an extension of the ‘real world’ or an unhelpful, distracting, or even perilous escape from it” (pp. 9-10). Though, of course, we create a virtual world similar to the world described here through our creative imagination while watching a movie or reading a literary piece, the world created thus cannot be a virtual world because there is no interactivity. Virtual world created as a product of computer-based simulation allows the users to interact with the computer as a both way traffic, which, unlike the world we experience
by reading literature, is interactive in true sense of the term. By quoting Hayles (1990), Gillen & Merchant (2013) make an interesting point about virtuality:

‘Virtuality is a negotiation between materiality and information’ through interactions between people and technology—at least in the sorts of virtual environments…. [that] is actually constructed from bits of data, or ‘information,’ the material affordances of the computer and screen allow these users to see, inhabit, and often to modify that world—and in doing so they become material. (p. 11)

New media technologies produce virtualities of different kinds. Virtual reality (VR) is “produced by immersion in an environment constructed with computer graphics and digital video with which the ‘user’ has some degree of interaction” (Lister et al., 2009, p. 36). Users’ immersion in an environment created by their engaged interaction with the new media creates a microcosmic world (virtual reality) that replaces the real world. It also “refers to the space where participants in forms of online communication feel themselves to be” (p. 36). It is also used to mean retrospective contemplation that one experiences while watching film and television, reading books or contemplating photographs and paintings.

Unlike its old use to mean ‘almost’ or ‘as good as,’ “it now suggests and alternative to the real and, maybe, ‘better than the real’” (p. 36). “Cyberspace” is alternative and generic word that is used to mean VR. Alexander (2006) defines cyberspace as a large textual universe, “Cyberspace is a textual artifact of immense size, developed at an historically unprecedented pace, and including a rich variety of audiences, authors, discourses, and narrative production” (p. 27). Cyberspace’s ability to include a rich variety of audiences, authors, discourses, and narrative production interests me here, which I will explore in the second part of this chapter. To go back to the notion of virtuality with which this paragraph began, “Virtual” has close association with
“simulation,” which means “artificial, synthetic and fabricated, but…not ‘false’ or ‘illusory’” (p. 38).

The multimedia mix is another advanced output of computerization technology of new media. Virtual reality (VR) programming (a new kind of human-computer interface), as a model of multimedia mix, has made new media more interactive by allowing the user “to create and experience fantasy situations that are generated by computers filled with interactive software” (Dizard, 2000, p. 41). More than a science fiction game, its application in business, online shopping, research, planetary exploration, education and training field also contribute to the changes in the notions of rhetorical situation, which I will discuss in part two of this chapter later.

All the qualities discussed above make new media different from old media, but we cannot find all these qualities necessarily present in an example of new media at a time. Here, Lister et al. (2009) aptly express this idea in the following lines:

The characteristics [of new media]…should be seen as part of a matrix of qualities that we argue is what makes new media different. Not all of these qualities will be present in all examples of new media—they will be present in differing degrees and in different mixes. (p. 44)

And what characteristics will be present in what degree and in what mixes in new media also depends on how new media and technology evolves. It is very customary to say that everything in the world changes. However, it is imperative to talk about new media and technology as a dynamic and evolving space as its inherently qualifying characteristics. In what follows, I will discuss this feature of new media and technology.

III. I. IV. A Dynamic and Evolving Space
There is a joke about new media and technology: the moment you define what new media and technology is, it will already be old. Due to continuous innovation and reinvention, new media and technology is always in flux as Haas & Neuwirth (1994) say, “technologies are continually evolving; they are not static but shaped subtly and constantly by the uses to which they are put and by the discourse that accompanies those uses” (p. 324).

By birth and by nature, new media is a motional site because it maintains its qualifier (“new”) by changing, and modifying itself thereby incorporating recent advanced technology, and also by inventing new technology to make it always new. In this context, Jenkins (2003) says:

The media never rest. Their various modes are in perpetual circulation. Consulted, scanned and read in every country and on every continent, they are a vital means of communication in the modern world. Sometime criticized or even abused, they are also refreshed and renewed as they accomplish multiple tasks. (Foreword)

Lister et al. (2009) also buy Jenkins’s (2003) view and admit that new media is always in the state of constant flux: “such media had continually been in a state of technological, institutional and cultural change or development; they never stood still” (p. 10). New media can be seen as an agent of globalization of all kinds by dissolving “national states and boundaries in terms of trade, corporate organization, customs and cultures, identities and beliefs, in which new media are seen as a contributory element” (Lister et al., 2009, p. 11).

As Tribe (2001) believes “New Media represents a constantly shifting frontier for experimentation and exploration” (p. xii), it does not simply keep up with the changing environs around it, rather it leads the change thereby doing experimentation with the new technology, and exploring new technology that could be useful to motor the change. As a motoring agent of new technology as well as cultural change or development, new media keeps on changing and
generating changes in the society thereby always causing of epoch-making phenomena of some sorts with the emergence of new media. Lister et al. (2009), in this context, rightly observe, “the emergence of ‘new media’ as some kind of epoch-making phenomena, was, and still is, seen as part of a much larger landscape of social, technological and cultural change; in short, as part of a new technoculture” (p. 11).

In what preceded, new media and technology is seen as an evolutionary pivoting force to effect global changes in the world, because it has an imperative push and pull tendency that keeps us doing some sorts of activities to bring changes in both technology and society. Miller’s (2010) idea about technology is very pertinent here, “Technology, like rhetoric, can both push and pull at us….Technology pushes or manipulates us by requiring us to do certain things and in certain ways” (p. ix). What I find interesting and touching in these lines of Miller is technology’s ability to push or manipulates us. People generally take for granted that they use technology to use it or as a means to do things, without ever being aware how technology shapes them both physically and psychologically. It is the push-pull tendencies of new media and technology that constantly shape new media and technology and is shaped by them thereby making it a motional site forever. The Web can be seen as a most fertile site for new developments in information technology. Barners-Lee et al. (2003) illustrates the point how the Web orchestrates innovation and invention of new media and technology:

The W3 [World Wide Web] initiative occupies the meeting point of many fields of technology. Users put pressure and effort into bringing about the adoption of W3 in new areas. Apart from being a place of communication and learning, and a new market place, the Web is a show ground for new developments in information technology. (p. 797)
New media and technology as a motional and evolutional site is seen as something that evolution happens for some better reasons because it is believed to bring some sort of hopes and claims to make the life easier than before. I conclude this section by citing Lister et al.’s (2009) optimistic lines in this regard, “New media appear, as they have before, with claims and hopes attached; they will deliver increased productivity and educational opportunity and open up new creative and communicative horizons” (p. 11). In what preceded, I briefly discussed on overall impact of new media and technology in human life physically and psychologically, and in what follows, I will discuss how new media and technology particularly change the notions of the rhetorical situation.

III. II. How do New Media and Technology Change the Notions of Rhetorical Situation?

New media and technology have an overall impact in our lives including the way we write and read a text, and teach writing, because as Selfe & Hilligos (1994) argue, “Technology changes us, redirects our thinking about the primary tasks of teaching reading and writing” (p. 1). William Costanzo (1994) extends Selfe & Hilligoss’s idea on technology further, “computers are altering the way many of us read, write, and even think. It is not simply that the tools of literacy have changed; the nature of texts, of language, of literacy itself is undergoing crucial transformations” (p. 11). By altering our overall literacy practice, new media and technology always creates a new situation, and require the users to use it in a defined way, and “to explain what a tool [technology] is and how to use it seems to demand narrative” (Nye, 2006, p. 5). For this matter, here, I will create a narrative that tells stories how new media and technology has created a new situation to redefine/reexamine/remap/revive the existing notions of the rhetorical situation.
New media and technology have moved us at least some distance away from the familiar realm of paper, ink, and books, and thus affected the locus of reading, writing, and interpreting texts thereby enabling us to understand the new interfaces through which most of the communication are done these days. How new media does it is rightly observed by Brooke (2009) in these lines, “new media invites us to rethink (or reinvent) the canons of classical rhetoric, understanding them as practices that might, in turn, be used to understand the proliferation of interfaces that surround us” (p. xiii). Selber (2010) also buys Brooke’s idea as to how new media and technology helps us to reinterpret the canons of classical rhetoric. As Selber (2010) says, “Their [technologies] increasingly widespread integration into all facets of culture has encouraged scholars and teachers to reinterpret (yet again) the traditional cannons of rhetoric” (p. 2), given the impact of new media and technology, the traditional notions of the rhetorical situation has to be reinterpreted in order to incorporate the changing/changed social and cultural milieu as a product of overall impact of new media and technology. In the part that follows, I will first discuss how new media and technology has caused overall changes in the notions of the rhetorical situation, and then examine the changes in particular components of rhetorical situation (writers, readers, and text, for example) in terms of how some characteristics of new media and technology discussed above impact the change as an agent.

III. II. I. General Impact

Digital composition as an inherent qualifier of new media and technology has impacted not only the way we write and read a text, but also the way how we perceive the constituents of the rhetorical situation—writers, readers, text—and their relationships as a product of overall impact of new media and technology that has changed the notions of the rhetorical situation. Whereas Johnson-Eilola (1997) sees this radical disruption of the connection situated in print
media in this way, “The links between author and text, sign and signified that were reinforced by the physical and social structure of book discourse seem to come radically unglued” (p. 171), Takyoshi & Selfe (2007) believe that digitization that played crucial role to revolutionize new media has challenged overall existing literacy practices in general and the nexus between the constituents of the rhetorical situation in particular. In this connection, they argue, “It is fast becoming a commonplace that digital composing environments are challenging writing, writing instruction, and basic understandings of the different components of the rhetorical situation (writers, readers, texts) to change” (p. 1).

Like Johnson-Eilola, and Takyoshi & Selfe, Marilyn M. Cooper (2010), in her essay, “Being Linked to the Matrix,” “reimagines the basic structures of the rhetorical situation, offering a view that embraces dynamic interaction, negotiation, and coordination as major elements” (Selber, 2010, p. 6). Likewise, new media and technology has the potential to “bring us together in new ways” (Yancey, 2004, p. 100), to “change the way students write, read and think,” and to “cultivate multiple literacies, to blur the writer/reader boundary and to broaden notions of ‘composing’” (Zoetewey & Staggers, 2003, p. 135). New media and technology have impacted our lives so much that “[c]omputers change the ways in which we read, construct, and interpret texts. In doing so, technology forces us to rethink what it means to be human” (Selfe & Hilligoss, 1994, p. 1). New media and technology, thus, have broken the linear relationship between writer and audience, performer and viewers. As a result, readers can act like writers in many ways, and writers sometimes have to behave like readers. In this sense, it has changed some existing notions of the rhetorical situation as something static, linear, real, genuine, and objective. This situation influences and shapes our understanding of the rhetorical situation, because the writers and readers now do not act like traditional writers and readers. They have a
changed role: the writers do not have so much authority on the text/message while readers have been empowered to take author-like roles.

III. II. II. Impact of Multimodality

The traditional notion of the rhetorical situation treats readers only as passive receivers of information thereby limiting the scope of readers. But, as a multimodal and interactive space, new media challenges containment of alphabetical systems of the print (old media) which privileges only reading thereby making the readers only receivers of information, and demands the multiple literacies: seeing, listening, writing, and allows readers even to manipulate the information. Multimodality in new media and technology thus produces new possibilities for the existence of different rhetorical situations, because it creates a new site where writer, reader, and text crisscross. This fact gets expressed in Williams’s (2007) lines below:

We should instead regard the ability to use multiple modalities of communication as a call to examine how new ways of conceiving of literacy and composing produce new possibilities for different rhetorical situations. The multiple purposes and audiences for which we write demand multiple approaches for communicating our message. (p. xi)

While so doing, new media changes the role of a reader and dismantles the lines between reader and writer, which breaks the linear notions of the rhetorical situation.

Since new media and technology stresses much on the use of visuals, and visual literacies, the traditional notions of “author” and “reader” as perceived in Bitzer’s notion of the rhetorical situation are changing or taking new meaning of “composer/designer” and “viewer” respectively. As Lauer (1993) points out, “Multimodality represents, if we’re using Bakhtin’s term, a dynamic diversity of modes grounded in different points of view on the world, in diverse forms for conceptualizing the world, each characterized by its own objects, meanings, and
values” (p. 45), it fosters polyvalent, multiple, and plural messages, hence breaking the traditional notion of message “out there” designed by the author. Ball (2004) talks about how multimodal text operates to make meaning by placing readers in the center of meaning making process, unlike in traditional text, which privileges author. She says:

Without the reader choosing clips to include on the timelines, this new media text would not be able to perform its intended argument….The reader must participate by dragging the still, audio, or text clips that she wants to the timelines. For the fullest understanding of the text’s meaning, all three timelines must be used, and then the reader must click the play button on the viewer to see the composed collage. No matter which selection and arrangement of clips the reader makes, the argument she constructs will be a smaller version of the whole, perhaps made to lesser or greater strengths depending on the combination of clips chosen” (p. 417).

Hocks (2003) also opines that multiple modalities enhanced by communication and information technologies allow ongoing dialogue and negotiations among the constituents of the rhetorical situations—writers, audiences, and text—thereby making multiple meanings possible. Her view that “digital rhetoric describes a system of ongoing dialogue and negotiations among writers, audiences, and institutional contexts, but it focuses on the multiple modalities available for making meaning using new communication and information technologies” (p. 632) echoes Kolb’s (1994) argument how the roles of author and reader change in multimodal text and how it makes difference in meaning, “the roles of author and reader begin to shift as the being of the text changes” (p. 323). All these points made above about the contribution of multimodality to shifting the roles of reader and writer, empowering readers unlike in traditional texts, allowing ongoing dialogue among writers, readers and text, and creating plural message orchestrate how
the notions of the rhetorical situations have changed and how the traditional notions cannot necessarily function in today’s world that has been so much influenced by new media and technology. Thus new media and technology break the traditional version of the rhetorical situation as they blur the distinction between the reader and writer, question the existence of exigencies in their palpable forms, and decontextualize the context as perceived in the traditional notions.

III. II. III. Impact of Hypertext

The idea of author being in the center of traditional texts (“books”) and reader being in the center of hypertexts gets expression when Selber (2004) compares books and hypertext: “Books are static, linear, hierarchical, author-centered, and dialogic, why hypertexts are dynamic, non-linear, non-hierarchical, reader-centered, and polylogic” (p. 20). Like Hilligoss & Selfe (1994) say “[w]ith hypertext, teachers and researchers have also blurred the boundaries between writing and reading” (p. 337), hypertext also has blurred the boundaries between the two constituents of the rhetorical situation—writers and readers. What interests me in the views expressed above is the reversal of author-reader role in making meaning that shifts not only the role per se, but it also changes the value attached to one of the constituent of rhetorical situation, i.e. readers, in traditional notions of the rhetorical situation, because it allows users to collaborate more substantially in the act of writing and making meaning that complicates traditional notions of authorship. In relationship to the rhetorical situation, hypertext creates a space for readers in such a way that it empowers them, and frees them from their subservient role unlike the ways they are perceived by Bitzer and many other scholars (as mentioned in chapter 2) who believe that readers are only recipient of messages always passively waiting for the authors to solve the exigencies through the rhetorical discourses.
The use of hypertexts in new media has complicated the linear notion of writer and reader, because it “has potential to change fundamentally how we write, how we read, how we teach these skills, and even how we conceive of text itself” (Charney, 1994, p. 239). In hypertext, a non-linear, computer supported text, “the common distinctions between ‘writer’ and ‘reader’ begin to collapse in a way that has long been theorized for print text but not realized in such visible form” (Johnson-Eilola, 1994, 195). Unlike print text, readers have very important role in hypertext, because the sequence of reading, which is fundamentally nonsequential, is determined by readers’ navigational interest which involves selecting parts of the hypertext and deciding which other parts they want to navigate. So, “Within hypertext the reader can become something of a co-author because the order of a nonsequential document is determined only at the time of reading” (Carter, 2003, p. 4). The nonsequential and fluid nature of hypertext, reader’s increased ability to make meaning, and author-reader role shift get expressed when Claire Lauer (2009) says:

The notion of the author as a single, solitary voice communicating to his or her audience through the finished product of the book has been transformed as communications media have opened up the possibilities for textual production to be non-linear, hypertexual, continuously revisable, and interactive. As writing becomes an increasingly screen-based activity, the ways in which we write (from the grammar we use to the style, tone, appearance, and structure of our words, sentences, paragraphs, and pages) necessarily make more fluid and transitory the role we occupy as “author” of a text. This change in the relationship of author to text, and thus in the way in which meaning can be communicated through text, was facilitated by technological advancement that allowed
for a shift from the static medium of the page to the more fluid medium of the screen. (p. 227)

This notion of hypertext has contributed to the creation of hyperfiction which has broken the spatio-temporal concept of the beginning, middle, and end of fiction. This gets pronounced in Pavlik (1998), “Writers are even venturing into a new form of non-linear text known as hyperfiction, in which notions of beginning, middle and end have little meaning and the reader enters the realm of story creator” (p. xii). Hypertext opens up a space for “fundamental alterations in the roles of the writer, the reader, and the text” (Johnson-Eilola, 1994, p. 196) thereby collapsing the distinction between writer and reader. Thus, hypertext allows two-way multiple interactions between writer and readers, because “[h]ypertext writers set up multiple connections between nodes of a text, and readers choose which links to follow, which nodes to read, and which nodes to skip” (p. 197). The readers have so much freedom to read the text in any way they like based on their interest that allows them to create the meaning of their own.

This opens up possibilities for the readers to assume the role of a writer. It changes and fuses the role of writer and reader, “Using hypertext, people are neither solely readers nor solely writers—users take the two roles simultaneously and visibly” (Johnson-Eilola, 1994, p. 206). Unlike traditional readers as only the recipient of message, the hypertext readers are creator and manipulator of message, likewise unlike “writer-controlled” traditional text, hypertext is also “reader-controlled,” which, in turn, problematizes also the notion of message and text. Hypertext requires both readers and writers to participate in making the text and, thus, become “co-learners” (Joyce, 1988, p. 12) who influence each other to make the text, and derive meaning from it. In this way, new media and technology problematize the whole traditional notions of rhetorical situation by collapsing the lines between the authors and readers, empowering the
readers unlike they are perceived in the traditional notions of the rhetorical situation, and allowing readers access the text in any way they like. This situation creates the possibilities of the existence of not only the plural rhetorical discourses, but also of multiple messages, and readers and writers hence revision of the traditional notions of the rhetorical situation.

New media and technology has, thus, used hypertext “as a means to liberate readers (as well as writers) from the constraints of text boundaries, freeing them to wander through and array of connected texts, graphics, and commentary, to explore and create topical paths of association at will” (Charney, 1994, p. 240) thereby making it an open-ended text in true sense of the term, where readers, text, and writers engage in multiple mutual interaction constantly. Allen (2000) powerfully expresses this multiple author-text-reader interaction while concluding his theories of intertextuality, “hypertext makes author, text, and reader into joint participation of a plural, intertextual network of significations and potential significations” (p. 202). While so doing, hypertext breaks the linear relationships between the constituents of the rhetorical situation, and thus impacts the traditional notion.

While talking about why hypertext is fundamentally different form of text, Dryden (1994) makes an interesting point about the authorship of hypertext. He believes that authorship is fundamentally different in hypertext, because “the reader chooses how to navigate through the text; in some hypertext, the reader can also choose to add to the text, perhaps in a way that makes his or her additions indistinguishable from the original” (p. 309). The writers and readers both affect each other and are affected by the text, hence symbiotic relationships between writers, readers, and texts, unlike discrete relationships between the constituents of traditional notions of the rhetorical situation. In this context, Johnson-Eilola (1997) believes writing and reading activities are affected by the concerned community’s ideology, “Hypertext provides vivid
examples of the ways in which the activities of writing and reading are transformed and appropriated by widely divergent communities, each of which reconstructs general characteristics of hypertexts in relationship to that community’s goal” (p. 7). Hypertext has transformed/revolutionized writing and reading spaces in such a way that it allows “writers and readers the capability for productive, purposeful, empowering action in a range of text types and social situations” (p. 25). Here, readers can assume the role of writer, and, thus, problematizes the linear relationships between them, hence questioning the traditional notions of the rhetorical situation.

By borrowing Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) notion of rhizome, hypertext is like a “rhizome as an ever-shifting organism that challenges the ‘root-book’” (Johnson-Eilola, 2003, p. 422). Rhizomatic tropes defines hypertext in terms of its “connections, heterogeneity, multiplicity, asignifying rupture” (p. 423) that acknowledge that no writers or readers are in control of meaning of a text, which is rather determined by rhizomatic relationships between readers, writers, and the text, as Johnson-Eilola (2003) says:

In this trope, hypertext is about a constant making and remaking….In the play of the rhizomatic, we are asked to hold all our sacred beliefs about readers and writers, text and meaning against the larger systems that reify traditional power dynamics. Without a rigid structure to reject, deny, or even hold on to, we read rhizomatic hypertext as a means to challenge binary logics that separate ways of living in language, that occlude other connections and multiplicities. (p. 423)

By summing up what hypertext contributes to literary theories, poetry and creative writing, technical writing, and our perception about writing and reading, Johnson-Eilola & Hea (2003) say:
For literary theorists, hypertext provided the true weapon for assassinating the author: Readers wrestled control of the text away, kicked the author in the head a few times for good measure, and skipped off into the down of a new day. For poets and creative writers, hypertext provided the foundation for erecting a space for free exploration and innovation, unburdened by the repressive limits of the line. For technical writers, hypertext provided a method for dealing with individual users in varying situations—rather than force users to tediously thumb through manuals, hypertextual online help would bring the right information (and only the right information) directly to the user, when the user needed it, and not a moment sooner or later. And, for a few bold writing instructors, hypertext provided the means to challenge the preferred genre of the first-year composition course: the traditional, linear, “logical” print-based essay. From its most conservative to its more iconoclastic enactments, hypertext set about shifting our perceptions of writing and reading. (pp. 416-417)

By the same token, hypertext in particular and new media and technology in general changes our conceptions about the notions of the rhetorical situation by breaking the traditional meanings of reader, writer and text. We can, thus, describe hypertext as breaking the lines or jamming code, or whatever it does, it primarily frees “the word from the page, the text from the line, the writer and reader from their separateness” (Johnson-Eilola & Hea, 2003, p. 417). What interests me most in hypertext here is its ability to free the writer and reader from their separateness. The traditional notions of the rhetorical situation clearly separate writer and reader by drawing a demarcation line between them, perhaps keeping them in two different watertight compartments, thereby assigning two different set of roles to them. Very interestingly, hypertext, guided by postmodernist tendencies, has broken this modernist containment in defining the constituents of
the rhetorical situation, and freed the writer and reader from their separateness thereby allowing
them to cross the border. I will discuss a postmodernist reading of how new media and
technology dismantled the linear relationship between readers, writers, and text later in this
chapter. Now, I will examine how interactivity as a product of new media and technology in
general and hypertext in particular has impacted the changes in the traditional notions of the
rhetorical situation.

III. II. IV. Impact of Interactivity

By making new media and technology a truly collaborative site where both readers and
writers collaborate via writing and reading the text to manipulate it in their own way,
interactivity as one of the qualifying features of new media and technology has also contributed
to the change in traditional notions of the rhetorical situation. While so doing, interactivity
allows change in the role of writers and readers, and performers and viewers in such a way that
the boundaries between them collapse. Here is an example of how new media and technology
has dismantled the traditional linear relationship between performer and viewers, two of
constituents of the rhetorical situations by extension:

Families in test communities in California are playing Jeopardy! via computer in
simultaneous competition with the competitors seen on television each evening. Viewers
in Montreal, Canada, are selecting stories of their own choice each evening on nightly
newscasts and playing armchair director during telecast of Montreal Canadian hockey
games, choosing camera angles and instant replays as they desire. (Pavlik, 1998, xii)

In this context, Pavlik (1998) says “These new technologies are radically transforming almost
every aspect of how we communicate and with whom, as well as just about any other dimension
of our lives, from dating to making money to health care” (p. 1). New media and technology is
revolutionizing some aspect of human communication in one way or the other, and thus extending communication well beyond text-based communication, and transforming all forms of human communication thereby blurring lines between writer and reader.

The Internet as an legitimate product of new media and technology has given birth to web 2.0 tools which are so much fundamentally social and interactive that “[e]ven aspects of the Internet that do not seem particularly social, such as business sites, online magazines and information services, have integrated social opportunities such as chat spaces and bulletin board into their sites” (Baym, 2002, p. 62), and has made them synchronously and asynchronously interactive. This highly interactive feature of the Internet blurs the traditional relationship between writer and reader that can be characterized as fluid and slippery because they change their role so quickly that we cannot perceive them as static.

Sally J. McMillan (2002) talks about three types of online interactivity that have enabled analysts to identify communication patterns in online exchanges: user-to-user, user-to-system, and user-to-document (p. 174). Very importantly, we can see the users in the center of all these online exchanges having a kind of crucial role in making the interactivity possible that overpowers readers, unlike in print media. For example, in user-to-system interactivity, “the user activates a technical capacity of the system, and the system responds” (Warnick & Heineman, 2012, p. 56). While user-to-user interactivity naturally focuses on users, because they have very prominent role in making communication possible, Warnick & Heineman argue that the users’ role is crucial and equally important in user-to-document interactivity, because:

users become active co-creator of the messages when they customize site content, vote in online polls, submit questions to be answered on the site, or post messages and photos that become part of the Web site text. In this sort of exchange, the Web site invites users
to submit content; uses send in materials; and then those materials are posted to the site for others to read. And even more frequent form of user-contributed cross-reference is when respondents on political blog posts include hyperlinks that can be further pursued by those readers who are interested in viewing the recommended content. (Warnick & Heineman, 2012, p. 56).

Intertextuality also allows some sorts of interactivity not simply by making readers to partake actively in the design of the text in new media; it allows readers to become “complicit in constructing the meanings of the texts they encounter” thereby offering “a wide repertoire of ways to engage attention, such as the use of embedded hyperlinks to external resources” (p. 77). Interactivity created in this way makes readers prominent by allowing them to create text, construct the meanings, and collaborate with writers and other readers in full potential, hence assuming author like role. Interactivity is also enhanced and exemplified by defining new media as a virtual space, which I will talk in the part to follow.

III. II. V. Impact of Virtual space

The Web as a legitimate product of new media and technology has created a virtual space as an interactive site where users and writers interact in such a way that line between the constituents of the rhetorical situation is blurring, and the sense of location as perceived in traditional notions of the rhetorical situation is lost. As in Nostalgic Angels, Johnson-Eilola (1997) states:

In online information systems, users inhabit and navigate a virtual space,” and “the concept of location becomes less physical and more mental… as they move from ‘place’ to ‘place’ electronically, they see and manipulate information in and as a space that spans the entire earth” (p. 93),
new media creates the illusion of space within a machine through its navigational commands which blurs our notion of space, and supplants it with “cyberspace,” “it is so fundamental to the way we experience the world, and so desirable a means of representing the world, that we have to think about it as a property in itself” (Murray, 2003, p. 6) thereby blurring the distinction between the constituents of the rhetorical situation. As Manovich (2003) believes “it [new technology] will destroy the ‘natural relationship between humans and the world’ by ‘eliminating the distance’ between the observer and the observed,” (p. 19), new media and technology has ruptured the linear notions of the rhetorical situation. The idea of blurring the writer/reader boundary gets more vividly expressed in Costanzo’s (1994) example of interactive fiction as a most fascinating instance of collaboration between the user and the computer, where readers can manipulate the story so much that:

Everything depends on the reader. Readers move through the story by typing in commands or questions from the keyboard….Much of the appeal of interactive prose lies in readers’ leaning about their fictional characters, discovering the characters’ goals, overcoming conflicts, and exploring imaginary worlds….The story is a collaborative creation of the author and the reader. (pp. 16-17)

The notion of cyberspace and virtual world as mentioned in the first part of this chapter interests me here because it also contributes to change the traditional notions of authors, readers, discourses and narrative production. As Alexander (2006) clearly points out while defining cyberspace as “a textual artifact of immense size” that includes “a rich variety of audiences, authors, discourses, and narrative production” (p. 27), it reconceptualizes the notion of plural authors, audiences, discourses, and narrative production by interrogating the traditional notions of constituents of the rhetorical situation that is inherently singular. The notions of cyberspace as
perceived above actually breaks the border between writers and readers because it allows readers to play the role of writers and make writers to act also like readers sometimes, hence diminishing the authorship of writers and increasing the writer-like role of readers. Cyberspace and its contribution to change the role of readers and writers speak to the notion of the rhetorical location I will argue in chapter 5 while proposing my theory of the rhetorical situation.

Likewise, virtuality makes users very powerful in modifying the virtual world. In virtual world, “the material affordances of the computer and screen allow these users to see, to inhabit, and often to modify that world—and in doing so they become material” (Gillen & Merchant, 2013, p. 11). The notions of hypertext, cyberspace, and virtual world as discussed above can be seen as a postmodern concept, because they enhance the notions of plural authors (or death of the authors), multiple audiences in author’s voice, participatory discourses (texts), and petit narratives, which essentially blurs the boundaries between them. In the following part, I will do postmodern reading of what the prominent qualifying features of new media and technology have to offer in relation to the notions of the rhetorical situation, and how it does so.

III. II. VI. Postmodern Reading

I have mentioned above that new media and technology has the tendency to blur the lines between reader, writer, text, and their relationship, which is verisimilitude with postmodern rupture. New media and technology in general and the Web in particular helped hypertext accelerate its postmodernist tendencies to blur the distinction between the writer and reader by “turning the reader into a voracious, consuming mouseclick” (Johnson-Eilola & Hea, 2003, p. 417). Hocks (2003) extends this argument to include digital text that contributes to making new media inherently postmodern, when she says, “Interactive digital texts can blend words and
visuals, talk and text, and authors and audiences in ways that are recognizably postmodern” (pp. 629-30).

In postmodernist perspectives, hypertext ruptures the boundaries between writer, reader, and society as it totalizes and fragments them on computer screen. In this connection, Johnson-Eilola (1997) argues:

[H]ypertext may end by affording only a postmodernist forum, in which everything (writer, reader, and society) becomes simultaneously totalized and fragmented, simulated on the computer screen and in magnetic memory. We should not be surprised at this condensation of agents, objects, and subjects: The collapse of subject, method, object, and interpretation is immanent from a poststructuralist standpoint. (p. 137)

Hypertext as a multifaceted space, thus, fosters intertextuality (multitextuality); problematizes the social construction of knowledge and the roles of readers and writers; and enhances indeterminacy of context and meaning and the formation of subjectivity, and the multiplicity of discourses, which, in turn, breaks down the traditional notions of rhetorical situation. Johnson-Eilola’s (1997) views, in this connection, are worth-mentioning:

One of the most striking features of space and subject hypertext is the way in which the technology apparently breaks down the distinctions between writer and reader, especially the commonsense notions of these roles as polar opposites. Theorists see the blurring of the line between writer and reader as extending recent theoretical positions in literary theory—hypertext, in this articulation, makes visible something that has long been theorized. (p. 143)

This explicit postmodern blurring of the lines of responsibility between reader and writer, as expressed by Landow (1992), “Hypertext blurs the boundaries between reader and writer” (p.
5), and postmodern rupture of the notions of texts, message and interpretation in hypertext open up the possibility to theorize the rhetorical situation from a new thread of line, because hypertext complicates traditional notions of authorship and text’s authority, “the original author or text’s authority seems to evaporate under the force of the readers’ movements: Readers not only choose among the options offered by the original text, but may also add their own paths or even texts” (p. 145). Though some websites still characterize modernist notions of space as linear and hierarchical, apparent as in the ordered list of information, “information-rich screens” as pointed out by Johnson-Eilola (1998), which is enriched by a hypertext, “ask users to understand things in multiple, contingent spatial structures rather than in serial and chronological orders” (Reynolds, 2004, p. 67). The creation of postmodern spaces in hypertext allows readers more freedom to perceive the meaning in any way they like and thus assigns them authorship of meaning thereby empowering them over the authors themselves. These postmodern spaces created by hypertexts get more clearly characterized in Johnson-Eilola’s (1998) lines:

these spaces can be navigated and negotiated from a simultaneous, surface perspective that does not attempt to find single facts or linear structures but has learned to process information along parallel lines without relying on a single focal point or goal….In learning to understand communication in terms of simultaneous, contingent streams and structures, users also lose the ability to anchor themselves anywhere with certainty. (p. 205)

The increasingly widespread integration of new media and technology in any communicative practice today has made writers and communicators “anticipate reader control with modular hypertext that can support multiple interpretive pathways and that can invite textual transformations and revision” (Selber, 2010, p. 2).
Snoddy (2003) anticipated the pervasiveness of new media and technology, and its impact in bringing up the world together by dismantling the notion of distance:

Technology will one day be so pervasive and so inexpensive that everyone...will have the ability to call up on the move every image and tactic to a portable device that will combine the characteristics of a computer, television set and telephone. This will of course amount to The Death of Distance. (p. 18)

Brooke (2009) expresses similar idea about new media and technology’s ability to break the spatial conception of geography. But while asserting this fact, he also mentions that new media and technology both connects and separates us: it connects us with the world at distance, while it separates us from more immediate, local connection. In this context, he says, “Online networking might enable us to forge new connections with concern for geography, but those connections may come at the cost of our more immediate, local connections” (p. xv). Thus, new media and technology complicates the notion of distance by providing us with connections with the world around us, and also distancing us from more immediate world, which, in turn, problematizes also breaks the linear notion of the constituent of the rhetorical situation: audience, constraints, and exigence.

The conception of audience, constraints, and exigence is based on the idea of immediacy, and urgency. Audience, by and large, is associated with the immediacy of the targeted people whom the message is intended to address. But new media and technology distance the immediate audience around the author, and connect with the audience far and beyond. Likewise, constraints are loaded with urgency and immediacy that is defined as some hurdles that influence the decision and action of the rhetor, and expectation of the audience. New media and technology dilute the immediacy and urgency of constraints by distancing the rhetor and audience. So is the
case with exigence. Bitzer (1968) defines exigence as “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” (p. 6). However, new media and technology divert the rhetor’s attention from the immediate urgency, imperfection and a defect that need to be solved. For example, you might be donating and helping to make the lives of the poor people better somewhere in the world, without paying attention to the poverty most immediately around you.

III. III. Conclusion

Though there are many socio-political implications of new media and technology both as a motoring agent to gear up economic, scientific and educational advancement, and as a debacle of social values and humanity, my concern here is to discuss about it as a tool, an approach, an insight, a pedagogy, a philosophy, and an overall guiding principle in relations to Rhetoric and Writing Studies that significantly prioritize the use of new media and technology. When Murray (2003) smartly points out, “We are drawn to this medium because we need it to understand the world and our place in it” (p. 11), she is referring to Rhetoric and Writing Studies by “we,” and it makes a great meaning to me, because, in my concluding chapter, I will talk about how the changed notions of the rhetorical situation contribute to our discipline.

Given this plan and multifarious readings of new media and technology, I want to conclude this chapter only by talking about what is new media and technology, and how it has changed the notions of the rhetorical situation, and literacy. To sum up the points I already made, as an ever burgeoning use of new media and technology in any communicative practice, new media and technology is redefining both how we write, think and read, and the older notions of the rhetorical situation, and so subtly changing the way we conceive of the linear and distinct constituents of the rhetorical situation. Its contribution to writing is vividly expressed in
Zoetewey & Staggers’s (2003) lines, “new media writing affords students new opportunities to reassemble the world outside the linear constraints of the print paradigm and make things fit in new ways” (p. 135). While they particularly talk about the impact of new media and technology in writing practice, Haas & Neuwirth (1994) relate it to the overall literacy practices, “The new media technologies for literacy are such a powerful force that simply introducing them to writers or in writing classrooms will change writing and reading for the better, supplanting completely the old pen-and-book technologies” (p. 323).

Because of its powerful force to affect all, and to effect change in literacy practices, new media and technology is so omnipresent (and perhaps omnipotent?) in our lives that we have interfaces everywhere. Brooke (2009) rightly expresses this phenomenon when he says, “We encounter interfaces as a part of our individual media ecologies, and those interfaces each serve as ecologies of rhetorical practice, where cannons shifts, overlap, intermingle, and combine, sometimes as a direct result of our choices and sometimes despite them” (p. xiii). By being so ubiquitously present, especially in our rhetorical practices, as ecologies, new media challenges the structuralist binary oppositions and boundaries that we have inherited from the classical canons. Brooke’s (2009) view in this regard is pertinent to mention, “new media occupy an increasingly relevant focus within the disciplinary ecology of rhetoric, challenging traditional binaries and boundaries, some of which we have retained since rhetoric’s inception” (p. xiii).

However, new media and technology’s unequivocal emphasis on “medium is the message” is sometimes problematic because it diverts its focus from audience and purpose, which are some of the most important concerns of all rhetorics including new media rhetorics. While the new media text’s singular focus on the medium is said to have ignored the audience and purpose to some extent, “we now must deal with the fact that choice of medium influences
audience expectation” (Rabkin, 2006, p.136). I argue that new media does not ignore audience and purpose; it only changes the way audience and purpose are treated by offering new possibilities to examine author, audience, purpose, discourse and interactivity between them. Nevertheless, it is true that “the set of expectations an audience has about any of these new media is necessarily more contingent than those raised by book culture” (p. 136). Here, I would argue that an expectation of an audience of new media is more contingent upon the medium than the expectation of an audience of print media. As Rabkin (2006) suggests that digital media often breaks down the boundaries between “the finality of composition, the identity of the author, the role of the audience, and the unity of purpose” (p. 137), new media and technology contributes to the changes in the traditional notions of the rhetorical situation because now “we live and work in an inherently collaborative infosphere” (p. 137).

The underlying structure of new media and technology hitherto discussed is its user-centered quality that separates it from traditional text which makes it an inherently collaborative infosphere, where, as Rice says, “Users not only can create, but also (re)distribute, recommend, and evaluate content” (p. 1). However, the absence of skill provides a bleak image about it, because it pushes users into the conundrum of definitions, from where no solution can be obtained, and thus there is no way to get out from the labyrinth of knowledge. In this context, Murray (2003) provides an optimistic note when she says, “We will not be mere prisoners of the labyrinth, nor even trail-blazers: we will be the makers of the labyrinth, the gods of our own machine” (p. 11). Because as the lack of skills loses us in labyrinthisme knowledge, the lack of a new theory on the notions of the rhetorical situation will make it “incomplete.” So, suggestive of Murray’s optimistic line, in chapter V, I will propose a new theory on the rhetorical situation that will make the notions of the rhetorical situation “complete.” In order to do so, in the next
chapter, I will first engage in theoretical discussion to lay a foundation for suggesting a new theory of the rhetorical situation. I conclude this chapter with Withrow’s (2004) pragmatic lines, “The challenge is to use the right technology at the right time. Technology should never be used just for the sake of technology. Technology should increase the learning experience for the learner” (p. 42).
CHAPTER IV

ANALYZING THEORIES OF THE RHETORICAL SITUATION: WHERE ARE WE NOW?

This chapter lays a theoretical foundation for suggesting a new theory of rhetorical situation in chapter 3. Here, by bringing in the theories of critical geography (Soja, 1980, 1987, 1996; Sack 1986, 1993; Sibley 1995; Cresswell, 2004; Delaney, 2005; ), critical theory of technology (Bolter, 1991, 2001; Johnson-Eilola, 1997, 2005; Johnson, 1998; Feenberg, 1991, 2002, 2006; Morville, 2005), and rhetoric and language theory (Nietzsche, 1989, Berlin, 1987, 1988, 1992, 2003), I will discuss how the notions of language, rhetoric, technology, and space/place/territory revise the concepts of the rhetorical situation. All these discussions will help me theorize the rhetorical situation from postmodern perspectives, which I will bring in as a theoretical underpinning to argue for my dissonance with the existing notions of the rhetorical situation, and exigence of a new theory in chapter 5. In this chapter, I will also answer my third primary question: What theories can help the revision of our notions of the rhetorical situation?

The notions of the rhetorical situation can be better understood and discussed in relation to some theories on rhetoric and language, technology, and space/place/territory, because treating the rhetorical situation in isolation from these theories based only on classical rhetorical theories does not provide a complete picture of the rhetorical situation. I argue that besides new media and technology, a postmodern approach to rhetoric and language theory, critical theory of technology, and theories of critical geography provide critical tools to revise the notions of the rhetorical situation. While, in chapter 3, I discussed how new media and technology have changed the notions of the rhetorical situation, in the part that follows, I am primarily concerned with looking for how theories on rhetoric and language, technology, and space/place/territory can help revise the notions of the rhetorical situation.
IV. I. Theories of Critical Geography

As with the rebirth of scholarship in geography, “other disciplines have increasingly come to regard space as an important dimension to their own areas of inquiry,” (Warf & Arias, 2009, p. 1) I find the notions of space and territory as used in the theories of critical geography very useful in theorizing the rhetorical situation. My narrative is based on what Edward Soja (2009) says “spatial thinking is central to the production of knowledge and so driven by the need to inform others of the epistemological power of a critical spatial perspective” (p. 11). By using the lenses of critical geography, I attempt to show how space and place are both connected and differentiated, and how these relationships speak to the rhetorical situation.

Though in general use space and place are viewed as synonymous, from the perspective of critical geography, they are perceived quite differently but as related concepts. Understanding the nuances between these concepts can help us understand how the traditional notions of the rhetorical situation limit the physical context only as a place, thus ignoring the possibility of a space. In the following part, I explore the differences between space, place and territory by bringing in the theory of critical geography, and argue that how the traditional notions of the rhetorical situation only conceive of the concept of place in the speculation of context as locality, and how it can be seen differently when it includes the notions of space and territory as defining framework for physical context. This paradigm shift in defining the rhetorical situation makes the picture new that incorporates the changing/changed notions of the rhetorical situation.

While Tuan (1978) sees space and place in dialectical relation, and defines space a complex set of ideas, Soja (1980, 1987) conceptualizes space in terms of socio-spatial dialectic, and differentiates space from place by relating them to spatiality (social construction) and territoriality (physical construction) respectively. In the dialectical relation between place and
space, Tuan (1978) defines place as a concrete thing and space as an abstract, formless notion. In common sense definition, place denotes “all spaces which people have made meaningful” (Cresswell, 2004, p. 7). As in Cresswell’s, and Tuan’s definition of place as “any locality that has significance for a person or a group of persons” (p. 7), the traditional notions of the rhetorical situation perceive place as physical construction ignoring the concept of space—its spatiality (social and ideological construction) as a material product of the relationship between social and spatial structure. The constituents of the rhetorical situation are not only physically related in a place; rather, as Soja (1980) believes in “The Socio-Spatial Dialectic,” socio-spatial dialectical relationships better defines their relationships. Soja’s (1980) definition of space as “a dialectically defined component of the general relations of production, relations which are simultaneously social and spatial” (p. 208) truly defines the relationships between the constituents of the rhetorical situation, which is inherently spatial. Instead of modernist linearity as conceived in place, the postmodern formless, complex sets of ideas are what truly define the relationships between them.

By making a distinction between contextual and created space, Soja (1980) believes that created space is a social product:

Space itself may be primordially given, but the organization, use, and meaning of space is a product of social translation, transformation and experience. Socially produced space is a created structure comparable to other social constructions resulting from the transformation of given conditions inherent in life-on-earth, in much the same way that human history represents a social transformation of time and temporality. (p. 210)

Soja (1980) further elaborates his notion of space by quoting Lefebvre in the support of his idea about socially constructed nature of space, “Space is not a scientific object removed from
ideology and politics;….Space is political and ideological. It is a product of literally filled with ideologies” (cited in p.210). I find Soja’s idea about space significant to argue for redefining the notions of the rhetorical situation. In the conception of the rhetorical situation, space as a social, political, and ideological product is completely ignored for defining the relationships between the constituents. Reconceiving the rhetorical situation by incorporating the notions of space defines the relationships between the constituents of the rhetorical situation in different ways, and thus makes the picture of the rhetorical situation fundamentally different thereby making the constituents polyvocal. Soja’s (1987) argument on the notion of space continues through the cocoons of postmodernization of geography. His position on space gets succinctly expressed by his belief “space and place make a critical difference” (p. 289) in meaning, which can be fruitfully used to redefine the notions of the rhetorical situation.

Agnew’s (2005) lucid explanation of the conceptual differences between place and space can help in reconceiving the notions of the rhetorical situation. She distinguishes place and space in simple terms:

In the simplest sense, space refers to location somewhere and place to the occupation of that location. Space is about having an address and place is about living at that address. Sometimes this distinction is pushed further to separate the physical place from the phenomenal space in which the place is located. Thus, place becomes a particular or lived space. Space then refers to the fact that places cannot but be located somewhere. Place is specific and space is general. (p. 82)

The physical location conceived in the notions of the rhetorical situation is a specific place occupied physically that is located at a definite place. This conception does not necessarily include the meaning of space.
While Tuan (1978), Soja (1980, 1987) and Agnew (2005) conceive place and space in dialectical relations, Sack (1993, 1997) connects them in terms of their interdependence. Interdependence is the key factor that defines space and place, and “place and space are constitutive of nature, social relations, and meaning” (1993, p. 328). In fact, they are so much interdependent to each other to exert power and meaning for each other that “the ideas ‘space’ and ‘place’ require each other for definition” (Tuan, 1977, p. 6). In Homo Geographicus, Sack (1997) further develops the constitutive and interdependent nature of space and place, and provides a sophisticated theory of how space and place are related from a broadly humanist perspective, emphasizing the roles of human awareness and moral concern as well as more conventional social and environmental dimensions of experience. The idea of interdependence and constitutive nature of place and space (Sack, 1993, 1997; Tuan, 1977) makes revision of the rhetorical situation rich, and complete, because it is lacking in the traditional notions of the rhetorical situation. The traditional notions of the rhetorical situation conceive location only as a place, a physical locality having physical address, where we actually live and perform communicative practices, and ignores the meaning of space in location. This tendency limits the scope of location, and discounts the interdependence and constitutive nature of place and space. When the location is perceived by including the notions of space, and validating the interdependence and constitutive nature of space and place while conceiving or defining the rhetorical situation, it essentially help revising it from a new perspective that inherently broadens its scope because it incorporates the changed meaning of the rhetorical situation.

Soja (1996) further makes distinction between two shades of meaning of space, which are verisimilitudes to place and space broadly defined:
We traditionally tend to think about space in two ways, one as concrete material forms, empirically expressed geographies; and the other as a more mental construct, as imagined geographies. Stated differently, the first involves *things* in space, the second *thoughts* about space. (p. 1426)

Soja’s subtle difference between two shades of meaning of space, in fact, defines place and space very succinctly. So, by borrowing his definition, we can argue that place is defined as concrete material form, whereas space is a mental construct, an imagined geography.

While Soja shows the polarization of positions on space and place, and Sack argues for how space and place are related, Agnew (2005) combines both arguments. While so doing, Agnew (2005) extends Soja’s concept further and argues that space is controlled (constructed) notion, whereas place is lived or experienced, “Space is the abstraction of places into a grid or coordinate system as if the observer or controller is outside of or looking down on the places that constitute it” (p. 81). However, Agnew is not happy with this polarizing tendency as she believes that “adequate understanding of either term requires that each be related theoretically to the other” (p. 81). She very clearly asserts: “There is a need to reconnect the two concepts, space and place. As conceptual twins, they offer more together than use of either does separately. Only when related to the other does either reach its full potential” (p. 82). Agnew might be arguing for conceptualizing space and place interdependently for a number of reasons, because the polarization can problematize and complicate their relation, and define them as antithetical concepts. Defined in this sense, place might stand for the local and traditional, whereas space represent the global and the modern. As an extension of this distinction, “Place is often associated with the world of the past and space with the world of the present and future…place is
therefore nostalgic, regressive or even reactionary, and space is progressive and radical” (p. 83). These progressive and radical aspects of space are what interest me, because these aspects will help me revise the traditional notions of the rhetorical situation from a postmodern perspective in chapter 5.

Sibley (1995) takes a different approach to deal with space in terms of its relation with society for the construction of the boundaries of the self. For him, there is reciprocal relationship between personal space and social space, and private spaces are integral elements of social space. He asserts that “private spaces have a relationship with the public spaces of geography—they are reciprocally conditioned, and it is the process of reciprocal conditioning which requires illumination if we are to understand problems like the rejection of difference in localities” (p. 77). Sibley’s argument for conceiving space in terms of its relation with society, and seeking connection between personal space and social space broaden the scope of space, and thus help revise the notions of the rhetorical situation. When the notions of space is conceived in terms of its relation with society, and when personal space is connected to social space, it automatically revises the way we perceive location, because location conceived in this way broadens the scope of location that includes social impact while interpreting the location. This phenomenon helps revise the notions of the rhetorical situation. In the part that follows, I explore the notions of territory, like I did about space above, and briefly examine, reserving the details for chapter 5, how the notions of territory can be linked and analyzed to redefine and reconceptualize the notions of the rhetorical situation.

Like space, territory is always a socially or humanly constructed notion, but it is more a spatial strategy to show power relations. Sack (1986) defines territoriality in human “as a spatial strategy to affect, influence, or control resources and people, by controlling area; and, as a
strategy, territoriality can be turned on and off” (pp. 1-2). As a tool to show power relations that is rather socially and geographically rooted than biologically motivated, the use of territoriality:

...depends on who is influencing and controlling whom and on the geographical contexts of place, space and time. Territoriality is intimately related to how people use the land, how they organize themselves in space, and how they give meaning to place. Clearly these relationships change, and the best means of studying them is to reveal their changing character over time. (Sack, 1986, p. 2)

Primarily as a site of a geographical expression of social power, territoriality shows how space and society are related, and how power relations change in a society based on spatio-temporal phenomena. By bringing in the notions of territoriality as a geographical expression of social power, I argue that understanding the rhetorical situation in a better way demands an understanding of the rhetorical territoriality that involves knowledge about how interlocutors organize themselves in space to influence and affect others by controlling language as a rhetorical strategy. I will elaborate more about what I mean by rhetorical territoriality in chapter 5. For now, I explore more about territoriality below.

From what I mentioned above, territory is a social product that is “commonly understood as a device for simplifying and clarifying something else, such as political authority, cultural identity, individual autonomy, or rights” (Delaney, 2005, p. 9). However, as Delaney (2005) opines, “it [territory] is an extremely complex and often highly ambiguous element of social life, relationships, and interactions” (p. 9). Territory thus can be understood as a complicated notion that has close association with space and language. Delaney (2005) rightly captures this notion, when he elaborates it:
Territories are human social creations. Although territoriality, like language, may, in some very general sense, be a human universal, also like language, the specific forms that it takes are enormously varied. Territoriality is an important element of how human association—cultures, societies, smaller collectives—and institutions organize themselves in space. It is an aspect of how individual humans as embodied beings organize themselves with respect to the social and material world. Territories, then, are significant cultural artifacts of a rather special kind. As with any artifacts…territories reflect and incorporate features of the social order that creates them. (p. 10)

The existence and furtherance of territories are contingent upon the existence and furtherance of certain power and politics that make it contingent, socially constructed, and ideologically informed, and, thus, commonly contested, because it is not a primordial concept.

It is territoriality that creates space, or territorilization of institutions happen in space. However, territoriality is not just a strategy for control of space; it is much more than this—it is something that shapes identity of any kind. Delaney (2005) rightly observes this fact about territory when he says: “It is better understood as implicating and being implicated in ways of thinking, acting, and being in the world—ways of world-making informed by beliefs, desires, and culturally and historically contingent ways of knowing” (p. 12). I see the territoriality perceived as an identity shaping agent is connected with the rhetorical territoriality inherently found in the notions of the rhetorical situation, which contributes to the revision of the traditional notions from a new perspective.

What interests me here in the discussion above is how the notion of the key terms—space, place, and territory—in the theories of critical geography speak to the revision of the notions of the rhetorical situation. The traditional notions of the rhetorical situation conceive of a
location as a place, a concrete location where you actually live and experience in communicative practice, and ignore the meaning of space and territoriality. But, I argue that the concept of space and territoriality can be more fruitfully used to revise the traditional notions of the rhetorical situation. In the traditional notions of the rhetorical situation, place is conceived as a concrete, formed, structured space, as a particular locality having significance for a person or group of person in, does not in fact convey the abstract, formless, and complex set of idea associated with space thereby limiting the notions of context as something physical and concrete. When physical situation is conceived as a space, an ideological construct created as a material product of the relations between social and spatial structure, the scope of the rhetorical situation broadens, and it includes the notions of territoriality, which deals about how human situation and institution organize themselves in space with respect to the social and material world, where power relation shapes identity of any kind, and when the power relation changes, it also changes the relationship between author and reader. In this way, inclusion of space and territoriality as defining concepts of context help redefine the concepts of the rhetorical situation. I will explore this issue in theorizing new theory on the rhetorical situation in chapter 5. In the following part, I explore about critical theory of technology, and briefly examine how it could be used to revise the notions of the rhetorical situation.

IV. II. Critical Theory of Technology

In the theory of technology, technology is primarily conceived through the lenses of instrumental and substantive theory. In this connection, Feenberg (1991) says, instrumental theory “treats technology as subservient to values established in other social spheres (e.g., politics or culture), while the latter [substantive theory] attributes an autonomous cultural force to technology that overrides all traditional or competing values” (p. 5). The fundamental notion
associated with instrumental theory is that technologies are just tools ready to serve the purpose of the users without affecting values of the society. It means it is neutral without having valuative content—ideology and politics—to manipulate the society in the interest of the users. This instrumentalist philosophy of technology exits because of unreflective assumptions by most people as something spontaneous product of our civilization. This philosophy treats nature “as raw material, not as a world that emerges out of itself, a *physis*, but rather as passive stuff awaiting transformation into whatever we desire” (Feenberg, 2006, p. 9). The world in this sense exists there to be controlled and used without any inner purpose.

On the contrary, substantive theory sees technology beyond the realm of merely tools, as Feenberg (1991) argues “technology constitutes a new type of cultural system that restructures the entire social world as an object of control” (p. 7). In this sense, technology is the means of not only developing the society, but also primarily a vehicle for a cultural and political domination, because “the values embodied by technology are the pursuit of power and domination” (Feenberg, 2006, p. 11). Technology, in this sense, reflects the values and power structure of a particular industrial civilization that, according to Feenberg (2002), should be judged in cultural critique of technology. Feenberg (2002) explains how modern technology is not neutral:

Modern technology as we know it is no more neutral than medieval cathedrals or the Great Wall of China; it embodies the value of a particular industrial civilization and especially those of elites that rest their claims to hegemony on technical mastery. (p. v)

The distinction between instrumental and substantive theory of technology helps understanding of the notions of rhetorical situation. The traditional notions of the rhetorical situation are conceived assuming that language used by authors is just an instrument, and author
uses language only as a rhetorical tool to do something in the interest of the users irrespective of the valuative content in it. This instrumental theory is questioned when the discourse is seen from the perspective of substantive theory, and thus the traditional notions of the rhetorical situation can be revised because the text embodies the value of a particular ideology. By extension, reading of that text also embodies the value of the reader, thus inherently making plural readings/meanings. Unlike the modernist linear relationships perceived between the constituents of the rhetorical situation in the traditional notions, this phenomenon clearly suggests plural and multiple relations between the constituents of the rhetorical situation, and thus portrays a different picture of the rhetorical situation. When a rhetorical discourse is conceived of as having valuative content in it as guided by substantive theory of technology, a text or a rhetorical discourse is always seen as a site of plural ideologies unlike it is perceived by Bitzer, who sees a singular and linear relationship between exigence and a rhetorical discourse. This situation not only redefines the rhetorical discourses, but also helps to reconceive the relationships between the constituents of the rhetorical situation in particular and the notions of the rhetorical situation in general.

While Feenberg talks about one way influence of technology on society, Arthur (2009), by carrying on the substantive view of technology, believes that technology and society shape each other: technology shapes and is shaped by the society. More than just used as a tool, technology makes a great difference in creating our world and our identity that separates us from the past. In this connection, Arthur (2009) argues:

Technology is what separates us from the Middle Ages; indeed it is what separates us from the way we lived 50,000 or more years ago. More than anything else technology creates our world. It creates our wealth, our economy, our very way of being. (p. 10)
Arthur’s view of how technology and society shape each other, and how technology, more than just a tool, creates our identity, as seen in Johnson’s (1998) view of rhetoric as a technology, creates a different picture of the rhetorical situation, which conceives rhetoric as a substantive agent to create the identity of the rhetor. This notion echoes Berlin’s notion of rhetoric and ideology which I will discuss later in this chapter.

Unlike Feenberg and Arthur, Ihde’s (1993) approach is broader and more critical, because he sees a kind of automatic transition from instrumentalism to substantivism, and to critical theory of technology. Technology used primarily as a tool “becomes the means of the experience itself” (p. 40) and a way of life that “implies a kind of world or environment….a systematic way of seeing the world” (p. 41). Here, Ihde (1993) argues for critical theory of technology, because he believes that technology is important in understanding the human world. What can be derived from his argument is that even instrumental theory of technology fosters the birth of substantivism and critical theory, because as we use technology as a tool, it becomes a way of life and our identity. By extension, the use of rhetoric as a tool is itself an ideology, because it carries values of the users which are primarily plural, hence the multiple relations between the constituent of the rhetorical situation.

Substantive theory of technology gives birth to critical theory of technology. Technology as a means for a cultural and political domination, so to speak, creates a condition for new forms of exploitation, oppression and domination. Critical theory of technology, in this context, “analyzes the new forms of oppression associated with modern industrialism, and argues that they are subject to new challenges” (Feenberg, 1991, p.13). While so doing, critical theory of technology explains how technology is used for ideological purposes, and then it looks for how
modern technology can be designed to adapt to the needs of a freer society. Feenberg (2006) rightly summarizes critical theory in this way:

Critical theory agrees with substantivism that technology is not the unmixed blessing welcomed by instrumentalists and determinists. It recognizes the catastrophic consequences of technological development but still sees a promise of greater freedom in a possible future. The problem is not with technology as such but with our failure so far to devise appropriate institutions for exercising human control over it. We could tame technology by submitting it to a more democratic process of design and development. (p. 12)

Critical theory of technology, thus, sees “a relation between the technologies and the humans who use, design, make, or modify the technologies in question” (Ihde, 1993, 47).

Unlike instrumental theory, while substantive theory believes that use of technology is value embodied, critical theory, recognizing value laden use of technology as done by substantive theory, analyzes how technology as a means of cultural and political domination creates condition for new forms of oppression, and argues for democratization of technology that creates a participatory space. In this sense, critical theory of technology is one step forward from substantive theory. By bringing in critical theory’s argument for participatory and democratic use of technology, I argue for the rhetorical text in the rhetorical situation as a participatory space, where readers like author have control over the creation, design, and meaning of the rhetorical text. This new situation allows both writers and authors to engage more democratically in the construction and meaning of the rhetorical discourse than ever before though readers’ position may not be ideally equal to that of the writers. Looked from this perspective, the traditional notions of the rhetorical situation and its constituents are perceived differently from that of
instrumentalism, which help revise the traditional notions of the rhetorical situation in such a way that frees readers from their subservient role as conceived in the traditional notions.

From the discussion above, we can see that critical theory shares some characteristics with both instrumental and substantive theory, “Like instrumentalism, critical theory argues that technology is in some sense controllable, but it also agrees with substantivism that technology is value-laden” (Feenberg, 2006, p. 13). Though it seems a contradictory position to own the fundamental but contradictory traits of instrumentalism and substantivism, critical theory does not see technologies as mere tools, but sees it as frameworks for ways of life. Feenberg (2010) further explains this notion by saying that critical theory of technology shows “technology is not merely instrumental to specific goals but shapes a way of life” (p. 67), and while technologies create ways of life, “they should do so democratically with an eye toward the rights not only of women, the poor, and the people of color, but of future generations” (Leitch, 2004, p. 212).

Users’ active participation and democratization of technology as discussed by the scholars above also echo Selfe (1999), Johnson (1998), and Banks (2006). Selfe suggests the teachers of composition, English studies and language arts should see technological literacy from its cultural aspect. Her suggestion is that technological literacy need not only provide technological knowledge to the users but also should enhance critical awareness of how technological literacy can impact the society. In the like manner, Selfe suggests that the social and economic inequities caused by technological literary movement in American society are because of its inability to facilitate the users as active participant, producers and practitioners. Banks (2006) intensifies this phenomenon and argues that technologies as we use them as such with their existing design and program have enforced and maintained racism in American society. He has firm belief that:
Racism is enforced and maintained through our technologies and the assumptions we design and program into them—and into our uses of them. Without systematic study of our relationships with technologies and technological issues, we remain subject to those technologies and the larger patterns of racism and racial exclusion that still govern American society. (p. 10)

The discussion above opens up the possibility of reflecting on how we choose to use or control technologies for more democratic purpose. In order to achieve this purpose, “[c]ritical theory of technology detects a trend toward greater participation in decision about design and development” (Feenberg, 2006, p. 15) of technology based on user’s interest. This idea of democratic participation reflects Johnson’s (1998) idea of user-centered technology. User knowledge is always situated in time and space, and, thus, changes every time. So, “technologies are constantly tested and refigured by those who use them” (Johnson, 1998, p. 10) in order to fit them in changed context and users.

The ancient Greeks also “treated technology as an art whose end was in the use of the product, not in the design or making of the product itself” (p. 11). Thus user-centered design focuses on contextualized and situated interpretations of technology and its use. Moreover, the use of or design of technology is situated in a specific historical and cultural context that limits what you do with technology. But the end of all activities associated with technology, from user-centered perspective, is not who designs technology and how one designs it, but its use by the users. The user-centered model of technology places the user at the center of the model as the users actively participate in the design, development, implementation, and maintenance of technology, thus refiguring the place of the user in particular and technology as such in general.
This redefinition of technology from the perspective of user “forces a rethinking and potential revaluing of material, social, and political relations in radical ways” (Johnson, 1998, p. 46).

We can see affinity between what Johnson attributes users as practitioner, as producer and as participatory citizen (but not as consumer and passive receiver of technology) in user-center modality, and Selfe’s suggestion that technological literacy need not only provide technological knowledge to the users but also should enhance critical awareness of how technological literacy can impact the society. While explaining the user-centered approaches, Johnson (1998) says:

[user]-centered approaches should rethink the user as being an active participant in the social order that designs, develops, and implements technologies. Users as producers have the knowledge to play an important role in the making of technologies; users as practitioners actually use the technologies and thus have a knowledge of the technologies in action; users citizens carry user knowledge into and arena of sociotechnological decision making. (p. 64)

In the like manner, Selfe suggests that the social and economic inequities caused by technological literary movement in American society are because of its inability to facilitate the users as active participant, producers and practitioners. Banks (2006) also expresses a kind of user-centered philosophy when he relates meaningful access to technology to its use, “[t]he first, and perhaps most important element of a meaningful access is use—more than merely owing or being close to some particular technology, people must actually use it, and develop the skills and approaches to using it that are relevant to their lives” (p. 68). While so doing, he stresses the fact that digital divide exists because of lack of opportunity to use technologies to develop the skills and abilities.
The instrumental theory of technology can be likened with modern technological rationality that has “desire for order, control, domination, security; its mastery, willfulness, utilitarianism; its dedication to calculation, objectification, representation; its frantic transformation of everything including nature and human beings into efficient machines and resources” (Leitch, 2004, p. 210). But technology, in essence, as Feenberg (1995) says, “is not just the rational control of nature; both its development and impact are intrinsically social” (p. 4), and, thus, inherently political, because democratization of our society requires democratization of technology. In this sense, technology can be seen as a restructuring agent of our society.

Because of ever-increasing reliance on technology for the operation of society, increasing technological power is proved to be a valuable asset in liberal democratic societies, which, in turn, “has been perceived to create a number of straightforwardly political problems and publicly recognized controversies” (Pippin, 1995, p. 43). This ever-increasing reliance generates another subtle but more severe problem—an ideological problem. Technology perceived as an ideology, as a means of belief formation, a form of consciousness, shapes people’s perspective on the nature of reality, the significance of a social practice, the origin and legitimacy of an institution, and leaves catholic and perennial imprints. Pippin (1995) believes that it is already ideological to argue about technology as a value-neutral tool, because it “already hides, distorts, renders impossible to discuss as an option” (p. 46), while mediating false consciousness about it.

Unlike conventional reading of technology that endorses instrumental theory, critical reading to technology sees it as a human, contextual and social affair. Kaplan (2009) explains critical reading of technology in this way: “Technologies are socially constructed realities with meanings and functions intelligible in relation to human contexts, not ahistorical notions of
scientific reason and technical efficiency” (p. 91). According to Kaplan (2009), critical theory of technology can be summarized in the following features:

- Questioning authority; challenging taken-for-granted attitudes; diagnosing and explaining current conditions; uncovering hidden origins, hidden actors, hidden consequences; uncovering overlooked or forgotten victims; exposing failures and omission; identifying vested interest; placing things in relation to power and authority; attributing responsibility to crucial decision makers, exposing their histories, identities, and roles they play; revealing alternative possibilities; showing now seeming universals are in fact historical; imagining more desirable futures. (p. 92)

Critical theory of technology, thus, perceives technology as a socially constructed reality that helps human create meaning in relation to context. By extension, this notion of technology and Kaplan’s (2009) summarizing points of critical theory of technology revise the traditional notions of the rhetorical situation, because it questions the authority of the author, and challenges the taken-for-granted attitudes toward the relationships between the author and reader. To be precise, it challenges the authority of an author as conceived in the traditional notions of the rhetorical situation, and frees readers from their subservient positions thereby paralleling both of them on the same level of authority if any. Redefining the relationships between the writers and readers, and restructuring their roles in this way help me revise the traditional notions of the rhetorical situation, which I will explore in chapter 5 as a background analysis for suggesting a new theory in the rhetorical situation. In the following part, I examine some features of technology in general, and how these features particularly contribute to revising the meaning of authority, and the relationships between the author and reader.
Okay, so are you defining the traditional understanding of the rhetorical situation as primarily author-speaker driven then? And then what does it mean to redefine it in this way?

IV. II. I. Technology and the End of Authority

Drawing on the notions of critical theory of technology, I argue that technology’s overarching effect on society also has brought an overall impact on literacy in general and has broken the structuralist binaries between author and reader in particular, significantly changing the relationships between the constituents of the rhetorical situation. By digitizing the media, technology has liberated reader from the subservient position. As long as the print media remained the primary medium of literacy, the author as an authority of message was the sole authority, and the reader was merely a passive recipient of message with no say on it, and the text was a neutral instrument designed and used in the sole interest of the author to effect a change in the society. The traditional print media created a binary relation between the author and reader thereby privileging the author and othering the reader in writing space, “An author is a person whose words are faithfully copied and sent around the literary world, whereas readers are merely the audience for those words” (Bolter, 2001, p. 163). This instrumental theory is questioned with the advent of new media and technology in the design of a text as Bolter (1991) says:

The electronic medium…threatens to bring down the whole edifice at once. It complicates our understanding of literature as either mimesis or expression, it denies the fixity of the text, and it questions the authority of the author. The author is no longer an intimidating figure, not a prophet…. (p. 153)
In this way, digital technology has reduced “the distance between author and reader by turning the reader into an author herself” (Bolter, 2001, p. 4) thereby questioning the monumental image of author.

By questioning and rejecting the authority of the author, as Bolter mentions above, it also suggests the reader’s participation in the making of the text. Here, we can sense the application of the critical theory of technology as discussed above in new media and technology to create a participatory space for both the author and the reader. As a result, “the text is not simply an expression of the author’s emotions, for the reader helps to make the text” (Bolter, 1991, p. 153). Perceived as a restructuring agent of a society according to critical theory of technology, new media and technology have restructured the traditional concept of the rhetorical situation thereby resituating the author, reader, and text in a new democratic space where they can interact and communicate with democratic say. Accordingly, unlike an author perceived in instrumental theory, who is free to use rhetoric (technology) as a tool, “[t]he electronic author assumes once again the role of a craftsman, working with defined materials and limited goals….provided by their computer systems” (Bolter, 1991, p. 153) thereby limiting the author’s role, and providing participatory space for the reader as well.

The computer systems not only restrict the author’s role, but also impose some limitations upon the readers within which the reader is free to play, hence ironically liberating the readers. In this way, the computer systems allow the readers to become the author’s adversary and make the contest between them possible, which inherently makes new media text a participatory and democratic. Bolter’s (1991) observation rightly expresses what makes the writing space truly participatory: “The computer makes concrete the act of reading (or misreading) as interpretation and challenges the reader to engage the author for control of the
writing space” (p. 154). While talking about the future of print, Raymond Kurzweil (1999) explains how and why new media is more participatory and thus creates a democratic space, “…electronic books will have enormous advantages, with pictures that can move and interact with the user, increasingly intelligent search paradigms, simulated environments that the user can enter and explore, and vast quantities of accessible materials” (p. 297). New media thus perceived as a more participatory and democratic space helps to revise the notions of the rhetorical situation that construes democratic relationships between the constituents of the rhetorical situation. To be particular, the participatory and democratic space created in new media provides a space not only for authors but also for readers to interact with each other and text with equal say. As a result, it gives agency to readers as well to influence both the author and text. Before I move to address this issue in chapter 5, I plan to discuss below how hypertext as a fundamental defining quality of new media create a new space, and how it problematizes the traditional relationships between author and reader thereby giving a different picture of the rhetorical situation.

IV. II. II. Hypertext and New Space for the Author and Reader

New media, as I discussed above, creates a participatory space, where author and reader can fully participate in democratic manner in the construction of the text and meaning. This interaction and participation between author and reader is possible because of hypertextual quality of new media writing. Johnson-Eilola’s (1997) idea of hypertext as ‘a social technology’ reflects and resembles the democratization of technology as perceived in the theory of critical technology. Hypertext as a social technology creates a space for divergent communities (of authors and readers) fostering democratic participation. Johnson-Eilola (1997) expresses how hypertext fosters democratic space for all participants involved in communication: “Hypertext
provides vivid examples of the ways in which the activities of writing and reading are transformed and appropriated by widely divergent communities, each of which reconstructs general characteristics of hypertext in relation to that community’s goals” (p. 7). This democratic participation of authors and readers with equal say redefines and restructures the traditional notions of the rhetorical situation. As a result, the linear relationship between writer, reader and text as perceived by traditional notions of the rhetorical situation is broken and changed into recursive relationship because writers and readers both affect and are affected by the text. In this sense, writers and readers both write and are written by each other through text. This recursive and mutually constructing relationship primarily because of hypertext forms an ecological relationship between the constituents of the rhetorical situation, which I will discuss in depth in chapter 5.

The idea of ecology is also fostered by collaborative hypertext environment, which encourages the ideas of intertextuality, and thus revises notions of authority attached to the author in the traditional notion of the rhetorical situation. Johnson-Eilola’s (1997) critique of instrumental theory echoes critical theory of technology when he says: “Hypertext (or any technology) is never neutral or transparent to our intentions. At the same time, we are never completely written by the technology. Technological changes open at least the potential for productive change” (p. 14). Like Foucault, Johnson-Eilola argues for ambivalent nature of hypertext that allows use of objects or concepts in various ways depending on the social conditions in which they are constructed and reconstructed. For him, ambivalent “does not connote neutrality but multiplicity, contingency, and tendencies of varying strength” (p. 23).

Hypertext as a social technology contribute to the creation of a new space—hyperspace (virtual space), which Johnson-Eilola calls digital colony, that breaks the notion of location and
place perceived generally as a physical location in the conception of the traditional notions of the rhetorical situation. In virtual space, “the concept of location becomes less physical and more mental, as users inhabit information space, as they move from ‘place’ to ‘place’ electronically, they see and manipulate information in and as a space that spans the entire earth” (Johnson-Eilola, 1997, p. 93). Very interestingly, users’ ability to inhabit and navigate virtual space redefines traditional author/reader relation in the exploration of information (message), because in these spaces, “information is not merely transported by compact virtual machines from sender to receiver, but appears as a new world of exploration, inhabitation, development, sale, and circulation” (Johnson-Eilola, 1997, pp.93-94) thereby not only spatializing the information, but also allowing an active and full play of sender receiver interaction in the exploration and development of information, hence democratization of technology. Johnson-Eilola (1997) very rightly connects this spatializing tendency of hypertext with information space, “Information is becoming a space, one in which we increasingly work, teach, and live” (p. 95).

This new space created by hypertext can be termed as a postmodern space, because it breaks the hierarchies between author and reader, and provides multiple and plural spaces for them to have free exploration of information. Johnson-Eilola’s (1997) explanation of postmodern space very truly expresses the liberating traits of postmodern space:

The normal hierarchical arrangement of reading time regulating spatial movement becomes inverted in this articulation of postmodern space, with space portioning out time, regulating time. Thinking about hypertext in this way, readers are no longer reliant on the writer to lead them temporally from border to border in the span of a tale; readers walk around, deconstruct and build, move over and under, exterior and interior. (p. 136)
This postmodern space is capable of building a place encouraging deconstruction and dispersal of meaning orchestrating the reader and writer movement more effectively by allowing them to have a free play of meaning. Hypertext, while so doing, “may end by affording only a postmodernist forum in which everything (writer, reader, society) becomes simultaneously totalized and fragmented, simulated on the computer screen and in magnetic memory” (Johnson-Eilola, 1997, p. 136), thereby collapsing agents/objects/subjects binaries. However, postmodern space also allows collaboration between writer and reader through intertextual, networked space by making both readers and writers “co-learners” (Joyce, 1988, p. 12). Though reader always negotiates with text, writer, society, and self while interacting with a text, hypertext makes the interaction special by creating postmodern space, because “the original author or text’s authority seems to evaporate under the force of the reader’s movements: Readers not only choose among the options offered by the original text, but may also add their own paths or even texts” (p. Johnson-Eilola, 1997, p. 145). Consequently, hypertext makes the text inherently postmodern:

The text is no longer a linear or hierarchical string of words (an object connoting isolation and self-unity) but now an explicitly open space of text that can apparently be entered, navigated, deconstructed, reconstructed, and exited in nearly infinite ways.

(Johnson-Eilola, 1997, p. 147)

The postmodern qualities of hypertext promote plural relations between the constituents of the rhetorical situation, and allow the reader to navigate the text in many ways, and thus reconstruct/deconstruct the meaning, thereby significantly helping to revise the traditional notions of rhetorical situation. In readers’ abilities of entering, navigating, deconstructing, reconstructing, and exiting in innumerable ways, multiple relationships with authors are established, and authors’ authority is questioned. All these phenomena potentially give birth to
multiple meanings and texts, inherently breaking the traditional relationships between the constituents of the rhetorical situation.

IV. II. III. Information Age and Networked Culture

Apart from talking about hypertext as a product of overall democratization of technology, and the postmodern space it inherently created, Johnson-Eilola (2005) details how technology contributed to the creation of information age and its fundamentally defining quality—networked culture. Information age as the sole product of new media and technology is a departure from industrial age, which was the sole product of science and technology. The advent of new media and technology brought change in the epoch from industrial age to information age thereby shifting their focus, “Whereas the industrial age focused on the production of concrete objects, the information age focuses on the production of information. In this epoch, information workers do not merely use information, they inhabit it” (Johnson-Eilola, 2005, p. 3). This shift in focus has also brought a paradigm shift in how we think, write, interact, communicate, live, and how we conceive of the rhetorical situation.

Johnson-Eilola’s (2005) concept of datacloud , which is a product of information age, help us understand how the notion of creation of text (message) change. It is no longer a creative act of genius; rather it is an act of assembling the information from the datacloud. He believes that:

We live in a cloud of data, the datacloud—a shifting and only slightly contingently structured information space. In that space, we work with information, rearranging, filtering, breaking down, and combining. We are not looking for simplicity, but interesting juxtapositions and commentaries. This is the vague shape and erratic trajectory of the coming revolution. (p. 4)
While, in traditional notions of the rhetorical situation, message (text) is taken for granted as a creative act of genius and authoritative writer, users in information age are simply manipulator of preexisting data. Johnson-Eilola (2005) further explains how users in information age create text and see information:

Rather than understanding creativity as the inspired production of solitary genius, these users manipulated preexisting data, filtering, cutting, pasting, and moving. Rather than seeing information as something they needed to master and contain, they saw information as a rich field in which to work. (p. 3)

Johnson-Eilola’s notion of datacloud results into a new culture—networked culture—a cultural shift that increasingly requires a different approach to understand how concepts, objects, and subjects are constructed and how communication take place in information age. As Johnson-Eilola (2005) says, “We are in a networked culture, both in the sense of communication networks and concepts, objects, and subjects being constructed by interconnected social and technical forces” (p. 9), we are so much exposed to information, and our communication and relation to the world around us is so much networked that we are having simultaneous access to multiple channels. In this networked culture, “we need to reconstruct—rearticulate—what we mean when we talk about communicating and working” (p. 10). By extension, we need to reconstruct the traditional linear relation between author and reader, because the relationship between them is now networked, and thus recursive, which I will explore more in chapter 5.

Johnson-Eilola’s theory of technology that works well in networked culture echoes Feenberg’s critical theory of technology, because he also talks about how uses of technology is political and how its use is contingent upon contexts, users, political motives, and whole technical system. In this context, Johnson-Eilola (2005) observes:
Technologies are taken up and, functionally speaking, reconstructed by users within specific contexts. Numerous forces come together within that moment of use structure and determine the specific nature of uses: Technology uses are articulations involving not simply isolated devices, but also specific users and contexts, political concerns, and whole technical systems” (p. 20).

Johnson-Eilola’s idea about datacloud is verisimilitude with information overload that Morville (2005) talks about in *Ambient Findability*, in which he tries to answer two fundamental questions of this information age: how do people find their way through and age of information overload? And how can people combine streams of complex information to filter out only the parts they want? The fundamental trait of information overload of this information age is that it lets us find anyone or anything from anywhere at any time because the information is so much pervasively and ubiquitously surrounding us. What interests me here it how the relationships between the author, reader, and text are constructed and reconstructed in the process of finding right information an individual is seeking for. In this process, the linear relationships between them are broken, because it shifts the attention and authority from the traditional author to multiple authors that include readers as well. But, I will discuss about this issue in more depth in chapter 5. For now, let me talk about how this findability of information works.

With increasing power of ubiquitous computing system, Morville (2005) argues, we can make any information findable from anywhere, in any time:

*We’re at an inflection point in the evolution of findability. We’re creating all sorts of new interfaces and devices to access information, and we’re simultaneously importing tremendous volumes of information about people, places, products, and possessions into our ubiquitous digital networks.* (p. 2)
New media and technology have enabled us to find information in ambience; in other words, the information we look for are here and there in our immediate surroundings that could be reached with the movement of our fingertips anytime, anywhere. More significantly, it has given more freedom to individual users not only to choose information they want, but also to create information of their interest. It has empowered users (readers) than ever before. Morville (2005) observes this fact when he says:

Ambient findability describes a fast emerging world where we can find anyone or anything from anywhere at anytime. We’re not there yet, but we’re headed in the right direction. Information is in the air, literally. And it changes our minds, physically. Most importantly, findability invests freedom in the individual. As the Web challenges mass media with a media of the masses, we will enjoy an unprecedented ability to select our sources and choose our news. In my opinion, findability is going ambient, just in time. (pp. 6-7).

The notions of ambient findability that have empowered the users with freedom to find any information they like within the reach of their fingertips at any moment and place challenge the authority of author in the traditional notions of the rhetorical situation, thereby liberating and empowering users (readers) to access the information. The ambient findability of information thus contributes to accessing information in multiple ways, and revises the conventional meaning of author as a sole authority of meaning and message. By challenging the author, in this way, it redefines the relationships between the author and reader, hence revising the traditional notions of the rhetorical situation. Reserving to explore it more in chapter 5, I plan to discuss rhetoric and language theory below, and examine how rhetoric and language theory help revise the
traditional notions of the rhetorical situation in general and the traditional relationships between
the constituents of the rhetorical situation in particular.

IV. III. Rhetoric and Language Theory

Rhetoric and language theory as conceived by Nietzsche and Berlin can be a useful
theory to argue for the revision of the traditional notions of the rhetorical situation, because it has
a close association with rhetorical situation as it primarily involves rhetoric and language use in a
context. In the part that follows, I will discuss the connection of rhetoric with ideology,
postmodernism and language, and examine individually how its connection with ideology,
postmodernism and language can contribute to the revision of the traditional notions of the
rhetorical situation.

IV. III. I. Rhetoric and Ideology

I would like to begin this part with Berlin’s (1988) famous statement: “A rhetoric can
never be innocent, can never be a disinterested arbiter of the ideological claims of others because
it is always already serving certain ideological claims” (p. 477). To make this statement more
simple, even the discourse we use in our daily practice carries ideology of certain types, forces,
and amount, because it always brings with it strong social and cultural reinforcement that
prescribes us or others to act this way, and not the other, thereby reflecting power relations
between the speaker and listener. Since a discourse carries ideology, it is always plural and thus
conflicted. Berlin (2003) observes it very appropriately when he says, “ideology is minutely
inscribed in the discourse of daily practice, where it emerges as pluralistic and conflicted” (p.
84). In the process of subject formation, language as imbricated with ideology defines the
subject (the self), other subjects, the material world, and the relation of all of these to each other
from a certain perspective that is plural and thus contested. While so doing, the subject
negotiates with the conflicting ideologies.

Considering ideology in relation to communicators, audiences, formulations of reality,
and the central place of language in all of these is being rhetorical. In this sense, rhetoric cannot
do away with ideology. Ideology is so much imbricate and ingrained in any signifying practices
that the discourse that talks about it (rhetoric) is itself ideological. Arguing for how rhetoric as
such is ideological, Berlin (2003) says:

Of course, rhetorics have historically been concerned with the power of signification in
public discourses of power, that is, in the provisional and probable realms of politics, law,
and social ceremony. At present, however, no inquiry can be regarded as unquestionably
outside the sphere of the provisional and probable. (pp. 72-73)

Since, rhetoric is an ideology, and ideology refers to “the pluralistic conceptions of social and
political arrangements that are present in a society at any given time” (Berlin, 1987, p. 4), we can
easily notice plural ideological relationships between the constituents of the rhetorical situation
that inherently make it fluid. Berlin (1987) argues that there is close plural and ideological
relationship between the elements of rhetorical triangle: reality, interlocutor, audience, and
language. Unlike in the traditional notions of the rhetorical situation, this pluralistic notion frees
reader from the structuralist binary relationship between author/reader that privileges author, and
makes him/her able to engage in dialectical process of (re)interpretation and (re)construction of
message in a text. Berlin (2003) explains this phenomenon:

The reader must also engage in this dialectical process, involving coded conceptions of
the writer, the matter under consideration, and the role of the receiver in arriving at an
interpretation of the message. Writing and reading are thus both acts of textual interpretation and construction, and both are central to social-epistemic rhetoric. (p. 91)

By dividing theories of rhetoric into three epistemological categories: the objective, the subjective, and the transactional, Berlin (1987) briefly sums up their function and relations:

Objective theories locate reality in the external world, in the material objects of experience. Subjective theories place truth within the subject, to be discovered through an act of internal apprehension. And the transactional theories locate reality at the point of interaction of subject and object, with audience and language as mediating agencies. (p. 6)

While objective theories see meaning in the external world abandoning social, psychological, and historical perceptions that might affect the meaning located in the material world, subjective theories abandon both empirically verifiable sensory world, and socio-historical perception to see meaning “within the realm that is accessible only through the individual’s internal apprehension” (Berlin, 1987, p. 10). Unlike objective and subjective theories, transactional theory “sees truth as arising out of the interaction of the elements of the rhetorical situation: an interaction of subject and object or of subject and audience or even all of the elements—subject, object, audience, and language—operating simultaneously” (Berlin, 1987, p. 15). This distinction is what interests me here for a numerous reasons. First, I see the connection of the objective and subjective theories of rhetoric with the traditional notions of the rhetorical situation. This nexus, on the one hand, gives me tools to show my dissonance with the traditional notions of the rhetorical situation because it ignores the networked and transactional relation between the constituents of the rhetorical situation. On the other, it leads me to argue for the existence of a new theory that is supported by the transactional theories which see all
elements of the rhetorical situation: interlocutor, audience, material reality, and language, as ecology. I will explore about it in more detail in chapter 5. Now, I further explain the notions of transactional theories by connecting it with Berlin’s concept of social-epistemic rhetoric. In this context, I borrow Berlin’s (1987) argument about truth that resonates how transactional theories of rhetoric perceive truth: “Truth is never simply ‘out there’ in the material world or the social realm, or simply ‘in here’ in a private and personal world. It emerges only as the three—the material, the social, and the personal—interact, and the agent of mediation is language” (p. 17).

Like transactional theory of rhetoric, social-epistemic rhetoric sees the real “located in a relationship that involves the dialectical interaction of the observer, the discursive community (social group) in which the observer is functioning, and the material conditions of existence” (Berlin, 1988, p. 488). The affinity between transactional theory and social-epistemic rhetoric is seen vividly by the fact that both negates the transcendental truth, and believes that truth is contingent upon how the stake holders of communications interact and negotiate based on the material conditions. When Berlin (2003) says “[s]ocial-epistemic rhetoric enables senders and receivers to arrive at a rich formulation of the rhetorical context in any given discourse situation through an analysis of the signifying practices operating within it” (Berlin, 2003, p. 90), in this process, there is transaction of ideologies between sender, receiver, and text given the socio-political context.

In this transaction of ideologies in seeking a truth, the constituents of the rhetorical situation have the postmodern relationships that are inherently multiple and conflicted, hence fluid subject of the rhetorical act. Berlin (2003) rightly captures this notions when he says, “the subject of the rhetorical act is not the unified, coherent, autonomous, transcendent subject of liberal humanism. The subject is instead multiple and conflicted, composed of numerous subject
formations and positions” (p. 88). Apart from seeing the subject and the message as multiple rhetorical formations, social-epistemic rhetoric also believes that “the subject is itself a social construct that emerges through the linguistically-circumscribed interaction of the individual, the community, and the material world” (Berlin, 1988, p. 489), which fundamentally reflects transactional relationship between the constituents of the rhetorical situations as professed by transactional theories. Based on its discursive constitution and limitation, social-epistemic rhetoric self-reflectively analyses the subject formations and transactional relationship between the elements of the rhetorical situation on the basis of discursively constituted socio-historical conditions.

From what I have stated above, we can see the convergence of social-epistemic rhetoric with postmodern conclusions about language and culture. In the following part, I first discuss how rhetoric and postmodernism converge in general and how these convergences can be seen particularly in discussing the elements of the rhetorical situation—interlocutor, conceptions of the real, audiences, and the language—because they are conceived in social-epistemic rhetoric informed by poststructuralism.

IV. III. II. Rhetoric and Postmodernism

As I have stated above, social-epistemic rhetoric fundamentally uses postmodern perspective to analyze subject relation on the back-drop of discursive socio-political conditions that make rhetoric a pluralistic ideology to interpret use of discourse. By extension, we can see a close relationship between rhetoric and postmodernism, because like postmodernism, rhetoric tries to analyze discursive formations of ideology in language. Here, I argue that there is a symbiotic relationship between rhetoric and postmodernism: while rhetoric uses a multiple perspectives to analyze subject and ideology formation of any text based on material condition
that generates a postmodern tendency, “the postmodern theoretical turn is an attempt to recover the services of rhetoric, the study of the effects of language in the conduct of human affairs” (Berlin, 2003, p. 72). Berlin further says that “postmodern discussions have put rhetoric back on the agenda of virtually all of the human sciences (p. 72). More particularly, which is my concern here, postmodern rhetoric totally changes the traditional relationships between the elements of the rhetorical situation: in traditional notions, the relationships between them are pre-given and destined as producer and receiver of message whereas postmodern rhetoric construes it as a construction that is inherently plural. In this context, Berlin (2003) argues “[f]or a postmodern rhetoric, the writer and reader or the speaker and listener must likewise be aware that the subject, or producer, of discourse is construction, a fabrication, established through the devices of signifying practices” (p. 88).

Social-epistemic rhetoric ingrained in postmodernist philosophy frees the audience from being just receiver of the message; they are never completely in the control of the sender of a coded message, because they can have a range of possible responses to any message. Engaging in a process of negotiation, they can decode the message through engaging in a measure of both accommodation with, and resistance to the sender. Berlin (1992) observes how social-epistemic rhetoric analyzes the transactional interaction between the elements of the rhetorical situation:

[S]ocial-epistemic rhetoric will enable senders and receivers to arrive at a formulation of the conception of the entire rhetorical context in any given discourse situation, and this will be done through an analysis of the signifying practices operating with it. Thus in composing a text, a writer will engage in an analysis of the cultural codes operating in defining her role, the roles of the audience, and the constructions of the matter to be considered. (p. 22)
Social-epistemic rhetoric treats both signifying practices and the material conditions as a construct, which are the prime constituents of the message of the discourse, and in the process of making meaning of the text “the reader of the text must also engage in a dialectical process involving coded conceptions of the writer, the matter under consideration, and the role of the receiver of the text in arriving at an interpretation of the text” (Berlin, 1992, p. 22). This dialectical process of seeking meaning as an act of interpretation is based on the transaction between writer and reader with the text. So, “[w]riting and reading are thus both acts of textual interpretation and construction, and both are central to social-epistemic rhetoric” (Berlin, 1992, p. 22), hence plural and conflicted. Social-epistemic rhetoric thus redefines the traditional writer and reader relationship as Berlin (1992) says, “The opposition between the active writer and the passive reader is displaced since both reading and writing are considered constructive” (p. 25).

IV. III. III. Rhetoric and Language

Language is by nature, and by birth rhetorical. It is not just a vehicle of thought or means of communication; it constructs ‘reality,’ and so it is ideological. Since there are no absolute truths, and they are simply constructed by how we use language, they are partial and thus provisional. Our experience and knowledge are only our linguistic habit as to how we use language in a certain situation rather than in another. Nietzsche (1989) argues that full and essential knowledge of the world cannot be grasped and it is grasped not as a thing, but as a sign perceived partially only through language:

The full essence of things will never be grasped. Our utterances by no means wait until our perception and experience have provided us with a many-sided, somehow respectable knowledge of things; they result immediately when the impulse is perceived. Instead of
one thing, the sensation takes in only a *sign*. That is the *first* aspect: *language is rhetoric*, because it desires to convey only a *doxa* [opinion], not an *episteme* [knowledge]. (p. 23)

Explaining how Nietzsche believes in language as a rhetorical act in itself, and how language is a partial representation of things and thus perspectival, Gilman, Blair & Parent (1989) say:

Consciousness does not grasp things, but impulses or imperfect copies of things, and these impulses are represented only in images. The images are not the things but ‘the manner in which we stand toward them.’ Furthermore, the impulses gained through sensation and experience themselves are signs. Because of that, ‘language is rhetoric,’ for it conveys an attitude or opinion, a partial view rather than an essential knowledge of the thing. So, for Nietzsche, the partial or partisan nature of rhetoric is a further, conscious refinement of that quality as it already exists in natural language. Language, the very material of perception and experience, is inherently partial, and therefore perspectival. (p. xiii)

Language structures experiences, rather than simply recording it, because our experiences, ethics and knowledge are grounded in how we use language. This quality of language makes it inherently rhetorical. In this regard, Nietzsche (1989) argues: “There is obviously no unrhetorical ‘naturalness’ of language to which one could appeal; language itself is the result of purely rhetorical arts” (p. 21). Apart from these, even “[h]uman thought is inherently limited by the capacities and constraints of language” (Gilman, Blair & Parent, 1989, p. xv).

Berlin (1987) also sees no division between experience and language: “All experiences, even the scientific and the logical, are grounded in language, and language determines their content and structure. And just as language structures our response to social and political issues, language structures our response to the material world” (p. 16).
Like Nietzsche, Berlin also observes a deep connection between language and rhetoric, and their nexus is “pluralistic and complex system of signifying practices that construct realities rather than simply presenting or re-presenting them” (Berlin, 1992, p. 19). In the construction of realities, language is not innocent; rather it is ideologically imbricated that serves for “the arena of struggle for determining the meaning of key signifiers, signifiers which then operate in the formation and maintenance of economic and political conditions as well as in the construction of social subjects” (Berlin, 2003, p. 80). Here, Berlin sees dialectical relation between language and the invention and meaning formation activities in which language is involved. The process of invention of meaning or meaning formation that language fundamentally does is ingrained in the economic and political conditions that seek to perpetuate an ideology. This structuring of ideology is never unified, coherent, and sovereign, because it is always already plural.

However, language use is always ideological; one who uses it attempts to use it in their interests. Expressing similar opinion, Berlin (2003) rightly states: “There are no strictly disinterested uses of language, since all signifying practices—both in writing and reading—are imbricated in ideological predispositions” (p. 93-94). The users then try to manipulate language in such a way that it promotes or communicate their ideologies. By the same token, the audience decodes the language to do the same. This dialectical process of encoding and decoding fundamentally involves multiple transactions, plural meanings, and thus multiple, recursive relationships between the author and audience (I will explore this relationship more in chapter 5). However:

No single person is in control of language. Language is a social construction that shapes us as much as we shape it. In other words, language is a product of social relations and so is ineluctably involved in power and politics. (Berlin, 2003, p. 92)
This symbiotic relationship between language and its users is also contingent upon material conditions and mass consciousness which are constantly in conflict that generate different group of people carrying different signifying practices. Because language use is thus ideological and polyvocal in itself, it fosters multiple messages and plural relations between the constituents of the rhetorical situation, thereby contributing to the revision of the notions of the rhetorical situation in particular, which I will primarily focus on in the next chapter along with how the theories on rhetoric and language, technology, and space/place/territory can help me revise the existing notion and retheorize the rhetorical situation thereby incorporating the changing/changed notions of the rhetorical situation given the impact new media and technology, that will make the picture complete.
CHAPTER V
RHETORICAL SITUATION AS TRANS-SITUATIONAL NETWORED ECOLOGIES

In this chapter, I offer a theory of the rhetorical situation that has more explanatory power than any theory presently available, and that is more relevant to current communication practices. The existing theories of the rhetorical situations conceive communicative events as inherently meaningful, objectively real, and so are the rhetorical situations. These theories define the rhetorical situations as something “real” or “genuine” based on historic reality. I believe that this modernist containment to perceive the rhetorical situation can be detrimental to understanding it in broader sense, because it cannot capture the changed meaning of the rhetorical situation given the impact of new media and technology. Consequently, it limits the scope of the rhetorical situation. I argue that this confining tendency of existing theories has potential to make these theories obsolete, because these theories cannot incorporate the changed notions, and thus makes our understanding of the rhetorical situation “incomplete.” To do so, I will answer the following questions in this chapter: What are my dissonances with some of existing notions of the rhetorical situations? Why do these notions not work and thus need to be revised, and why some (if any) can be developed to propose a new theory? What needs to be (re)theorized, relative to the rhetorical situation, to make it a viable concept for our contemporary moment? To extend and “complete” the meaning of the rhetorical situation, I will propose a new theory that captures the changed/changing notion of the rhetorical situation, particularly given the impact of new media and technologies.

V. I. Examining the Existing Notions of the Rhetorical Situation

I revisit the mapping done in chapter 2, and show my dissonance with the some of the notions of the rhetorical situation. I also examine why these notions are not appropriate to
today’s communication, and thus need to be revised, as well as why some others (if any) can be
developed to propose a new theory. I do this in the following three broad headings that cover the
time period from 1968 to 2012, which are both historic and thematic topics at the same time:
Bitzer-Vatz-Consigny and more debate from 1968 to 1974; a departure from Bitzer-Vatz-
Consigny debate from 1975 to 2003; and a networked complex system from 2004 to 2013.

V. I. I. Bitzer-Vatz-Consigny and More Debate from 1968 to 1974

Though the debate on rhetorical situation begins with Bitzer (1968), three theories of the
rhetorical situation as articulated by Lloyd Bitzer (1968), Richard Vatz (1973), and Scott
Consigny (1974) in fact lay the foundation of the theories on the rhetorical situation. Underlying
each theory of the rhetorical situation is a different theory of meaning, and different focus that
conceive different disciplinary conception of rhetoric. Ultimately, Consigny’s theory of rhetoric
as an art of topics attempts to resolve the opposition of Bitzer’s and Vatz’s theories of the
rhetorical situation. Bitzer-Vatz-Consigny debate and some other debates associated with it cover
a time period from 1968 to 1974, which I explore in this part with my dissonances why these
theories cannot incorporate the present issues.

Bitzer’s Theory of the Rhetorical Situation

Bitzer’s (1968) theory on the rhetorical situation is based on the belief that “the presence
of rhetorical discourse obviously indicates the presence of a rhetorical situation” (p. 2). Here, he
makes quite explicit that the rhetorical situation is antecedent to and “invites” rhetorical
discourse: “it is the situation which calls the discourse into existence” (p. 2). Similarly, the
rhetorical situation “dictates” the responses and “constrains the words which are uttered” (p. 5).
For Bitzer, then, rhetorical discourse is secondary—a response to the “demands imposed by the
situation” (p. 5). Thus, he takes as a given that “rhetoric is situational” (p. 3). By this he means
that rhetoric “obtain[s] its character-as-rhetorical from the situation which generates it”—rhetoric responds to and is essentially related to a rhetorical situation (p. 3) because “[a] particular discourse comes into existence because of some specific condition or situation which invites utterance” (p. 4).

Treating the rhetorical situation as a dictating antecedent to rhetorical discourse, and treating a rhetorical discourse as a secondary thing raises a number of problems: while it over-emphasizes the exigencies of the fitting rhetorical discourses thereby giving less agency to the rhetors, it also relieves the rhetors of moral responsibility of the discourse. The rhetorical discourses are determined entirely by the exigence of the rhetorical situation, but not by the rhetors. In his theory, rhetors are “obliged to speak” or “required by the situation” to create discourse (p. 5), and the “speaker’s intentions [are] determined by the situation,” which “invites” and “prescribes” a specific, fitting response (pp. 9-10). Bitzer demonstrate that rhetoric is situational to some extent, but this is not always the case. More importantly, his treatment of authors as passive producers of a rhetorical discourse is problematic, because it does not rightly capture the sense that an author can create infinite numbers of rhetorical discourse based on the same exigencies, and thus ignores the possibility of plural responses.

Bitzer (1968) describes three constituents of any rhetorical situation necessary prior to discourse—exigence, audience, and constraints—which “comprise everything relevant in a rhetorical situation” (p. 8). He defines exigence as “an imperfection marked by urgency; a defect, an obstacle, something waiting to be done” (p. 6). In order to be rhetorical, an exigence must be “capable of positive modification… require[ing] discourse” (p. 7). For Bitzer, any rhetorical situation has “one controlling exigence… [which] functions as the organizing principle: it specifies the audience… and the change to be effected” (p. 7). In addition, rhetorical
situations always require audiences, as rhetorical discourse “produces change by influencing the
decision and action of persons who function as mediators of change” (p. 7). Similarly, every
rhetorical situation contains a set of constraints made up of persons, events, objects, and relations
that are parts of the situation; these can be “beliefs, attitudes, documents, facts, traditions,
images, interests, [or] motives” (p. 8).

As discussed above, Bitzer conceives of the rhetorical situation that reflects his realist
view of an objective, external reality, which are publicly observable historical facts. In this sense,
rhetorical situations are “real” or “genuine,” based in historic reality and independent of
rhetorical discourse. For Bitzer, events are inherently meaningful because events (i.e. rhetorical
discourses) have logical connection with rhetorical situation. They have a cause and effect
relationship as the rhetorical situation causes the birth of rhetorical discourses. Here, I argue that
Bitzer’s modernist approach to treat the rhetorical situations as objective and historic reality, a
genuine and real fact does not necessarily address fluid, postmodern reality. Postmodern human
condition is so fluid that there is no logical singular connection between rhetorical discourse and
the rhetorical situation. The cause-and-effect relationships between them do not work, because
their relationships are postmodern crisscross, plural, and infinitely producing multiple
relationships, which is missing in Bitzer’s notions of the rhetorical situation. However, his theory
conceives of rhetoric as a practical discipline—one which responds to an exigence through
discourse that urges an audience to action.

**Treatment of Exegencies: Bitzer and Miller**

Though like Bitzer, Arthur B. Miller (1972) treats exigence as the most important of all
constituents of the rhetorical situations, he sees a different type of relationship between a rhetor
and exigence, in which he liberates a rhetor from producing a fixed response as demanded by the
situation. In this connection, he says “the rhetor has creative latitude to interpret the significance of the exigence” (p.111) within the limits specified by each exigence. I have both agreement and dissonance with Miller’s position about the notion of exigence and the relationship between a rhetor and exigence. While I have disagreement with his treatment of exigence as the most important constituents of the rhetorical situation, I like the way he sees the relationship between a rhetor and exigence. Here, I argue treating exigence as the most important constituent devalues other constituents of the rhetorical situation, because I believe other constituents of the rhetorical situation are also equally important to create a rhetorical discourse. However, I like the way Miller sees plural relationships between a rhetor and exigence: While Bitzer limits rhetorical discourse only as a response to the exigence as a fixed entity, Miller makes it more flexible within the limits based on the rhetor’s “creative latitude” that opens up possibility for multiple responses. It is in fact the freedom of opinion inherent in a rhetor that makes the difference in the ultimate or perceived nature of the exigence which depends on the constraints of the perceiver. I buy Miller’s position on the renewed relationship between a rhetor and exigence, and use it to argue for the exigency of a new theory of the rhetorical situation in the second part of this chapter.

**A Discourse is Rhetorical: Larson and Wilkerson**

Likewise, I borrow Richard L. Larson (1970) and K. E. Wilkerson (1970) who problematize Bitzer’s classification of discourse into two binaries: rhetorical and non-rhetorical, and argue that any discourse is rhetorical. To Larson, the distinction between rhetorical and non-rhetorical discourses as done by Bitzer is tricky and problematic, as, upon close observation, all discourses are rhetorical as they are produced in response to an ongoing rhetorical situation, whether those be “scientific” or “poetic.” All the discourses, Larson (1970) believes, have the
power to modify the existing beliefs and to fill the gaps in our knowledge of the world. Wilkerson (1970) also disagrees with Bitzer’s classification of rhetorical and non-rhetorical discourses as he finds the distinction arbitrary because the discourse Bitzer labeled as non-rhetorical could be rhetorical in its essence. In order to argue for the exigence of a new theory on the rhetorical situation, while I show my dissonance with Bitzer’s classification of rhetorical and non-rhetorical discourse, I develop Larson and Wilkerson’s argument further combining with Nietzsche’s theory of rhetoric and language, in which, he argues for language is rhetoric.

**Bitzer-Vatz-Consigny Debate**

Richard E. Vatz (1973), in “The Myth of the Rhetorical Situation” (1973), critiques Bitzer’s realist conception of rhetorical situations as objective historic facts, suggesting instead an opposing perspective based on a different philosophy of meaning, providing a contrary view of the relationships between rhetoric and situations. Whereas Bitzer argued for the rhetorical situation as antecedent to and determining of rhetoric, Vatz instead argues that rhetoric is antecedent to and determining of the rhetorical situation (p. 157)—“a cause not an effect of meaning” (p. 160). When Vatz says “events become meaningful only through their linguistic depiction” (p. 157), he believes that “events” do not exist objectively in reality, but are instead “created” by choosing facts and translating meaning in rhetorical discourse. In other words, the reality of the rhetorical situation does not exist externally, but is instead created by and through rhetoric. In Vatz’s view, the rhetor is morally responsible for selectively choosing to create—through rhetoric—one reality or situation instead of another. Contrary to Bitzer, Vatz argues that “situations are rhetorical,” that “utterance invites exigence,” that “rhetoric controls the situational response,” and that “situations obtain their character from the rhetoric which surrounds… or creates them” (p. 159).
Vatz’s notions that “situations are rhetorical” and “utterance invites exigence,” ignore the importance of the contribution of exigence to generate rhetorical discourses. I, however, agree with his argument that rhetorical discourse gives meaning to events, and a rhetor is responsible to create a discourse. Giving agency to a rhetor as a construct of social relations in the creation of discourse, and giving meaning to events opens up possibilities for multiple responses to an exigence. This phenomenon helps me to explore multiple layers of relationships between the constituents of the rhetorical situation in the next part of this chapter. However, what I find lacking in his theory, just as in that of Bitzer’s, is a fair treatment to the role of audience in affecting the rhetorical responses. To be more specific, this model ignores the audiences’ agency in shaping the rhetorical discourse.

Attempting to resolve the antithetical theories of Bitzer and Vatz, Consigny, in “Rhetoric and Its Situations” (1974), proposes a more complete view of the rhetorical act, by building upon and integrating the theories of both Bitzer and Vatz, that attempts to characterize how a rhetor effectively functions in rhetorical situations. Consigny argues that the rhetorical situation exists independently of the rhetoric, and rhetors have some control over the discourse, but not the sole control over the situation. He believes that a situation includes particularities which require a rhetor to shape them and formulate concrete problems to be solved rhetorically, which he calls “rhetoric as an ‘art’” (p. 176). In his view, these situational particularities act as real constraints on the rhetor if the rhetoric is to be effective (p. 178). His view of rhetoric as an “art” explained how a rhetor can engage and make sense of novel and indeterminate situations (p. 179). Consigny proposes a rhetorical “art” as the essential power by which rhetors make sense of situations and effectively formulate and address problems to an audience (p. 180).
I find Consigny’s theory of the rhetorical situation more practical, and thus more useful, than that of Bitzer’s and Vatz’s when he conceives of independent existence of exigence, rhetor’s considerable control over the rhetorical discourse, and the lack of rhetor’s sole control over the situation. While I develop Consigny’s practical notions of rhetoric to argue for a new theory, I have some dissonance with him. Consigny attaches too much importance to a rhetor in finding strategies for shaping the indeterminate situation. For him, a rhetor must be able to “enter into an indeterminate situation and disclose or formulate problems… [and] present the problems in such a way as to facilitate their resolution by the audience engaged with him in the rhetorical process” (p. 179). Thus, the art of rhetoric allows a rhetor to face novel situations and receptively engage them to determine and resolve problems (p. 181). In this way, whereas he so much highlights the role of a rhetor, he does not mention at all how an audience can contribute to resolution of the problem.

**Jamieson’s Generic Constraints and the Rhetorical Situation**

Kathleen M. Hall Jamieson (1973) extends Bitzer’s notion of the connection between rhetorical discourse and rhetorical situation by arguing that genres constrain the rhetorical situation. She asserts that “perception of the proper response to an unprecedented rhetorical situation grows *not merely from the situation* but also from antecedent rhetorical forms” (author’s emphasis) also because “[t]he chromosomal imprint of ancestral genres is evident at the conception of new genre” (p. 163). But while so doing, she also admits how the audience and situation constrain genres, “Genres are shaped in response to a rhetor’s perception of the expectations of the audience and the demands of the situation” (p. 163). Going one step further, Jamieson (1973) argues that genre should not have procrustean function to constrain new rhetorical discourses in the traditional frame of genre, but should liberate them based on
changing contexts, because she also believes that genre should be viewed as evolving phenomena, and rhetors involve in modification of genres.

I find Jamieson’s view about the connection between genre and rhetorical situation ambivalent: while, on the one hand, she argues that a new response to a rhetorical situation is guided by antecedent rhetorical form (genre), because there is “chromosomal imprint of ancestral genres” in a conception of new response to a rhetorical situation, on the other, she also gives agency to rhetors, audience, and the demands of the situation. Likewise, she conceives of the genres both as a fixed entity, and evolving phenomena. Her ambivalent attitudes naturally generate my ambivalent attitude toward her notion of the connection between genre and the rhetorical situation. Her treatment of genre as a fixed, objective, and historical entity is dated and inapplicable to current communication situations, given the impact of new media and technology. However, I agree with her when she says genres are evolving phenomena, and rhetors contribute to the modification of genre based on audience expectation, and the demands of the rhetorical situation. Writing is now so much multimodal and hypertextual that it has dismantled the modernist and archaic notion about genre as an objective reality. Showing my dissonance with her belief of generic constraints, in proposing a new theory on the rhetorical situation, I further develop her idea about genre as involving phenomena, and rhetors’ role in the modification of genre and creation of a new fitting response on the basis of audience and the rhetorical situation. I like her second argument about the connection between genre and the rhetorical situation, because she gives agency to all the constituents of the rhetorical situation, namely, rhetors, audience, and context. She is one step forward in expanding the notions of the rhetorical situation, because, unlike her predecessors, she gives agency to audience as well when she talks about audience’s role in affecting the construction of rhetorical discourse.
V. I. II. A Departure from Bitzer-Vatz-Consiny Debate from 1975 to 2003

While the writers discussed above primarily argue around Bitzer-Vatz-Consiny debate in some ways or the other, some scholars from 1975 to 2003 focus on the departure from Bitzer-Vatz-Consiny debate. For example, whereas Jamieson argues along the line of Bitzer’s concept of the rhetorical situations by bringing in the issues of genres as rhetorical constraints in the discussion of the rhetorical situations, Baxter & Kennedy (1975) complicate and problematize the linear and singular notion of the rhetorical situations. In this part, I examine how the scholars in this period discuss on the notions of the rhetorical situation as a departure from the previous debate, and show my dissonance and agreement with their departures to argue for the exigency of a new theory.

A Departure from Bitzer

As a departure from Bitzer, Baxter & Kennedy (1975) argue for indeterminacy of a rhetorical situation to elicit single response, because they believe that multiplicity of existence of a rhetorical situation fosters indeterminate and various responses, which make a rhetorical situation a complex thing, “[t]he rhetor, audience, subject, occasion, and speech,…, can be said to be the members of a multiplicity which, at the outset of a speech, have a disjunctive relationship” (p. 160). Unlike Bitzer who conceived the rhetorical situation as a finality, they conceive of it “as a process” (p. 161) and “as an epochal whole of becoming” (p. 162), hence deconstructing the established conception and providing another view of rhetorical situation. I find Baxter & Kennedy’s deconstructive picture of the rhetorical situation useful, especially when they conceive of indeterminacy of a rhetorical situation to produce a single response. This idea is helpful for me to argue for the exigency of a new theory, because it breaks the structuralist notion of seeking one to one relationship between the rhetorical discourse and
exigence, and thus fosters a postmodern plural relationship between them. They perceive a rhetorical situation as a complex thing as it involves the rhetor, audience, subject, occasion, and speech in disjunctive relationship. I further develop this notion of complex and disjunctive relationships between the constituents of the rhetorical situation while proposing a new theory on the rhetorical situation in the next section to come.

Like Baxter & Kennedy, John H. Patton (1979) also argues for indeterminate nature of the rhetorical situations to cause rhetorical discourse thereby attaching much importance to the rhetors’ interest to create the discourse, while equally focusing on rhetorical exigences as necessary, but not sufficient, conditions to cause the rhetorical discourses (p. 44). Similarly, Charles W. Kneupper (1980) argues “[t]he material conditions are necessary but not sufficient conditions for rhetoric” (p. 162), and thus attaches the significance to the role of the person as definer of situation. The person makes a choice to communicate and how to communicate based on “an intricate meshing of definitions” of self, exigence, audience, constraints, purpose, and probabilities. Thus, to him, rhetorical response is very complex phenomenon. Even Bitzer (1980b) later gives credit to the role of the interest of the rhetors and their environment as the fundamental factors to cause rhetorical discourse. Bitzer (1980b) admits because the rhetors have different perspectives toward the existence of the exigence, they bring different rhetorical discourses in response to the same exigence. As a departure from Bitzer, William L. Benoit (1994), and Smith & Lybarger (1996) critique Bitzer’s objective nature of exigence, and argue for its revision. Benoit (1994) believes that rhetorical exigence is epistemic as it is perceived in different ways by different rhetors. This epistemological assumption is related to the rhetor and the rhetor’s purpose. Depending on the purposes of the rhetors, the same situation generates different rhetorics, and the nature of a rhetor also influences the discourse produced in response
to a certain situation. Likewise, Smith & Lybarger (1996) also critique Bitzer’s definition that locates exigencies in the external conditions of material and social circumstances, and treats it as singular phenomenon. By revising Bitzer’s relatively autonomous notion of exigence, they argue that rhetorical situation involves a plurality of exigencies and complex relations between the audience and rhetorician’s interest, thereby making it more interactive with other elements of the situation.

In the discussion above, I agree with their unanimous argument for the indeterminate nature of the rhetorical situation to generate many rhetorical discourses, because rhetorical discourses are based on rhetors’ ability and interest to understand rhetorical exigencies, which makes a rhetorical response inherently plural and complex phenomenon. While I agree with their argument about the rhetors’ power to define the situation in their own terms to create multiple responses based on the same exigence, and develop this argument further to propose a new theory of the rhetorical situation, I have dissonance with their dismissal of audience’s role in shaping the rhetorical discourse, because they imply a passive role of the audience in their theories of the rhetorical situation, thereby privileging authors as the sole designers of rhetorical discourses.

Intending to modify to Bitzer’s definition of the rhetorical situation, Grant-Davie (1997) develops her model, in which exigence demands more comprehensive analysis; all the constituents are plural; and rhetors like audiences are part of rhetorical situations. In her model, rhetors as a constituent of rhetorical situation mean those people, real or imagined, who are responsible for the discourse and its authorial voice, and audience means those people, real or imagined, with whom rhetors negotiate through discourse to achieve the rhetorical objectives, and constraints are factors in the situation’s context that may affect the achievement of the
rhetorical objectives. Donna Gorrell (1997) also reviews Bitzer’s theory along with the modifications suggested by Richard Vatz and Scott Consigny, and proposes a dynamic interaction of the situational components. Her model suggests that the more the components come closure in a dynamic play, the better rhetorically ‘fitting’ response it generates, and the less they join in this process, the more chance of adversarial, mere and failed rhetoric. The crux of her argument is that “the fitting response to any rhetorical situation results from the interactions of all its components—rhetor, audience, and reality. Anything less is not a true rhetorical situation” (p. 411). Besides this, her model suggests the synthesis of the components and its responsiveness to the variety of situations.

I buy most of the ideas of Grant-Davie and Gorrell. Grant-Davie’s model is useful, because it expands the scope of the rhetorical situation by allowing more comprehensive analysis of exigence, by treating all the constituents as plural, and by including rhetors as a constituent of the rhetorical situation. While I agree with her notion of audience, because she conceives of audience who has agency with whom rhetors negotiate through discourse, her portrayal of rhetors as people with authorial voice is problematic. She seems to have very traditional notion about author while having postmodern attitude toward audience. By showing my dissonance with her notion about author, I develop her position about audience as someone with whom an author has to negotiate to create rhetorical discourse, because it gives agency to the audience and thus broadens the scope of the rhetorical situation. Similarly, Gorrell’s model is productive at it proposes a dynamic interaction between the constituents of the rhetorical situation to generate rhetorically fitting response, and develop her idea to suggest a new theory on the rhetorical situation. Gorrell gives agency to all the constituents of the rhetorical situation, which I further develop to support my argument for the exigency of a new theory.
A Deconstructive Approach to the Rhetorical Situation

Developing a deconstructive approach to the rhetorical situation, Barbara A. Biesecker (1989) calls for the appropriation of deconstructive insights and deconstructs the relation between rhetorical discourse and audience in order to rethink the rhetorical situation. Accordingly, Biesecker (1989) argues that rhetorical discourse also influences the constituent elements of the situation. For her, the relation between rhetorical discourse and its situation is discursive and thus indeterminate, “neither the text’s immediate rhetorical situation nor its author can be taken as simple origin or generative agent since both are underwritten by a series of historically produced displacement” (Biesecker, 1989, p. 121). The discursivity and indeterminacy of the connection between rhetorical discourse and its situation is more evident in the reception of rhetorical texts because it is received differently by different audience.

Since my approach to the revision of the rhetorical situation is a postmodernist and deconstructionist one, I concur with Biesecker’s deconstructive take in conceiving the relation between rhetorical discourse and audience, and rhetorical discourse and constituents of the rhetorical situation. The influence of rhetorical discourse on the constituents of the rhetorical situation has been hitherto ignored, and their relation was conceived as one way traffic. Biesecker’s deconstructive approach, in this context, opens up a possibility of new relationship that can be useful to revise the notions of the rhetorical situation. Likewise, I buy her notions of discursive and indeterminate connection between the rhetorical discourse and its situation, and further develop it to argue for the exigency of a new theory in the next section of this chapter.

V. I. III. A Networked Complex System from 2004 to 2013

The scholarship written on the notions of the rhetorical situations during this period reflect how the notions of the rhetorical situations have changed with the advent of new media
and technology, and its integration into all forms of communication in particular and human life in general. In this part, I discuss how some essays written on the rhetorical situation treat the notions of the rhetorical situation, particularly given the impact of new media and technology, and how I plan to develop their notions to propose a new theory of the rhetorical situation.

Byron Hawk (2004) defines rhetorical situation as complex adaptive systems where there is a dynamic interplay between the polarity of situation and discourse in the networked (media) culture. In this way, Hawk perceives rhetorical situation always as complex adaptive systems which “remain open to their environments and adapt accordingly…produce strange loops among their individual parts that create” (pp. 835-836). I agree with Hawk’s notion of the rhetorical situation as complex adaptive system, and by borrowing complexity theory as an explanatory framework, I develop Hawk’s argument further to argue for the exigency of a new theory. In this connection, I argue that the constituents of the rhetorical situation as complex adaptive system are linked to other network. Bringing in complexity theory as an explanatory framework defines constituents of rhetorical situation not as discrete entity; they are rather interconnected, networked, an entity linked with a range of linked concepts, and thus can be better understood as an ecology. No entity alone is prominent to cause the other; rather all the constituents of rhetorical situation are connected as a web, at least partially or mutually constituting each other.

Like Hawk, Jenny Edbauer (2005) advances a new debate on rhetorical situation. By borrowing Phelps’s (1988) notion of ecology Edbauer places the rhetorical elements within the wider context of ecology that destabilizes the discrete borders of a rhetorical situation, and treats the relationships between the constituents of the rhetorical situation as ecology, but not as discrete entities, in which they are perceived as a circulating ecology of effects, enactments, and events resulting into rhetorical ecologies, where all the elements are networked and connected,
which could be called “sites of complex network or net worked process” if we borrow Helen Foster’s (2007) terminologies. I buy Edbauer’s notion of relationships between the constituents of the rhetorical situation as ecology, and develop it further by borrowing Foster’s concept of networked process.

To sum up, the rhetorical situations are not discrete, linear, and singular entities; rather they are networked ecologies of a complex system. To argue for the exigency of a new theory, I buy many scholars, primarily including Hawk and Edbauer’s theories of the rhetorical situations, and further develop them by bringing in complexity theory, Foucault’s concept of discursive formation, Phelps’s notion of ecology, and Foster’s concept of networked process, and propose a new theory below as rhetorical situations as trans-situational networked ecologies. To this end, I bring in the discussion on how new media and technology have changed the notions of the rhetorical situation from chapter 3, and the theories of critical geography, critical theory of technology, and rhetoric and language theory from chapter 4. Before I move to propose a new theory of the rhetorical situation, I first discuss about the exigency of a new theory below.

V. II. Exigency for a New Theory

The discussion above, especially the discussion about my dissonance with the some of the theories presently available, very obviously suggests that there is the exigency for a new theory of the rhetorical situation that incorporates the changed notions of the rhetorical situation given the impact of new media and technology. I feel the exigency of a new theory for two reasons: first, the traditional notions of the rhetorical situation born primarily in Bitzer-Vatz-Consigny debate that is still dominant do not outright address or incorporate the changed notions; second, because of new media and technology, our communicative practices and modes have so much changed that some of the existing notions of the rhetorical situation cannot fully work. So,
the rhetorical situation needs to be retheorized and revised in such a way that the new theory could have more explanatory power. In the following part, I first briefly discuss about the problems with some existing notions of the rhetorical situation, and why they cannot address the change, and then, I explain how new media and technology have contributed to the revision of the notions of the rhetorical situation.

The traditional notions conceive of the rhetorical situation based on realist view of an objective, external reality, which is publicly observable historical fact, thereby treating rhetorical situations as “real” or “genuine,” that is based on historic reality and independent of rhetorical discourse. A rhetorical discourse as an inherently meaningful event has logical connection with rhetorical situation, and thus they have a causal relationship. This kind of modernist approach cannot address the fluid postmodern reality that sees plural and arbitrary connections between rhetorical discourses and rhetorical situations. The postmodern human condition seeks infinitely multiple relationships between any entities including relationships between rhetorical discourse and rhetorical situation.

There is a debate in the traditional notions as to which constituents of the rhetorical situation is antecedent to what. One opinion argues the rhetorical situation (exigence) is antecedent to rhetorical discourse, while the other asserts vice versa. Both opinions privilege one over the other, thereby creating a structuralist binary, which is fundamentally faulty assumption, because whereas the first argument gives less agency to the rhetors by treating rhetorical discourse as a secondary thing, the second view gives unnecessary and too much credit to the rhetors, and ignores the value of rhetorical situation to cause rhetorical discourse. While one view treats authors as passive producers of a rhetorical discourse ignoring the possibilities of plural responses, the other gives God-like image to them. Both arguments do not agree that all
constituents of the rhetorical situations are equally important to create rhetorical discourses. These structuralist views to privilege a constituent over the others do not address the postmodern reality of the collapse of binaries.

The traditional notions of the rhetorical situations classify between rhetorical and non-rhetorical discourse and treats non-rhetorical as subservient. This is a problematic classification, because all discourses are rhetorical as a language is rhetoric per se as ‘[s]uch distinctions between rhetorical and non-rhetorical discourse…turn out to be slippery…(Larson, 1970, p. 166). In traditional notions, there is much focus on the genre and generic constraints over rhetorical discourse. They treat genre as a fixed, objective and historic reality. This modernist argument again does not reflect the change new media and technology have brought in our writing practice, because writing is now so much multimodal and hypertextual that it has dismantled the modernist and archaic notion about genre as an objective reality. I will discuss about this issue more in the part that follows. In the discussion above, while I talked about some reasons why the existing theories of the rhetorical situation needs to be revised, in the following part, as a continuity of the same argument, I concentrate on how new media and technology compel us to revise the traditional notions of the rhetorical situation.

How do New Media and Technology Foster the Exigency of a New Theory?

New media and technology have impacted our lives so much that we write, and read a text differently than ever before. More importantly, they have changed our thinking and communicative process, by changing the nature and modes of texts and language in particular, and literacy practice in general, because new media and technology always create a new situation to effect crucial transformations in literacy practice, and thus shape users’ habit to practice literacy in a defined way. As a result, they have affected the locus of reading, writing, and
interpreting discourses by introducing new interfaces through which most of the communications are done these days. This change has encouraged scholars to interpret the traditional cannons of rhetoric in general and the traditional notions of the rhetorical situations in particular in order to incorporate the changed literacy practice. In the part that follows, I discuss how new media and technology have fostered the exigency of a new theory of the rhetorical situation by changing the way we conceive of the notions of the rhetorical situation. To be precise, I examine how new media and technology have created a new situation to argue for the exigency of a new theory of the rhetorical situations.

Digitization has played crucial role in revolutionizing new media and has changed existing literacy practices in general and the nexus between the constituents of the rhetorical situation in particular. As a result, digital composition has impacted not only the way we write and read a text, but also the way how we perceive the constituents of the rhetorical situation—writers, readers, text—and their relationships. It has blurred “the writer/reader boundary and… broaden[ed] notions of ‘composing’” (Zoetewey & Staggers, 2003, p. 135) by breaking the linear relationship between writer and audience, performer and viewers, thereby fostering the exigency of a new theory, because now the rhetorical situations are no more static, linear, real, genuine, and objective.

Multimodality in new media and technology demands the multiple literacies: seeing, listening, writing, and allows readers even to manipulate the information which creates a situation to argue for the exigency of a new theory of the rhetorical situation, because multimodality creates a new site where writer, reader, and text crisscross. In this process, new media changes the role of a reader and dismantles the lines between reader and writer, thereby breaking the linear notions of the rhetorical situation, and fostering the exigency for a new
theory. The use of visuals as a crucial element of multimodality has played a significant role in effecting crucial transformations in the meaning of the traditional notions of “author” and “reader”, because they are changing or taking new meaning of “composer/designer” and “viewer” respectively. More importantly, multimodal text places readers in the center of meaning making process by allowing active participation to make the sense of the text. It also allows two way dialogue and negotiations among the constituents of the rhetorical situations—writers, audiences, and text—thereby making multiple meanings possible. The discussion made above about the contribution of multimodality to shifting the roles of reader and writer, empowering readers unlike in traditional texts, allowing ongoing dialogue among writers, readers and text, and creating plural message orchestrate how it is high time to revise the notions of rhetorical situations, hence exigency of a new theory.

Like multimodality, hypertextuality brings forth the readers in the center, thereby blurring the boundaries between the two constituents of the rhetorical situation—writers and readers, and complicating the linear notion of writer and reader. Hypertext allows the readers to navigate the fundamentally fluid and nonsequential text in whatever way they like, thus making them pivotal in a meaning making process that fundamentally shifts author-reader relations as perceived in traditional text. Hyperfiction as an example of hypertext breaks the spatio-temporal concept of the beginning, middle, and end of fiction. The writers, readers, and text have symbiotic relationships, because they mutually affect each other and are affected by the text at the same time, unlike discrete relationships between the constituents of traditional notions of the rhetorical situation. The reversal of author-reader role in making meaning allows users to collaborate more substantially in the act of writing and making meaning that complicates
traditional notions of authorship, and thus fosters the exigency of a new theory of the rhetorical situation that better represents the changed notions of writer and reader relations.

Synchronous and asynchronous interactivity as one of the defining features of new media and technology creates a collaborative site where both readers and writers collaborate and manipulate the text through writing and reading. This quality of new media has altered the way we traditionally perceive the rhetorical situation, because it changes the role of writers and readers, and performers and viewers in such a way that the boundaries between them collapse, and thus fluid and slippery relationships characterize their relationships. Since, the traditional notions of the rhetorical situations cannot reflect and address this changed relationships resulted from highly interactive quality of new media, there is an exigency of a new theory of the rhetorical situation.

Virtual space as a simulated interactive site of The Web, likewise, creates a space where users and writers interact in such a way that it blurs the line between the constituents of the rhetorical situations, and problematizes the sense of location as perceived in the traditional notions of the rhetorical situation. New media thus creates an illusion of space within a machine through its navigational commands which blurs our notion of space, and supplants it with “cyberspace.” The notion of cyberspace and virtual world as mentioned here changes the traditional notions of authors, readers, discourses and narrative production, because it perceives them as plural. These changed notions of the constituents of the rhetorical situations foster an exigency of a new theory of the rhetorical situation.

To sum up, in the discussion above, while I primarily discussed about the problems with the existing notions of the rhetorical situation, and how new media and technology in general and the notions of digitization, multimodality, interactivity, hypertext, cyberspace, and virtual world
in particular have contributed to argue for the exigency of a new theory on the rhetorical situation, in the next section, I propose a new theory of the rhetorical situations that has more explanatory power than the existing notions, also by arguing how this theory can better incorporate and address the changed/changing notions of the rhetorical theory.

V. III. Proposition of Rhetorical Situation as Trans-situational Networked Ecologies

Given the situation discussed above, here, I propose a new theory of the rhetorical situation, which I call “

**rhetorical situation as trans-situational networked ecologies.**”

Rhetorical situation as trans-situational networked ecologies fundamentally believes that the constituents of the rhetorical situations are not discrete entities, and there are no linear relations between them. Rather the elements of the rhetorical situation have multiple layers of relationships, a networked system connected as an ecology. Below, I outline, explain, and discuss the defining features and components of the rhetorical situation as trans-situational networked ecologies, which will help me theorize the new notion of the rhetorical situation.

V. III. I. Defining Features of Rhetorical Situation as Trans-situational Networked Ecologies

The rhetorical situation as trans-situational networked ecologies has some distinct defining features that make it different from the traditional notions of the rhetorical situation. In the following part, I first explain the defining features of rhetorical situation as trans-situational ecologies, namely, ecology, networked, complex adaptive systems, and postmodern relations. Actually ecology and postmodern relations are two fundamental defining features of the rhetorical situation as trans-situational networked ecologies, and networked and complex adaptive systems are defining qualities of the larger concept, ecology. However, I plan to discuss
about networked and complex adaptive systems separately because it will have complementary role to complete what I mean by ecology.

**Ecology**

The constituents of the rhetorical situations of the rhetorical situation as trans-situational networked ecologies are characterized by networked relationships, which I will discuss below. These networked relationships place the rhetorical elements within the wider context of ecology that destabilizes the discrete borders of a rhetorical situation, and provides “a framework of affective ecologies that recontextualizes rhetorics in their temporal, historic, and lived fluxes” (Edbauer, 2005, p. 9). This situation treats the relationships between the constituents of the rhetorical situation as ecology, in which they are perceived as a circulating ecology of effects, enactments, and events resulting into rhetorical ecologies. When a rhetorical situation conceived as an ecology, the constituents of the rhetorical situation interact dynamically to form systems within the systems, in which they are constantly changing themselves and changing others. The systems are not given; instead they are constructed and reconstructed in the act of interaction between the constituents of the rhetorical situation, in which every element is necessarily involved. The rhetorical situation conceived as an ecology resembles a web, in which the movement of an element causes vibration in the whole system. Through the dynamic and changing interaction within and beyond the internal elements, elements of the rhetorical situation organize and co-evolve, fostering no simple cause-and-effect, linear relationships, but recursive relationships that are characterized by networked and complex adaptive systems, which I discuss next.

**Networked**
No entity alone is prominent to cause the other; rather all the constituents of rhetorical situation are connected as a web, at least partially or mutually constituting each other, where all the elements are networked and connected, which could be called “sites of complex network or net worked process” if we borrow Helen Foster’s (2007) terminologies. As Foster believes “networked process evokes both the growing number of sites and the relational loops” and thus it “encompasses a variety a variety of sites” (p. XV), this networked relationship between the constituents of the rhetorical situation does not treat the rhetorical situation as a relatively closed system; rather it perceives the elements as distributed acts thereby placing the situation within an open network. Likewise, Jenny Edbauer (2005) believes that “rhetorical situations operate within a network of lived practical consciousness or structure of feeling” (p. 5). She also perceives the rhetorical situation as a process when she says “rhetorical situation is better conceptualized as a mixture of processes and encounters” (p. 13) thereby making it fluid and networked. Her argument about the fluidity, and networked relations of the rhetorical situations gets expressed when she says “[r]hetorical situations involve the amalgamation and mixture of many different events and happenings that are not properly segmented into audience, text, or rhetorician” (p. 20). Thus, the rhetorical situations are trans-situational, networked, open-ended process with heterogeneous associations. This heterogeneity association between the constituents of the rhetorical situation represents the mingling of various entities in complex assemblages of networked systems.

Complex Adaptive Systems

The constituents of the rhetorical situation are characterized by complex adaptive systems that are constantly changing, and are linked to other networks. They are open to any influence from each other and from the material conditions that influence them, and adapt accordingly to
new systems. In this connection, Hawk’s (2004) perception of rhetorical situation remaining “open to their environments and adapt accordingly…produce strange loops among their individual parts that create” (pp. 835-836) truly captures the notion of complex adaptive systems. In this complex adaptive system, the elements of the rhetorical situation interact with each other, form a system, and evolve co-adaptively. Complexity theory as an explanatory framework of this phenomenon defines constituents of the rhetorical situations as interconnected networked entity linked with a range of linked concepts, and thus can be understood as ecology. In other words, the constituents are so interdependently networked that when one changes, the others are influenced by that change, and these components help each other co-adapt every time when there is change in one component, thereby influencing change in the whole system. This is a constant process.

**Postmodern Relations**

Postmodern relations are what truly define the relationships between the constituents of the rhetorical situation that suggest inherently plural and fluid relationships between them. Postmodern relations free audience from being just receiver of the message; they are never completely in the control of the sender of a coded message, because they can have a range of possible responses to any message. Engaging in a process of negotiation, they can decode the message through engaging in a measure of both accommodation with, and resistance to the sender.

New media and technology have the tendency to blur the lines between reader, writer, text, and their relationship, which is verisimilitude with postmodern rupture. New media and technology in general and the Web in particular accelerate its postmodernist tendencies to rupture the distinction between the writer and reader, and which totalize and fragment their
relationships, by altering the roles of readers and writers. This explicit postmodern blurring of
the lines of responsibility between reader and writer, and postmodern rupture of the notions of
texts, message and interpretation fosters new notions of the rhetorical situation, because it allows
readers more freedom to perceive the meaning in their own way, and thus resituates the readers
and author on the same level.

Postmodern relations exist between them also because of new media and technology’s
ability to complicate notion of distance between readers and writers. New media and technology
both connect and separate readers and writers: it connects authors with the readers in the world at
distance, while it separates them from more immediate, local connection. This kind of
postmodern relation problematizes the notion of distance by connecting the authors with the
world, and distancing them from more immediate world, and thus revises the notions of
audience, constraints, and exigence. The conceptions about audience, constraints, and exigence
are based on the idea of immediacy and urgency. Audience, by and large, is associated with the
immediate people whom the message is intended to address. But new media and technology
foster postmodern relations between the author and audience by connecting with the audience far
and beyond. Likewise, there is postmodern relationship between the constraints and urgency,
because new media and technology dilute the immediacy and urgency of constraints by
distancing the rhetors and audience.

Foucault’s (1986) postmodern notion about space that argues for inherent heterogeneous
and relational nature of space also suggests postmodern relations between the constituents of the
rhetorical situation. From this perspective, the constituents of the rhetorical situation have
network of relations in which one element is linked with all others as in network. Cyberspace
and hyperreality as postmodern notions of space also enhance postmodern relations between the
constituents of the rhetorical situation, which challenge our understanding of the contemporary world, and the relationship between the global and local. In so doing, they conceive postmodern relations between the constituents of the rhetorical situation.

V. III. II. Components of Rhetorical Situation as Trans-situational Networked Ecologies

While I discussed above the conceptual framework that has explanatory power to define the features of the rhetorical situation as trans-situational networked ecologies, I now define different components of the rhetorical situation as trans-situational networked ecologies, which are also defining features in broader sense. Apart from defining the components of the rhetorical situation as trans-situational networked ecologies, the outline below, thus, elaborates the conceptual framework in general, and specific relationships of the components within the rhetorical situation in particular.

Authors-readers-texts Relationships

In my theory of the rhetorical situation, all the constituents (authors/rhetors, readers/audiences, texts/rhetorical discourses, exigencies etc) are plural and their relationships are based on transactional networked ecologies. In other words, the elements of the rhetorical situation are connected with each other as in a networked ecology that they are characterized by their transactional relationships. They exist in their transactional relationship both influencing others and being influenced from others. Rhetors are those real or imagined people, who create rhetorical discourses as per their understandings of the exigence of the situation by negotiating with audience through discourse. Since a rhetorical discourse is a result of rhetors’ negotiation with other constituents of the rhetorical situation, the authors alone do not have authority over the message. Likewise audiences are those people, real or imagined, who have transactional relationships with other constituents of the rhetorical situation, with whom rhetors negotiate
through rhetorical discourses to meet the rhetorical objectives. These transactional relationships give agency to all the constituents of the rhetorical situation in the creation, design and meaning of a rhetorical discourse, and thus broaden the scope of the rhetorical situation. Texts or rhetorical discourse will be discussed later, so now, I move to discuss the relationship between the constituents of the rhetorical situation.

As new media and technology have broken the structuralist binaries between author and reader, the constituents of the rhetorical situation are viewed on equal status with authority of message. Now the readers are not just the audience of the message; they also are able to assume an author-like role to influence the message. As a result, the monumental image of author and subservient concept of reader are gone, and they are craftsmen of the rhetorical discourse. In this way, new media and technology have restructured the relationships between the constituents of the rhetorical situation, and situated the author, reader, and text in a new democratic space where they can interact and communicate with democratic say. There are dynamic relationships and interactions between the constituents of the rhetorical situation to create fitting rhetorical responses; close and harmonious relationships produce better fitting responses and vice versa. In other words, if the components have a good synthesis, this synthesis rightly responds to the variety of situations. However, whatever the case, all the constituents of rhetorical situation have agency to cause rhetorical responses; authors alone cannot be credited for it. So, there are recursive and ecological relationships between authors, readers and text, because authors and readers recursively affect each other, and are recursively affected by the text. In this recursive relationship, like writers, readers negotiate with text, writer, society, and self while interacting with a text. What type of relationships they have are also based on readers’ abilities of entering, navigating, deconstructing, reconstructing, and exiting the text in innumerable ways. This
inherently establishes multiple relationships between the constituents of the rhetorical situation that generates multiple meanings and texts. However, both the readers and writers are not creative genius; rather they are simply manipulator of preexisting data.

Because of information overload in this information age that has created ambient finadability of information, in the process of finding relevant information, the relationships between the author, reader, and text are constructed and reconstructed in multiple ways. It has empowered the readers to access the information they like, and thus gain author like status in making meaning and text. However, there are transactional relationships between the authors, readers and texts in making meanings, because meanings arise out of the interaction of the constituents of the rhetorical situation. These connected and transactional relationships between them characterize the elements of the rhetorical situation as networked ecologies, which I will discuss below when talking about defining features of revised notions of the rhetorical situation. The transactional relationships involve transaction of ideologies between the constituents of the rhetorical situation that enhance postmodern relationships that are inherently multiple, conflicted, and fluid.

**Exigence**

Exigences, or the demands of the situation to generate fitting responses, are plural and fluid, and thus do not invite only one definite rhetorical discourse. So, there is no one-to-one relationship between exigence and rhetorical discourse. That is why an exigence elicits multiple responses. Because potential rhetors have different perspectives toward the existence of the exigence, they bring different rhetorical discourses in response to the same exigence. This situation suggests rhetors’ considerable control over the rhetorical discourse, and the lack of rhetors’ sole control over the exigence. Rhetorical exigence is thus epistemic as it perceived in
different ways based on the rhetors’ purposes, and nature. Depending on the purposes of the rhetors, the same exigence generates different rhetorics.

**Rhetorical discourse**

Like exigence, rhetorical discourse, or text in broader sense, is not a fixed entity: rhetorical discourse is inherently plural. For this reason, there are multiple responses to an exigence because of indeterminacy of a rhetorical situation to produce a single response. It is the indeterminate nature of the rhetorical situation that causes multiple rhetorical discourses, because creation of rhetorical discourses is based on the rhetors’ interest and ability to define the situation, and to understand rhetorical exigencies. This situation suggests that rhetorical exigences are necessary, but not sufficient, conditions to cause the rhetorical discourses. The discursivity and indeterminacy of the connection between rhetorical discourse and its situation is more evident also in the reception of rhetorical texts because it is received differently by different audience. This makes a rhetorical response inherently plural and complex phenomenon. Similarly rhetorical discourse is not a fixed genre, because it keeps on evolving, and modifying depending on rhetors’ ability to negotiate with audience, and to understand the demand of the situation. It is not an objective reality and thus a fluid and indeterminate notion also because of the multimodal and hypertextual nature of writing.

Rhetorical discourse is not just the outcome to the response to an exigence; it influences the constituents of the rhetorical situation. It directly influences audience by affecting their attitudes toward self, authors, exigence, constraints, purpose, and probabilities, because it is through rhetorical discourse audiences know about authors, exigence, constraint, purpose, and many others related to rhetorical discourse. Audiences are so much intricately and complexly related with the rhetorical discourse that rhetorical discourse help them define who the author is,
what the exigence and constraints are, thereby deconstructing one-way relationship between exigence and rhetorical discourse. Rhetorical discourse does not only help readers to know about other constituents of the rhetorical situation, but also contribute to revise their notions. Rhetorical response is thus very complex phenomenon.

Unlike instrumental theory suggests, rhetorical discourse is not just language used by authors as a rhetorical tool in their interest irrespective of the valuative content in it. By following substantive theory, rhetorical discourse carries an ideology and valuative content, because it embodies the value of a particular ideology. By extension, reading of the rhetorical discourse also embodies the value of the reader, thus inherently making plural readings/meanings. These phenomena clearly suggest plural and multiple relations between rhetorical discourse, authors, and readers in particular, and between the constituents of the rhetorical situation in general.

Rhetorical discourse also serves as a participatory and democratic space for authors and readers, where they have democratic control over the creation, design, and meaning of the rhetorical text, thereby empowering readers have their say, paralleling both of them on the same level of authority. What contributes to make rhetorical discourse participatory space is new media, which enables authors and readers to interact with each other and with text with equal say thereby giving agency to readers to influence both the author and text. Rhetorical discourse in this sense is an explicitly open space that can be explored, deconstructed, reconstructed, and contested in multiple ways.

Rhetorical discourse is always plural and thus conflicted, because it carries ideology of certain types, forces, and amount, and so it brings with it strong social and cultural prescription that reflects power relations between the writer and reader. Rhetorical discourse thus imbricated
with ideology not only defines the subject (the self), other subjects, the material world, and the relation of all of these to each other from a certain perspective, but also the relationships between the constituents of the rhetorical situation that are plural and thus contested. More than that, rhetorical discourse is a negotiation of conflicting ideologies of the readers and authors. There is symbiotic relationship between rhetorical discourses its users, and it is contingent upon material conditions and mass consciousness which are constantly in conflict. This dialectical relationship reflects different signifying practices of different group of people. Since rhetorical discourse is ideological and polyvocal in itself, it fosters multiple messages and plural relations between the constituents of the rhetorical situation.

**Rhetorical Location**

While I revised the elements of the traditional rhetorical situation above to propose a new theory on the rhetorical situations, in this part and below, drawing from the theories of critical geography I discussed in chapter 4, I add two elements for consideration, namely, rhetorical location and rhetorical territoriality. I argue that these elements will enrich the notions of the rhetorical situation and make it more complete.

Rhetorical location is not just a place or physical context having physical address or locality, a location as a place, a concrete location where you actually live and experience in communicative practice; it is rather associated with the notions of space and territory. The constituents of the rhetorical situation are not only located in a place; they are also situated in space that has spatiality as a material product of the relationship between social and spatial structure. I believe that the relationships between the constituents of the rhetorical situation are simultaneously social and spatial. The notion of space as a social, political, and ideological product helps define the conception of the rhetorical situation. Rhetorical location conceived of
the notions of space as defining parameter configures the polyvocal relationships between the constituents of the rhetorical situation. Instead of modernist linearity as conceived in place, making a critical difference between place and space, and incorporating space in defining rhetorical location truly captures the essence of location in its postmodern, formless, and complex notion, which better defines the relationships between the constituents of the rhetorical situation.

Rhetorical location conceived only as a place that is a concrete, formed, structured space, as a particular locality having significance for a person or group of person does not in fact convey the abstract, formless, and complex set of idea associated with space thereby limiting the notions of rhetorical location as something physical and concrete. When rhetorical location is conceived as a space, an ideological construct created as a material product of the relations between social and spatial structure, the scope of the rhetorical situation broadens. Rhetorical location defined only in the sense of place might limit its scope within local and traditional, thus ignoring the fluid, global, postmodern notion of space. Rhetorical location conceived of the notions of space is a departure from the world of the past into world of the present and future, into the progressive and radical world, where location gets complete expression that truly defines the location where rhetorical situation is situated. Conceiving rhetorical location as a space automatically connects it with the society, because the space is inherently connected with the society, and thus broadens its scope by extending the lenses to interpret the mechanism of the rhetorical situation as who is involved, what is the social context, what ideology is governing, and what politics is in the play.

Rhetorical location also connotes a postmodern space, because it breaks the hierarchies between author and reader, and provides multiple and plural spaces for them to have free
exploration of information. As a post postmodern space, rhetorical location deconstructs and disperses the linear relationship between readers and writers, and thus allows them to have a free play of meaning. While so doing, it totalizes and fragments the relationships between the constituents of the rhetorical situation, thereby collapsing agents/objects/subjects binaries. Yet, rhetorical location also allows collaboration between writers and readers through intertextual, networked space by making both readers and writers co-learners.

**Rhetorical Territoriality**

As territoriality deals about how human situation and institution organize themselves in space with respect to the social and material world, rhetorical territoriality involves knowledge about how interlocutors organize themselves in space to influence and affect others by controlling language as a rhetorical strategy. Rhetorical territoriality helps you understand how power relation between the constituents of the rhetorical situation shapes their identity, and when their power relation changes, how the relationships between the constituents of the rhetorical situation also change. Understanding rhetorical territoriality helps us to figure out how the constituents of the rhetorical situation shape their and mutual identity in the transaction of rhetorical discourse. Rhetorical territoriality, as an extremely complex and often highly ambiguous notion to understand the relationships and interaction between the elements the rhetorical situation, is related to space and language. It deals about how components of the rhetorical situation organize themselves in space through the use of rhetorical discourse as a strategy. So, rhetorical territoriality as a contingent, constructed, ideologically informed, and thus contested notion is a tool to study the complex relationship between the constituents of the rhetorical situation.
To sum up, the rhetorical situation involves a plurality of the constituents of the rhetorical situation with complex, recursive, and co-adaptive relations. Rhetorical situation as a complex thing involves the rhetor, audience, subject, occasion, and speech in disjunctive, but networked relationships in an ecology. These components are in constant relationships mutually influencing each other and, thus, co-adaptive. All these defining features characterize rhetorical situation as trans-situational networked ecologies.

V. IV. Conclusion: Justification and Significance of the New Theory in RWS

The scholarship I discussed on the notions of the rhetorical situation and the theory I proposed above are not final theories of the rhetorical situations. These theories are more explanatory than the previous theories, because they incorporate the changes brought by new media and technology, and I believe that a theory of the rhetorical situations must always evolve as communicative practices evolve. Thus, though my theories are provisional, they have a number of contributions and significance in the discipline of Rhetorical and Writing Studies in general, and scholars, writing instructor and students in particular. In this part, I discuss the justification of my theory and its significance for scholars, writing instructor, students, and Rhetoric and Writing Studies. This part will answer my fourth primary question: What the rhetorical situation as trans-situational networked ecologies indicate for the discipline of RWS?

Scholars

The rhetorical situation as trans-situational networked ecologies will encourage scholars in the discipline of RWS to further build up theories of the rhetorical situation, as well as re-envision courses for RWS majors. The scholars can be benefitted from its fundamental assumptions that encourage critical approaches to think, argue, and if need be challenge the modernist monocentric philosophy to look as rhetorical theories in general and theories of the
rhetorical situation in particular. Many composition textbooks that include the rhetorical situation use the notions of the rhetorical situation closest to Bitzer’s version, probably because of its simplicity, and also because this version is good enough to begin with learning basic information about the rhetorical situation. I still argue it is good idea to include it as a basic understanding of the rhetorical situation in first-year composition courses, and save a more complex, updated, nuanced version for upper-division courses, because the first-year students are beginners, and the instructors who teach these courses often have minimal background in RWS (graduate teaching assistants and part-time instructors, for example). While so doing, the scholars can enrich the basic information the rhetorical situation with a more sophisticated theory so that it broadens their knowledge about the rhetorical situation, and provides an avenue to explore more about it later. More importantly, the rhetorical situation as trans-situational networked ecologies broadens scholars’ understanding about the rhetorical situation in particular and overall understanding of rhetoric, and encourages them to explore more in this area that incorporates the impact of new media and technology as an unavoidable reality of today’s life.

Given the ongoing debate on theory/practice binaries in rhetoric and composition, i. e., affiliating theory with rhetoric and practice with composition, by bringing in the insights from the rhetorical situation as trans-situational networked ecologies, the scholars can argue for breaking the theory/practice binaries to further build scholarship on rhetorical theory from postmodern perspectives, because the rhetorical situation as trans-situational networked ecologies encourages a postmodern perspective. Breaking the theory/practice binaries can have application in writing classroom, which I will explore in my future research. The modernist tendency to associate theory with rhetoric and practice with composition limits the scope of both rhetoric and composition. In such a context, the postmodern approach in the rhetorical situation
as trans-situational networked ecologies facilitate scholars to argue for breaking the associations and proposing a more explanatory framework that analyze their connections from postmodern perspectives that will enrich rhetoric and composition which in fact incorporate and inculcate theoretical and practical acumen.

**Writing Instructors**

As I mentioned above about enriching even the first-year composition courses with a more complex version of the rhetorical situation, the rhetorical situation as trans-situational networked ecologies equip teachers to teach the enriched courses with a new insight of the rhetorical situation. It provides the teachers tools to argue for plurality of approaches, against taken-for-granted notions about writing and composition process in particular, and life as such in general. To be precise, it enhances critical pedagogy for the teachers that makes them feel that it is their responsibility to create and maintain informed and thinking student body capable of critiquing, and if need be, resisting anything taught or imposed to them. By using the insight derived from this theory, the teachers can help their students be aware of possible manipulation, exploitation and indoctrination by some dominant ideologies and dogmas and be informed critical readers and writers. As Lunsford believes, “writing teachers have had to reinvent themselves and their disciplines several times during my career and that more change is definitely in sight” (2007, p. 170), this theory of the rhetorical situation contribute the teachers to reinvent and maintain the changes.

**Students**

The rhetorical situation as trans-situational networked ecologies broadens students understanding of what the rhetorical situation is in particular and their overall understanding of rhetoric as such, because it talks about the impact of new media and technology, and how it
should be incorporated in daily life. This theory will help students learn how to examine, discuss, debate, contest, and scrutinize the ideologies causing disparities and inequalities among the classes and groups in society. It thus quips the students with critical and analytical skills and insights so that they would be able to discriminate and critique the ideologies or texts, pursue the scholarly inquiry and participate in knowledge formation and consumption as informed citizens. The rhetorical situation as trans-situational networked ecologies equip writing major students with rhetoric and composition’s body of knowledge that they perpetuate in their personal, professional, and civic lives later. It thus provides them disciplinary knowledge of RWS, which they can use as a terministic screen to understand the world and act accordingly.

Since the rhetorical situation as trans-situational networked ecologies is informed by the social-epistemic rhetoric, it encourages students to be self-critical, introspective and allows self-correction. Moreover, it fosters a postmodern philosophy in students to be guided by the idea that none of the ideologies, theories, or sets of beliefs is absolute truth but provisional outlook and therefore requires critical appraisal and examination. Students informed by the rhetorical situation as trans-situational networked ecologies have understanding of rhetoric as a tool to create positive change. I believe teaching this theory has the potential to extend our student’s vision beyond the boundaries of the traditional classroom, and has the potential to change student’s life from one governed by the discourse they read, to being rhetors actively participating in the creation of knowledge. In this way, it has strong influence to students and to RWS, which I will discuss below.

Rhetoric and Writing Studies

The rhetorical situation as trans-situational networked ecologies will transform not only our understanding of the rhetorical situation as such, but also, very importantly, it will contribute
to enrich our understanding of RWS. Given that “new media is the next logical step in the
growth of our discipline” (Brooke, 2009, p. 5), the rhetorical situation as trans-situational
networked ecologies endorses the significance of new media and technology to enrich our
discipline broadly speaking, because new media and technology have played a very big role to
bring crucial transformation in the notions of the rhetorical situation, and effected a shift of
concentration of our discipline. This theory of the rhetorical situation speaks to this situation, and
opens up more possibilities for the exploration of more avenues of scholarships in RSW.

As the rhetorical situation as trans-situational networked ecologies, as mentioned above,
is a product of crucial transformations that new media and technology, and postmodern thought
brought in the revision of the notions of the rhetorical situation, it endorses the use of new media
and technology and postmodern thought influencing RWS. In this sense, it promotes postmodern
philosophy and incorporation of new media studies and technology theory to enrich the
discipline of Rhetoric and Writing Studies, which will have perennial influence in RWS. By
using the insight of critical theory of technology and new media studies, the rhetorical situation
as trans-situational ecologies encourages RWS to incorporate new media and technology as a
scholarship rather than just a tool, which will fundamentally democratize the use of technology
thereby freeing it from the province of a handful of experts.

The rhetorical situation as trans-situational networked ecologies has a significant
contribution to make RWS up-to-date, ever ready to incorporate any changes, and welcoming to
new theories, perspectives, and insights that will always make it contemporary and new. It will
help us break away from the legacies inherited from English departments, which has left us
unprepared for the shift from paper to screen, and build our discipline on our own on the strong
bedrock that accepts change and new perspectives. As the rhetorical situations as trans-situational networked ecologies is informed by theories of critical geography, new media studies, critical theory of technology, and rhetoric and language theory coupled with postmodern theory, it promotes transdisciplinarity in RWS that cuts across the full range of activities and inquiries into epistemology, and thus provides a disciplinary status, hence freeing it from English department, which treats it as a subdiscipline. From the standpoint of postmodern, transdisciplinary thinking, the rhetorical situation as trans-situational networked ecologies offer RWS a new way of seeing, defining, and knowing its disciplinarity. Contributing to promote and maintain a disciplinary status, and hopefully a departmental status in the universities, the rhetorical situation as trans-situational networked ecologies, rather than just examining the choices that others have already made, encourages us to make our own choices as a discipline.

The point here is not that the rhetorical situation as trans-situational networked ecologies can bring the changes all of a sudden. What I am arguing here is that this new theory will require us to rethink our disciplinary habit of accepting status quo, and uncritically accepting hitherto imposed subdisciplinary status. Likewise, it encourages us to engage in the conversation about incorporating technology in our discipline rather than running the risks of bracketing off technology as a specialty. This theory requires us to rethink what we mean by rhetoric, writing, and composition, what they look like when furnished with new media and technology. It encourages us to use technology not just only as a tool uncritically, but rather as a critical philosophy, a way of looking into the things, and as an approach to make our discipline ever relevant as Johnson-Eilola (1997) says “we must expand our definitions to gain broader influence and relevance” (p. 7). For this reason, we must integrate new media and technology curricula in master’s and doctoral programs, rather than limiting it to special seminars.
As discussed above, the rhetorical situation as trans-situational networked ecologies makes RWS a robust discipline, and by contributing to design full writing studies curriculum that ultimately help RWS to have departmental status on its own, also given the changing situation that writing majors are beginning to be developed in traditional English department. While it regenerates the notions of the rhetorical situation that has perennial impact on our discipline, it has broad impact on changing our notions about writing that is still largely reductively conceived as a skill, thereby providing academic and disciplinary status to writing at present, and to give a full-fledged future identity to RWS. In this way, the rhetorical situation as trans-situational networked ecologies will transform our understandings of RWS, and will help (re)design rhetoric and writing major courses. Because of lack of time and space in this project, I will test my theory on the rhetorical situation in two of my future research plans, namely, blending the theory/practice binaries as I mentioned above, and (re)designing rhetoric and writing major courses. In the first project, I plan to propose a pedagogy that informs students of other rhetorics and how they can apply those rhetorics in professional, personal and scholastic contexts. The concept of world rhetorics explores the relationships between Western and non-Western rhetorics. World rhetorics refers to an informed pedagogy that provides a theoretical framework that integrates world rhetorics, such as Eastern European, Western European, North American, Chinese, etc, into a shared dialogue in which they can be explored through classroom discussion, activities and assignments. The incorporation of world rhetorics into the writing classroom gives students the opportunity to view how these rhetorics relate to one another, how those rhetorics reflect the cultures’ means of communicating and how those rhetorics operate within the diverse realm of communication and in creating and portraying knowledge in localized and globalized contexts. In the second project, I will study how the rhetorical situation as trans-situational
networked ecologies can contribute to (re)design rhetorical and writing major courses, along with its possible impact on the scholarship in RWS in future.
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CURRICULUM VITA

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