Remapping the Rhetorical Situation in Networked Culture

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By

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Ramesh Pokharel
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In simple terms, the rhetorical situation means the contexts in which a communicative artifact takes place. Understanding the rhetorical situation in any communicative practice makes the communication effective. The traditional notions of the rhetorical situation primarily focus on, and around, Bitzer's (1968) theory that conceives the rhetorical situation as something 'real', 'genuine', or 'objective', based on historic reality. However, this conception of the rhetorical situation limits 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 the rhetorical situation has also changed, and thus, there is an exigence of a new theory of rhetorical situations that better incorporates the new notions. This book remaps the rhetorical situation and proposes a new theory on it which better incorporates the changed/changing notions of it, given the impact of new media and technology. I'm remapping a complete and updated picture of the rhetorical situation by bringing together critical theory of technology and theory of critical geography, along with rhetoric and language theory, and proposing a new, more viable, theory of the rhetorical situation, namely, "The Rhetorical Situation as Trans-situational Networked Ecology" which has more explanatory power, and in which I account for, frame, critique, and analyze, the fundamental assumptions and beliefs on rhetorical situations. This theory conceives the constituents of rhetorical situations as indiscrete and non-linear entities. Moreover, the elements of the rhetorical situation have multiple layers of relationships; a networked system connected as an ecology. The rhetorical situation involves a plurality of the constituents of the rhetorical situation with complex, recursive, and co-adaptive relations. The 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. This is an innovative way to study the rhetorical situation from a new light.

        The notion 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 used *kairos* in
a more or less similar sense to the way the rhetorical situation is used
nowadays. Sipiora (2002) stated: as "a 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" (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, 58). This meaning of *kairos* resembles the meaning of a
constituent of the rhetorical situation as generally used today. Another
term that is verisimilitude to the notion of the rhetorical situation is
'rhetorical stance' first used by Wayne C. Booth (1963) to mean the
rhetorical situation. Both *kairos* and 'rhetorical stance', though similar to
the rhetorical situation as used today, are actually closer to the partial
meaning of the rhetorical situation. In fact, they can be better understood
as constituents of the rhetorical situation because it has a much broader
meaning than *kairos* or 'rhetorical stance'.

        Broadly speaking, the rhetorical situation means the context and
its constituents that create a context for a communication to happen. The
basic factors that generate an artifact include the writer or speaker, the
audience, the purpose, the topic, and 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 personal characteristics and interest affect what
s/he writes or speaks about, and how s/he writes or speaks about it.
Moreover, the writer's age, experiences, gender, location, political beliefs,
parents and peers, education, and 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. Thus, understanding the notion of the rhetorical situation as a
whole will help students, scholars, and teachers in the field of rhetoric and
composition, writing studies, communications, film studies, philosophy,
and literature. It will also benefit general practitioners of communicative
arts, rhetoricians, politicians, and media people, as it provides them with a
solid grasp of the context in which they practice and use rhetorics.
Developing a comprehensive understanding of the rhetorical situation
empowers, more specifically, both undergraduate and graduate students
with the rhetorical acumen needed for effectively communicating their

ideas rhetorically. Because this book introduces the topic for beginners, and then offers a fair amount of specialist knowledge, all beginners, generalists, and experts, will benefit from it. This book introduces the rhetorical situation as a fundamental idea in the field of communications, rhetoric, writing, and composition, that is widely taught or researched, thereby extending its international appeal to the audience across the world.

A fully-fledged theory of the rhetorical situation was initiated by Bitzer's (1968) *The Rhetorical Situation* and followed by a three decades-long response of theories that reassert, re-examine, and contend with Bitzer's model. However, regarding several notions of the rhetorical situation, this book presents some dissonance with some of the writers like Bitzter (1968), Miller (1972), Jamieson (1973, 1975), Patton (1979), Kneupper (1980) and Grant-Davie (1997), who tend to define rhetorical situations as something 'real', 'genuine', or 'objective', based on historic reality. For them, events are inherently meaningful and objectively real, and so are the rhetorical situations. I believe that this modernist tendency to conceive the constituents of the rhetorical situation as objectively real, and discrete entities can be detrimental to understanding it in a broader sense, as it promotes modernist containment, and, thus, cannot capture the changed meaning that naturally exists with the impact of new media and technology, consequently limiting the scope of the rhetorical situation. As a result, this confining tendency makes it stagnant. The rhetorical situation is not a self-contained objective fact, or a determinate phenomenon, so I argue that the rhetorical situation conceived as a self-contained and determinate phenomenon does not truly capture the fluid and indeterminate nature of the rhetorical situation. The rhetorical situation is a complex thing, not discretely born, but 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 the rhetorical situation is a purely subjective phenomenon, because a 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, the 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 to

my broad and fundamental question of inquiry regarding the rhetorical situation: *In the period of 1968-2020, how have the concept of the 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 does the rhetorical situation as trans-situational networked ecology indicate for the discipline of Rhetoric and Writing Studies and Communication Studies?*

With the advent of new media and technology, the notion of the rhetorical situation has also changed, and thus, there is an exigency of a new theory of the rhetorical situation that better incorporates the new notion of the rhetorical situation germinated by the emergence of new media and technology. For example, new media and technology have broken the traditional relationships 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 the rhetorical situation does not fully express the changed meaning that naturally exists in the notions of the rhetorical situation with the impact of new media and technology. Consequently, it limits the scope and understanding of the rhetorical situation because this confining tendency is likely to make the notion of the rhetorical situation that does not incorporate the changed/changing situation stagnant, thereby giving only an 'incomplete' picture. So, by researching how the concept of the rhetorical situation has changed over time, particularly given the impact of new media and technology, I propose a new stance to look at the notion of the rhetorical situation that fits the changed situation and makes the picture more complete. In order to do so, I engage 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 the 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 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 the rhetorical situation and its various naming permutations have been variously characterized, I aim to position this book as a meaningful contribution to the scholarship in the discipline of Rhetoric and Writing Studies and Communication Studies.

In other words, this book 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 the rhetorical situation in our contemporary moment. In order to do so, I first conduct an historical mapping that collects various characterizations of the rhetorical situation from 1968-2020, and then I analyze these existing notions of the rhetorical situation, problematize them from a postmodern perspective, and explore the need to conceive the rhetorical situation from a new perspective. To do the historical mapping, 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 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 the rhetorical situation, by bringing in a postmodern reading of rhetoric that includes language, subjectivity, reality, space/place, technology theory, and new media, along with their relationships in defining the rhetorical situation. It is my strong belief that we cannot have strong Rhetoric and Writing Studies and Communication Studies that continue to be relevant to current communications practices without seriously and continuously examining the history relative to our contemporary situation. This book is built upon Berlin and Inkster's (1980) critique and evaluation of how the current-traditional paradigm construes the elements of the communication triangle: in 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 the rhetorical situation. In so doing, I also re-examine the consecutive theories and debate which reasserted, re-examined and critiqued their theories, and, in some cases, called for some new approaches to understanding the rhetorical situation in order to fit in the changed situation, particularly given the impact of new media and technology.

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) first theorized the rhetorical situation, though its concept existed before, in different terms. He described three constituents of any rhetorical situation necessary prior to discourse — exigence, audience, and constraints — which "comprise everything relevant in a rhetorical situation" (8). Bitzer's conception of the rhetorical situation reflects his realist view of an objective, external reality, and, in this sense, the rhetorical situations are 'real' or 'genuine' based on historic reality and independent of rhetorical

discourse (11). For Bitzer, then, a rhetorical discourse is secondary — a response to the "demands imposed by the situation" (5). Thus, he takes it as a given that "rhetoric is situational" (3). While Miller (1972), Jamieson (1973, 1975), Patton (1979), Kneupper (1980), and Grant-Davie (1997) followed Bitzer's model of the rhetorical situation, some others like Vatz (1973), Consigny (1974), Larson (1970), Wilkerson (1970), Baxter and Kennedy (1975), Hunsaker and Smith (1976), Biesecker (1989), Crismore and Vande Kopple (1990), Garret and Xiao (1993), Benoit (1994), Smith and Lybarger (1996), Gorrell (1997), and Edbaur (2005) problematized Bitzer's classification and definition of the rhetorical situation in one way or another. In this context, I situate my book in the exploration of the debate on the rhetorical situation, show my dissonance with some existing notions of the rhetorical situation, and argue for the exigence for new theory, by borrowing the arguments of the scholars as mentioned above, and extending them to fit in the new context, given the impact of new media and technology. In the following part, I briefly describe and analyze their arguments in order to situate my position in it.

        Of so many scholars who argued for, or against, Bitzer's model of the rhetorical situation, 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 elaborated 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* critiqued Bitzer's realist conception of the 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'(154), thereby providing a contrary notion about the relationship between rhetoric and situations. Vatz believed that 'events' do not exist objectively in reality but are instead 'created' by choosing facts and translating meaning in rhetorical discourse (157). Vatz argued that the rhetorical situation is not self-contained objective fact, and contended along the line of Larson (1970) and Wilkerson (1970) to problematize Bitzer's classification of rhetorical and non-rhetorical discourse, and argued that the use of language is rhetorical in itself, because all discourses have the power to modify

existing beliefs and to fill the gaps in our knowledge of the world (Larson 1970, Nietzsche 1989).

In *Rhetoric and Its Situations*, Scott Consigny (1974) attempted to resolve the "antinomy for a coherent theory of rhetoric" resulting from Bitzer's and Vatz's opposing conceptions of the rhetorical situation, (176) and assuming that there are "the indeterminate phenomena of a situation" (178). He proposed "rhetoric as an 'art'" (176), which, he believed, explains how a rhetor can engage and make sense of novel and indeterminate situations (179). While Jamieson (1973, 1975) argued along the line of Bitzer's concept of the rhetorical situation by bringing in the issues of genres as rhetorical constraints in the discussion of the rhetorical situations, Baxter and Kennedy (1975) complicated and problematized the linear and singular notion of rhetorical situations. They analyzed the connection between rhetorical situations and the rhetorical response, critically, in more depth, by asserting that a rhetorical situation cannot be determinate to elicit a 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" (160). They stressed the multiplicity of existence of a rhetorical situation that fosters indeterminate and various responses, which make a rhetorical situation a complex thing, unlike the way Bitzer conceived it, thereby suggesting the complex nature of the rhetorical situations when they asserted, "[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" (160). They conceived of the rhetorical situation "as a process" (161), and "as an epochal whole of becoming" (162), unlike the way Bitzter conceived it, as a finality, and 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 a postmodern perspective, and second, based on this approach, I argue for the exigence of a new theory.

Hunsaker and Smith (1976) critique Bitzer, Vatz and Consigny for not mentioning the importance of perception, along with admitting that their situation-based examinations of rhetoric have provided a new insight into the nature of issue. They valued the importance of perception in constructing the potential issues in a rhetorical situation, but also believed 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" (147). Bitzer (1980) extended 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 functions as the basic conditions and factors to cause a 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" (24). In so doing, Bitzer (1980a) asserted 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, can usually see its parts and appreciate its force" (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 and Smith (1976) and Bitzer (1980b) on the importance of perception and interest of the rhetor and his or her environment for creating a fundamental interacting ground for a rhetorical act, helps me to argue throughout this book that the rhetorical situations are not discrete, objective phenomena. By drawing on their argument, I argue that a 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 a subjective nature on 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 relationship between rhetorical discourse and the audience in order to rethink the rhetorical situation, adds a new dimension in the discussion of situation and rhetorical discourse. For her, the relationship between a 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, 121). The discursivity and indeterminacy of the connection between a rhetorical discourse and its situation are more evident in the reception of rhetorical texts because they are received differently by different audiences. This notion fleshes out her logic of the 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" (126), which is essentially provisional. This notion reads rhetorical discourses as processes entailing the discursive production of the audience, "whose identity is produced and reproduced in discursive practices" (127), thereby resituating "the rhetorical situation on the

trajectory of becoming rather than Being" (127). I bring in her idea of discursivity and indeterminacy and bind it up with Foucault's notion of discursive formation, arguing that the constituents of the rhetorical situations are not discretely born; rather, they are linked with discursive formation and indeterminate relation.

Crismore and Vande Kopple's (1990) explanation of Bitzer's notion of constraints also very clearly demonstrates the fact that a rhetorical discourse exits in plurality, as it is an expression of subjective phenomena, like beliefs, attitude, interest, and motives. They state that "[t]he sources of constraints are many: beliefs, attitudes, facts, documents, traditions, images, interests, and motives" (50). It elucidates that the rhetor's personal character, logical proofs, and style, cause 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" (343), 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 the rhetorical situation that ignores the epistemic nature of rhetoric. A 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 and Lybarger's (1996) revision of Bitzer's relatively autonomous notion of exigence. They argue that the rhetorical situation involves a plurality of exigencies and complex relations between the audience and the 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" (200). This notion of exigence, which is more like a complex of various perceptions, helps me argue for my position in this book.

In her article "Unframing Models of Public Distribution: From Rhetorical Situation to Rhetorical Ecologies", Jenny Edbauer (2005), unlike earlier works on the 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" (5). Her article advances a new debate on the 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)" (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" (9). For her, the rhetorical situations are not discrete entities; they are perceived as a circulating ecology of effects, enactments, and events, resulting in rhetorical ecologies where all the elements are networked and connected, which could be called "sites of complex network or networked process" if we borrow Helen Foster's (2007) terminologies. As Foster believes, "the networked process evokes both the growing number of sites and the relational loops", and thus it "encompasses a variety of sites" (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 the rhetorical situation as a process when she says, "the rhetorical situation is better conceptualized as a mixture of processes and encounters" (13). She argues that the standard models of the rhetorical situation mask the fluid nature of rhetoric. Her argument about the fluidity of the rhetorical situations is 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" (20). Rather, rhetorical situations are trans-situational and open-ended process.

By borrowing terminologies from Cooper (1986), Phelps (1988), Edbauer (2005), and Foster (2007), I propose a new theory of rhetorical situations as a trans-situational networked ecology. In so doing, I situate my discussion on the current notions of the rhetorical situation and argue for an extension of the notions of the 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 Rhetoric and Writing Studies and Communication Studies with new insight.

I have primarily used a bibliographic research method as discussed by North (1987). I use one of North's modes of inquiry, that is, a mode of inquiry of scholars. In the mode of inquiry of scholars, "North identifies three major types of knowledge-makers who produce scholarship: historians, philosophers, and critics" (Byard 2009, 25). To map the rhetorical situation,

I engage an historical and theoretical mapping. The historical inquiry, as North (1987) says, has two stages — the empirical and the interpretive. As per this inquiry, on the empirical stage, I first collect the scholars' understanding about the rhetorical situation, and then, on the interpretive stage, I create a narrative chronicling its changes over time. Though the empirical and interpretive stages are an interconnected process because interpretation is based on "the body of the available texts, and the search for further texts" (71), they are "not necessarily or neatly sequential" (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, 72). In this connection, I ask questions like: *What have the rhetorical situations been? What are they now? Why have the existing notions of the rhetorical situations not been able to express the changed/changing meaning?* In order to discuss these problems (questions), I identify, search for, assemble, and validate relevant texts on rhetorical situations (which are known as the empirical stage). Stepping on this empirical inquiry, I move on to the interpretive stage of my historical inquiry on rhetorical situations. In the interpretive stage, I search for pattern(s) in texts, explain the pattern(s) (which creates a narrative), relate the new narrative to existing narratives (which creates a dialectical narrative), and finally, draw conclusions and implications.

Based on the historical inquiry, as mentioned above, I engage the philosophical inquiry on the rhetorical situation, which is going to be the major part of this book, in which I account for, frame, critique, and analyze, the fundamental assumptions and beliefs on rhetorical situations. 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 rhetorical situations. However, I believe, this 'theorizing' will not simply be a talk on theory for the sake of theory; rather, I attempt to formulate a new model (rhetorical situations as trans-situational networked ecology) that hopefully theorizes the notion of 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 ecology expands our understanding of rhetorical situations and can also be fruitfully used in the design and development of scholarship in the field, as well as pedagogies for Rhetoric and Writing Studies and Communications Studies majors.

Since debate is the nature of philosophical knowledge, I believe that the logic and form of philosophical knowledge are dialectical, and a

dialogic that "takes the form of a free-ranging, never-ending debate" (North 1987, 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 and Communications 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; and 4. Drawing conclusion(s): Dissemination to a wider audience (North 1987, 99).

Along with the philosophical inquiry, I engage the rhetorical inquiry as a methodological frame because it better suits my purpose in this book, as Foster (2001) asserts: "Rhetorical inquiry […] begins with some dissonance or motivating concern that serves as a catalyst to the questions that direct inquiry" (6). The process of the 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 and Asher 1988, 5). Along the line of the 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 the rhetorical theory talked about a rhetorical situation to some extent, as through the discussion of *kairos* and 'rhetorical stances', which convey the meaning of the rhetorical situation, it is only with Bitzer (1968) that a fully-fledged theory of the 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 lack a theory that incorporates the changed notion of the rhetorical situation. This fact has motivated me to write this book.

Based on the primary question I seek to address, I engage an heuristic search in the line of literature review, in which I map the rhetorical situation (Chapter II), define new media and technology, examine how new media and technology have changed the notions of the rhetorical situation (Chapter III), analyze the theories in relation to the rhetorical situation (Chapter IV), build a theory on the rhetorical situation (Chapter V), and justify the theory by situating it in the field of Rhetoric and Writing Studies and Communications Studies (Chapter VI). First, I situate my book on mapping the 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).

In order to show my dissonance with the current notions, and argue for the exigence for a new approach, I bring in postmodern theory 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 the rhetorical situation is plural and fluid. I explore this notion in examining the relationships between/among the constituents of the 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 the rhetorical situation that characterizes the modernist containment. It does not necessarily capture the changed meaning of the 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 the rhetorical situation from a new stance that corresponds to the changed/changing situation and proposes a new model. To propose a new stance to study the rhetorical situation, I primarily rely on 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 relationships between the constituents of the 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 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" (22), I question those divisions or groupings of the constituents of the rhetorical situation and propose a new stance that defines the 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 (25).

Analyzing a discourse according to the framework of the 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 the 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 the 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 by re-examining it from a new light.

Foucault's notion of "discursive formations" describes different entities of a notion/object as "systems of dispersion" (37) that discover dispersions themselves "between these elements, which are certainly not organized as progressively deductive structures" (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 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" (38). As Foucault believes a statement itself has no consistent linguistic unit, by bringing in his notion of "discursive formation", I argue that the constituents of the rhetorical situation do not always consistently constitute the rhetorical situation because "discursive formation really is the principle of dispersion and redistribution" (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", Helen Foster's notion of "networked process", and Janice Lauer's notion of 'dissonance' help me to reconceptualize the meaning of the rhetorical situation in a new light. As Edbauer "argues that rhetorical situations operate within a network of lived practical consciousness or structure of feeling" (5), the rhetorical situations as discrete entities are perceived as a circulating ecology of effects, enactments, and events, resulting in rhetorical ecologies, where all the elements are networked and connected. As Foster believes "networked process evokes both the growing number of sites and the relational loops", and thus it "encompasses a variety of sites" (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. By borrowing their arguments, I argue that rhetorical situations are trans-situational, open-ended, and networked processes. I use the theories of critical

geography (Soja 1980, 1987, 1996; Sack 1986, 1993; Sibley 1995; Creswell 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) to discuss how the notions of language, rhetoric, technology, and space/place/territory revise the concepts of the rhetorical situation.

As a plan for the following chapters, Chapter II (Mapping Rhetorical Situation: 1968-2020) discusses how the concept of the rhetorical situation and its various naming permutations have been variously characterized in the period of 1968-2020. Chapter II serves as a background that functions as a springboard to study the new stance on the rhetorical situation. To map the rhetorical situation, I engage postmodern mapping. In this connection, I study scholarship about the rhetorical situation that is commonly used by scholars in Rhetoric and Writing Studies and Communications 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. This chapter does more historical/theoretical mapping of the rhetorical situation, along with interpretive mapping. Chapter III (Impact of New Media and Technology to Change the Notions of Rhetorical Situation) defines new media and technology and answers how they change the notions of the rhetorical situation. With the advent of new media and technology, the notion of the rhetorical situation has also changed, and, thus, there is an exigence of a new theory of the rhetorical situation that better incorporates the new notion of the rhetorical situation germinated by the emergence of new media and technology. For example, new media and technology have broken the traditional relationships between the writer, audience, exigence, and constraints, and have blurred the divisions among them to some extent. In this context, I believe the existing modernist notion of the 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 the rhetorical situation because this confining tendency is likely to make the notion of the rhetorical situation that does not incorporate the changed/changing situation stagnant, thereby giving only an incomplete picture. This chapter also answers how the emergence of new media and technology compels 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

the rhetorical situation. By bringing together the theories of critical geography, critical theory of technology, and rhetoric and language theory, I discuss how the notions of language, rhetoric, technology, and space/place/territory revise the concepts of the rhetorical situation. All these discussions help me theorize the rhetorical situation from postmodern perspectives, which I bring in as a theoretical underpinning to argue for the dissonance, exigence, and proposition of a new theory in Chapter V. In this chapter, I also answer what theories can help the revision of our notions of the rhetorical situation. In Chapter V (Rhetorical Situations as Trans-situational Networked Ecology), based on the analysis done in Chapters II, III and IV, I primarily analyze my dissonance of the existing notions of the rhetorical situation and argue for the exigency of a new theory. Then, I propose a theory of the rhetorical situation that has more explanatory power than any current theory presently available, theorize it extensively, and describe the constituents of this theory. To do so, I first answer the following questions in this chapter: *What is my dissonance with some of existing notions of the rhetorical situations? Why do these notions not work and thus need to be revised, and why can some (if any) be developed to propose a new theory? What needs to be retheorized, relative to the rhetorical situation, to make it a viable concept for our contemporary moment?* Chapter VI serves as the concluding chapter (Justification and Significance of the New Theory in RWS and Communications Studies), in which I discuss the justification of my theory and its significance for scholars, teachers, and students in the discipline of Rhetoric and Writing Studies and Communications Studies. This chapter also discusses pedagogical implications of the new theory on the rhetorical situation. In a nutshell, this chapter answers what the rhetorical situation as trans-situational networked ecology indicates for the discipline of RWS and Communications Studies, and what its pedagogical implications are.

CHAPTER II

MAPPING THE RHETORICAL SITUATION: 1968-2020

Mapping the rhetorical situation builds a foundation on which to study the new stance on the rhetorical situation. In so doing, this chapter answers the question: *In the period of 1968-2020, how have the concept of the rhetorical situation and its various naming permutations been variously characterized?* Answering this question entails historical/theoretical and interpretive mapping of the rhetorical situation, which serves as a point of departure that supports the proposition of a new theory in Chapter V. Engaging with postmodern mapping of the rhetorical situation, I study scholarship about the rhetorical situation that is commonly used by scholars in Rhetoric and Writing Studies and Communication Studies. While so doing, I continually revisit and question the past to ensure that we are not working with faulty assumptions, and I analyze 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 used *kairos* in a more or less similar sense of how the rhetorical situation is used nowadays. As a 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" (Sipiora 2002, 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, 58) which very aptly resembles 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 an 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 (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 rhetorical perversions. He explains them thus "[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, 143). Both these perversions (unbalanced stance) are, in fact, a result of ignoring the audience. Hence, Booth attaches much importance to the audience as the major constituent of the rhetorical situation when he says, "good writers always to some degree accommodate their arguments to the audience" (144), especially to the interest and peculiarities of the audience.

Though Bitzer (1968) 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 the rhetorical situation in undeveloped form when he says: "This essay […] should be understood as an attempt to revive the notion of rhetorical situation […]" (3). By asserting that he wants to revive the notion of the rhetorical situation, he indirectly admits that there were some notions of the 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 of discourse. None, to my knowledge, has asked the nature of rhetorical situation" (2). This suggests that Bitzer was not working in a vacuum because there were similar ideas in circulation, *kairos* and "the rhetorical stance," for example, which were circulated and likely to have influenced his thoughts. He only assumed that

the existing notions of the rhetorical situation were 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" (2) in order to make the picture more complete. Though *kairos* and "the rhetorical stance" existed to mean the rhetorical situation to some extent before Bitzer (1968) systematically gave full-fledged definitions of the rhetorical situation, they were pretty close to the notion of the rhetorical situation, but not exactly the rhetorical situation as it is understood today; instead, they were like some constituents of the rhetorical situation.

Now, I conduct historical and thematic mapping of the notions of the rhetorical situation in the period of 1968-2020, as to what the theories of the rhetorical situation are and discuss how the concept of the rhetorical situation and its various naming permutations have been variously characterized in this period. To achieve this end, I divide it into four 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" concentrates on the fundamental debate among Bitzer, Vatz, and Consigny, along with some other theorists in this period who in some ways focus their argument around the Bitzer-Vatz-Consigny debate, the second heading maps the notions of the rhetorical situation as a departure from the debate. While the third heading maps the concepts of the rhetorical situation from a different perspective, that is, the rhetorical situation as ecologies of a networked, complex system, the fourth heading discusses the notions of context collapse as the rhetorical situation.

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 seminal 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 the rhetorical situation with the belief that "the presence of rhetorical discourse obviously indicates the presence of a rhetorical situation" (2). However, even a rhetorical discourse "is a reliable sign of the existence of situation, it does not follow that a situation exists only when the discourse exists" (2). In other words, not every rhetorical situation is accompanied by a rhetorical discourse, as sometimes the opportunity to speak on a matter is missed (2). Bitzer (1968) describes three constituents of any rhetorical situation necessary prior to a rhetorical discourse — exigence, audience, and constraints — which "comprise everything relevant in a rhetorical situation" (8). He defines exigence as "an imperfection marked by urgency; a defect, an obstacle, something waiting to be done" (6). In order to be rhetorical, an exigence must be "capable of positive modification […] [requiring] discourse" (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" (7). In addition, the rhetorical situations always require audiences, as a rhetorical discourse "produces change by influencing the decision and action of persons who function as mediators of change" (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" (8). Bitzer describes two classes of constraints as those originated or managed by the rhetor and his or her method (Aristotle's "artistic proofs") and the other situational constraints which may be operative (Aristotle's "inartistic proofs") (8).

Bitzer (1968) makes quite explicit that the rhetorical situation is antecedent to, and 'invites', rhetorical discourse: "it is the situation which calls the discourse into existence" (2). Similarly, the rhetorical situation 'dictates' the responses and "constrains the words which are uttered in the same sense that it constrains the physical acts of paddling the canoes and throwing the nets" (5). So, a situation has controlling power to create a discourse, and it is the very ground of rhetorical activity. The implication is that, for Bitzer, a 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 a discourse (5). Rhetors are thereby relieved of moral responsibility because "exigence amount[s] to an imperative stimulus" (5), which prescribes a fitting response that is "strongly invited — often required" (9). Indeed, the "speaker's intentions [are] determined by the situation," which "invites" and "prescribes" a specific, fitting response (9-10). So, it is in the power of the rhetorical situation to both invite and constrain a fitting response from the rhetor (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" (11). In this sense, the rhetorical situations are 'real' or 'genuine', based on historic reality and independent of rhetorical discourse (11); for Bitzer, events are inherently meaningful because events (i.e., rhetorical discourses) have logical connection with the 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 (12). Finally, as objectively real, rhetorical situations "come into existence, then either mature or decay or mature and persist" (12). Bitzer notes that rhetorical forms develop as a response to those rhetorical situations that recur over time (12). For Bitzer, then, a rhetorical discourse is secondary; a response to the "demands imposed by the situation" (5). Thus, he takes as a given that "rhetoric is situational" (3). By this he means that rhetoric "obtain[s] its character-as-rhetorical from the situation which generates it" (3). Rhetoric responds to, and is essentially related to, a rhetorical situation, because "[a] particular discourse comes into existence because of some specific condition or situation which invites utterance" (4).

Bitzer summarizes that rhetoric being situational means: 1) rhetoric comes into existence as a response to a situation; 2) speech is given a rhetorical significance by the situation; 3) the rhetorical situation must exist as a necessary condition of a 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" (5-6). Therefore, Bitzer formally defines

the 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" (6). In other words, "the world really invites change — change conceived and effected by human agents who quite properly address a mediating audience" (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 the 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" (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" (4). In this sense, rhetoric is always persuasive.

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

While Arthur 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 the 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" (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" (111). However, "the rhetor has creative latitude to interpret the significance of the exigence" (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 (112). While Bitzer limits a rhetorical discourse only as a response to the exigence as a