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Teams, Tears, and Testimonials

A RHETORICAL READING OF THE *TWILIGHT* TIME CAPSULE

SARA K. HOWE

Set against the gloomy backdrop of Forks, Washington, the *Twilight* Saga chronicles the tumultuous love story of Bella Swan, a bookish and clumsy teenage girl, and Edward Cullen, a (perpetually) 17-year-old vampire. Bella and Edward face many unusual challenges throughout the series: Edward's nearly insatiable thirst for Bella's blood; Bella's werewolf best friend and potential suitor, Jacob Black; a vindictive redheaded vampire named Victoria; Bella's life-threatening pregnancy; and an ancient clan of malicious and dictatorial vampires—to name only a few. The *Twilight* Saga has captivated audiences across the globe, garnering an impressive transnational fan base. The four-book series has sold over 115 million copies worldwide; all five films have topped the box office charts upon release; the fifth and final film installment, *Breaking Dawn Part 2*, released in November 2012, grossed over \$828,000,000 worldwide.¹

Tapping into *Twilight*'s substantive fan base, Summit Entertainment, the film studio that produces the *Twilight* Saga films, launched the *Twilight* Time Capsule in October 2011. The Time Capsule is an interactive and updatable web-based archive of both official and fan-generated content concerning the *Twilight* Saga. In the introductory demo video with *Twilight* Saga film star Nikki Reed, who plays

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Rosalie Cullen, fans are told that the site will serve as a user-friendly hub for Twilight Saga “memories.” Referencing the endurance and agelessness of time capsules, Summit purports to be giving Twilight Saga fans an opportunity to “commemorate [their] personal memories forever and become a part of Twilight Saga history.”² Fans are here encouraged to post photos, videos, and comments about the Twilight Saga via social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter, Flickr, MySpace, YouTube, Photobucket, and Instagram. Visitors to the site can peruse the content without logging into one of these networking sites, but users must be signed in to post content. Organized chronologically around the release dates of the Twilight Saga films (2008–2013), the Time Capsule has several search options and preset filtering features. For example, users can click a box to search only fan-generated material or only official content. They can also filter their search results according to a particular character (Edward or Bella, for example), film director (Catherine Hardwicke, David Slade), or writer (author Stephenie Meyer or screenwriter Melissa Rosenberg). Summit Entertainment vets submissions and reserves the right to edit, use, or remove submissions at its discretion. Yet it claims no legal responsibility for the fan-generated content on the site (a more thorough exploration of these guidelines follows). As of March 2013, the film studio was not charging fees to submit to or visit the site; and the Time Capsule already housed more than 17,900 photos, videos, and comments, over 17,700 of which were fan generated.

To situate this unique site and more fully understand its functions, potentials, and limitations, it is helpful to turn to scholarship on fan culture, on the Twilight Saga and its fan base, and on new media. The primary audience for the Time Capsule is, of course, fans of the Twilight Saga. Though the Time Capsule website is owned by the film studio Summit Entertainment, it targets both fans of the films and fans of the book series, including author Stephenie Meyer as one of its preset search options. There is no clear distinction on the Time Capsule between fans of the films and fans of the books, which reflects the fluctuating, migratory practices of Twilight Saga fans, who tend to engage both franchises interchangeably. On a site like the Time Capsule, which promotes the Twilight Saga in all its iterations, media converge and the layers of reception intermingle. It is often difficult to decipher to which text fans are responding, but it is clear that the site targets Twilight Saga fans, broadly defined. The scholarship on fan culture that has proliferated over the last twenty-five years can help us to contextualize this audience. Early fan studies scholarship worked to establish fan communities as cultural sites worthy of serious scholarly attention, and fans as creative, critically engaged, and agentic audience members. Drawing attention to the fact that fans not only consume but also produce content (fan fiction, videos, songs, artwork, analytic essays), early fan studies scholars described fan communities as bases

for “consumer activism” that enable fans to “speak back to the networks and the producers.”³ Fans are, indeed, both great consumers of cultural capital and great producers of creative works, although the complexities of fandom extend far beyond this identificatory contradiction. Because of this, more recent scholarship has worked to complicate what it means to be a fan and to cultivate a more nuanced understanding of fan culture. As Matt Hills argues, fandom “cannot be depicted as a univocal site or as one ‘thing.’” Fans are both complicit with and resistant to hegemonic capitalist structures. Their creative works “simultaneously [reproduce] and [undermine] the structures that enable [them].”⁴ Fans’ appropriative and transformative compositions are both original and derivative, critical and affective, normative and transgressive. Furthermore, fan communities—online and offline—can be both peaceably collaborative and viciously contentious spaces.

Such tensions and contradictions have become highly visible in this increasingly digital and mobile age, which Henry Jenkins describes as a moment of “convergence.” Noting the recent technological, cultural, and social ways media circulate, Jenkins defines convergence “not [as] an endpoint,” but as an ongoing process. It involves the flow of content across multiple media platforms, the intersection of old and new media, the nomadic and creative practices of audiences and fans, and the unpredictable ways producers and consumers interact. An important feature of convergence culture is what Jenkins calls “transmedia storytelling”—stories that unfold across multiple media.⁵ These days, fans and consumers move through multiple media to fully understand (and often participate in) their favorite narratives and fictional universes. The *Twilight* Time Capsule speaks to both of these concepts: it is simultaneously a transmedia archive, a remarkable (albeit problematic) product of the process of convergence, and a space where *Twilight* Saga fans and producers collide in interesting and unpredictable ways.

The *Twilight* Saga and its fans have received increasing academic attention over the last few years. Some scholars have approached Meyer’s books from rhetorical and literary perspectives, addressing many of the issues the *Twilight* Saga explicitly and implicitly raises: gendered and familial subject positions and sexuality; social stereotypes and reader identification; the vampire and common fears about the post-9/11 transnational landscape; and, the (de)construction of conventions of romance.⁶ Turning from the *Twilight* novels to *Twilight*’s active fan base on the World Wide Web, Leisha Jones argues that the *Twilight* Saga narrative is a contemporary bildungsroman whose fans use the web—YouTube in particular—to assemble their own “infinite” distributive subjectivities and expansive narratives, their own “bildungsroman[s] 2.0,” around the *Twilight* Saga. According to Jones, these *Twilight* Saga fans are “prosumers,” people “who [produce] *professional* content often via noncommercial means,” composing and distributing “tweets, videos, lists,

reviews, and updates” on the web. In much the same vein, rhetoric and composition scholar Sarah Summers argues that *Twilight* Saga fans are finding, negotiating, and enacting feminism through *Twilight* fan forums online. Jones and Summers consider web-based fan spaces and fan compositions to be educative, knotty, and full of unique potentials and dilemmas.⁷

Building on this scholarship and, with Sonja K. Foss, thinking of rhetoric as the “human use of symbols to communicate,”⁸ I explore the *Twilight* Time Capsule from a rhetorical perspective as a communicative and persuasive space. My project maps ways in which meaning is made and communicated on this site, by and among *Twilight* Saga fans and producers. Understanding meaning as relational, I aim to take a closer look at the relationships formed and expressed throughout the Time Capsule—in particular, the consumer-producer relationship, the relationships formed between fans on the site, and the powerful affective and creative relationships fans form with the sparkling world of the *Twilight* Saga. This relational mapping captures the Time Capsule as a site that makes visible the tensions and contradictions at the heart of online media fandom. More significantly, this corporate site promotes and validates certain kinds of fan experiences and activities while ignoring or disabling others. Fans are encouraged to be voracious and reverent consumers but, at the same time, compliant and polite producers. All the while, their submissions to the Time Capsule are monitored for possible editing. There are thus several discrepancies between what Summit Entertainment purports to be constructing and what is actually being constructed with the Time Capsule, which provides only a partial and normative picture of *Twilight* fandom while situating itself as the singular space for recording *Twilight* fans’ experiences “forever.”⁹ Underscoring those discrepancies, my mapping directs attention not only to how the site animates or vivifies the complexities of one distinguishable fan culture but also to what is lost and denied when corporations, rather than fans, construct fan communities. In the end, I call for inventive frameworks and imaginaries grounded in rhetoric to help us better understand fan culture at large and, in particular, sites like the multisensory, multiperspectival, multimodal, and arguably duplicitous *Twilight* Time Capsule—sites that will surely grow in number as fans and producers interact with increasing regularity in this time of convergence and transmedia storytelling.

This Researcher’s Position

As a scholar and teacher of rhetoric and composition, I come to the Time Capsule with a specific interest in how the theories and practices of rhetoric and composition can be put into conversation with the theories and practices of fans.

That said, I am also a *Twilight* Saga fan. Conscious of the criticisms that the series is poorly written, grossly heteronormative, and misogynist, and despite my own criticisms, I still found myself swept up in the vampire-human-werewolf story. Indeed, I have become a fan not only of the *Twilight* Saga narrative but also of the fan culture that has sprung up around it. Thus I regularly read and sometimes contribute to *Twilight* Saga fan sites, often watch fan-made music videos, and occasionally read fan fiction. I am, in short, a “fan-scholar,” which is similar to Tanya Cochran’s “scholar-fan” or Henry Jenkins’s “acafan,” though I prefer to place the “fan” identification first to illustrate that being a fan is, for me, a position as important and critical as being a scholar. I approach the rhetorical mapping of the *Twilight* Time Capsule with excitement, curiosity, pleasure, and reverence. Contending, with Rosi Braidotti, that “one cannot know properly, or even begin to understand, that [for] which one has no affinity,”¹⁰ I see my participation in *Twilight* fandom not as a hindrance but rather as a means of better understanding—and properly knowing—what I am studying.

As a fan-scholar of the Time Capsule, I endeavor to understand a complex e-space, “seeking neither erasure nor mastery but rather consideration of the challenges” that make this site a “space worthy of research.”¹¹ Aware that what is *not* visible is as important as what is, I take careful note both of what the site reveals and of what it conceals. Moreover, my project is, like the *Twilight* Time Capsule itself, a work in progress (or “WIP” in fan terminology); I expect that the ideas in this essay, along with the Time Capsule, will evolve and change over time. From here, I explore how the relationships between fans and producers, fans and other fans, and fans and the *Twilight* series are instantiated, negotiated, and controlled on and through this curious e-space.

Fan-Producer Relations

Recent scholarship on fan culture suggests that the fan-producer relationship is unstable and unpredictable. It suggests, equally, that being a fan is, as Matt Hills has shown, a fluid subject position. Fans are interchangeably both producers and consumers (and often an amalgamation of both); they desire not only cultural capital but also cultural production, the creation of new texts and experiences. Also, as intimated earlier, producers now more than ever are engaging fans, encouraging fans to move through multiple media for more information about the stories and characters they love. The *Twilight* Time Capsule constitutes one way Summit Entertainment has tried to engage fans, and an interesting way it is. The Time Capsule both highlights and frustrates the fluidity of fandom, offering fans a feeling of choice and agency—and, to some degree, actual choice and agency—while Summit maintains panoptic

control over the site. Fans are invited to contribute to the Time Capsule, but Summit reserves the right to “hide, exclude, remove, or delete Contributions that violate the Contribution Guidelines, Terms of Use and/or for any other reason in its sole discretion.”¹² Likewise, fans are encouraged to speak to or post compositions for or about the authors and directors connected with the Twilight Saga films, though not to the actors or actresses. This section looks closely at the fine print and the overall structure of the Time Capsule to illuminate how the power dynamics of the fan-producer relationship play out on the site and what those dynamics might suggest.

The Time Capsule is touted as a “fan community.” Though there is arguably a corporate component to many fan communities, they are typically constructed and run *by fans themselves* (as are, for example, the Gossamer Project, an *X-Files* fan fiction archive, and Vampire-Diaries.net, a fan site for the CW’s *The Vampire Diaries*). Many previous attempts to construct fan communities and archives for fan art from the outside—by producers or nonfans—have failed. In fact, fan studies scholar Karen Hellekson argues that fan communities “cannot be constituted by anyone other than the fans themselves.” Both she and Jenkins have written about Fanlib (2007–8), a corporate attempt to archive, commodify, and profit from fan fiction. Fanlib “partnered with different TV and book copyright owners,” offering writing contests to fan fiction writers, but once fan writers submitted their work for the contests, they relinquished their rights to it. Basically, the producers of Fanlib wanted the fan fiction and any possible financial gains associated with it, but they did not want any legal responsibility for its creation. Although Fanlib did attract some fans, it shut down after just one year; it was purchased by Disney for “the coding software it had on its backend.”¹³

The *Twilight* Time Capsule is a slightly different—but not entirely dissimilar—type of enterprise. It is approaching its two-year anniversary at the time of this writing, still in one piece. On the surface, the Time Capsule validates fan-generated work and does not directly attempt to commodify it. Fan-generated compositions are positioned alongside official Twilight Saga content, and, as mentioned, the site gives users the option to view exclusively fan-generated material if they wish. Also, the site encourages fans to use any and all official Twilight Saga material to create and share their own works (including fanvids, which cut and reassemble clips from the films).

Upon closer inspection of the site, however, we see that all fan-generated content is cocooned in official content, placed below or between various advertisements for the official content and links to purchase *Twilight*-related products. Also, in its policy statement, Summit Entertainment claims the rights to any content submitted to the *Twilight* Time Capsule. The FAQ section of the site clearly states, moreover, that fans are “giving Summit Entertainment and

its affiliates the right to use, display, feature, and moderate [their] Contributions as part of the *Twilight* Time Capsule or otherwise.”¹⁴ The “or otherwise” means that Summit can reuse any of the submissions at any time. Summit does not, however, claim legal responsibility for any of the submissions, promoting a certain ideology of fandom where fans are encouraged to inhabit a fluid subjectivity—to be producers, but only to a certain point. If fans step beyond that indistinct and producer-determined point, the producers (here, Summit) distance themselves from any subjective fluidity and from any connection to fan activity or production.

As new media scholars have noted, interfaces and organizational structures are always ideological.¹⁵ Bearing out this insight, the structure of the Time Capsule reflects a particular ideology of fandom. The Time Capsule imposes a temporal linearity according to the release dates of the *Twilight* films. This linearity speaks on some level to Summit’s focus on (and perhaps preference for) the official content—the films and products they produce. Interestingly, this linear timeline is set against the fan-generated content that potentially dismantles the official content. For instance, below the timeline, visitors can see fan videos that dice up and reconstruct the *Twilight* films, cutting and pasting various narrative elements to create new narratives or meanings that are not necessarily bound to or coinciding with the temporality (or any of the “rules”) of the official texts: the movies and books themselves. In addition to suggesting that Summit values its own products—the films and the books to which they own film rights—first and foremost, the structure of the Time Capsule mimics the way fans approach and move through the *Twilight* Saga official content. In other words, the movies and books matter to the fans, of course, and the release dates of the films are generally highly anticipated or fondly remembered, but fans migrate: they shuffle back and forth from year to year, book to book, film to film, film to book, and back again. The Time Capsule reflects these migratory practices, allowing visitors to defy the linearity it imposes. The structure of the Time Capsule, then, is both rhetorically situated and ideological; it embodies or animates some of the intricacies of fans’ migration and compositional practices. It is thus both a peephole and a mirror—a way to glimpse the ideological and epistemological roots of the Time Capsule and a reflection of fans’ physical and imaginative journeys through and around the *Twilight* series.

In this way, the Time Capsule becomes a site that makes visible the shifting, multifaceted, and contradictory relationship between media producers and fans. It underscores the control and power media corporations wield—or desire to wield—while demonstrating that fans are both (re)producing and resisting that power. Throughout the Time Capsule, the increasingly murky line between producers and consumers decomposes and regenerates at once—as it does in fan culture and fan compositions. Thus the Time Capsule provides a sort of

moving and mutable snapshot—partial and flawed, of course—of the ways fans resist and push against capitalist structures (see the fan-generated materials) while remaining complicit with and dependent on them (see the structure and policies of the site, and the official content). Arguably more significant, the Time Capsule’s corporate producers both depend on and resist fans, which this site makes visible as well. Ultimately, though, the producers remain always at the helm of this particular e-space, never fully relinquishing control to the fans.

Fan-Fan Relations

Though fans and scholars frequently address the fan-producer relationship, especially in conversations about convergence and transmedia storytelling, the relationships fans form and nurture with one another are also an essential component of fan communities. According to Karen Hellekson, giving, receiving, and reciprocating are the three central tenets of participation in online media fandom. Hellekson asserts that online fan communities—which the *Twilight* Time Capsule site professes to be—typically operate under a unique “gift economy,” where gifts (fan-generated content and symbolic contributions) are circulated among fans “with no currency and little meaning outside the economy.” This economy is about “maintaining social ties” through exchange among fans who possess a shared interest in a particular source text.¹⁶ Other fan scholars have studied discussion forums and beta reading, the practice of editing and responding to fan fiction, as important community-building practices.¹⁷ This scholarship points to an integral aspect of fan culture: fan-fan relationships that build and maintain communities and friendships. The *Twilight* Time Capsule alleges to be a community (and perhaps Summit desires to cultivate one), but the submissions to the Time Capsule and the absence of fan-fan dialogue indicate that the site does not actually function as one.

Most noticeably, although commentary is encouraged on the Time Capsule, few fans have chosen to comment to one another on the site. As Hellekson and others note, the fan community experience largely depends on giving and receiving creative works and feedback on those works. Here, though, we find fan creations—photos, videos, and comments—with virtually no feedback. Aside from the occasional encouraging post—“OMG this is a great video,” for example—there are few, if any, conversations or lengthy comments following the submissions. One reason for this might be that Summit does not notify posters when they have received comments on their submissions. (Could this be another clandestine way of controlling or patrolling the site, discouraging fan-fan productivity?) But regardless of the reason for the lack of fan-fan interaction, its absence signifies that relationships on this site are not forged

through reciprocity (commenting, criticizing, discussing), as they are on other fan-run sites like BreakingDawnMovie.org, a *Twilight* news site, where fans comment to one another extensively, debate various issues, make their own meanings, and form (or dissolve) bonds.

Thus, instead of fan-to-fan commentary and dialogue or the formation of fan kinships, we see stagnant commemorations of shared fan experiences: photos of fans congregating together, counting down the days until the release of the next *Twilight* film and proudly displaying their *Twilight* memorabilia or their “team” (vampire Edward or werewolf Jacob), or videos of them celebrating the release of the latest film, participating in *Twilight*-themed parties, and squealing over the newest trailer or TV spot for the next the film. And we see photos of fans visiting Forks, Washington, smiling next to Bella’s red truck, and embracing one another on the shores of La Push Beach, as well as brief comments that discuss *Twilight* as a bonding experience: for example, one fan claims that *Twilight* “brought [her] and [her] friends together.” These Time Capsule submissions act like photographs in a scrapbook, immobile and immutable moments of fan-fan affiliation. They reflect what *was* and not what is developing—unlike contributions on other fan sites where relationships grow and change dialogically and experientially. Such static submissions to the Time Capsule offer only snapshots of fan-fan relationships, depicting how fans united with one another over their excitement for the *Twilight* series, of relationships shaped around consumerism, desire for merchandise, and appreciation for the *Twilight* series. What we do not see on the site are relationships formed from and engaged in contention, debate, and critical and analytic dialogue.

Thus, although Summit Entertainment does allow and even encourages fans to communicate with one another, it makes no effort to help them do so. And *Twilight* fans, for their part, have chosen to treat the Time Capsule not as an engaging, dialogic, and communal space but as a drop box or storehouse for sanitized, *Twilight*-only photos, videos, and comments. We can draw from these observations two important conclusions. First, as currently deployed, the *Twilight* Time Capsule shows fans to be savvy creatures. Keenly aware of the functions and purposes of the Time Capsule as designed by Summit Entertainment, they deposit their artifacts but avoid using the site as a conduit for fan-fan debate, connections, relationship building, or gifting. Second, the site highlights the wide disparity between corporate and fan expectations for fan communities. Through its idea of fan community, Summit hopes to promote and maintain fans’ desire to consume *Twilight* films, books, and other *Twilight* commodities, whereas, through theirs, fans hope to *create*, to generate texts, meanings, and relationships. Thus the Time Capsule in its current deployment can be read as a cautionary tale that reveals what is likely to be lost if corporate-sanctioned fan spaces grow in popularity. As Hellekson explains, fans typically use fan-run fan communities to “exchange

personally charged aspects of themselves in a gift culture whose field of value specifically excludes profit,” whereas corporate-run sites—which inevitably pursue profit—extinguish the intimacy, cherished personal exchanges, and gifting that typify fan communities.¹⁸

Fan–Twilight Saga Relations

The relationship fans form with the *Twilight* series is supposedly at the heart of the *Twilight* Time Capsule. Yet the Time Capsule places restrictions on that relationship. Aside from the vetting process, the policy statements, and the like, the site valorizes ardor without critique—that is, a fan experience that is rooted in intense affective response without either critical awareness or productivity; it also allows only certain kinds of compositions. To better understand the kind of relationship Summit expects fans to form with the official *Twilight* content, let us look at the creative and affective dimensions of the fan-generated submissions.

Creatively, fans are permitted to post photos, videos, and comments only. This excludes both fan fiction and “meta” (detailed analyses and critiques of the series), two of the most prevalent composing practices of fans. To give some sense of the breadth of this exclusion, as of March 2013, FanFiction.net, a popular digital fan fiction archive, housed nearly 200,000 *Twilight*-based stories. Likewise, individual *Twilight* Saga fan forums house hundreds of theoretical and interpretive discussions about the series. This means the *Twilight* Time Capsule ignores a large and significant sector of *Twilight* Saga fan culture, even though it claims to be “all about the fans.” Rhetorically, this would not be so troubling if in the Policy Statement, demo video, or FAQ section, Summit Entertainment acknowledged fan fiction and critical interpretation as important aspects of the *Twilight* fan experience. Instead, as the situation stands now, by disallowing fan fiction and critical commentary, the Time Capsule restricts the available “means of studying and responding to” the *Twilight* Saga. Through fan fiction and analysis, fans can construct new possibilities, “critically interpret” the saga narrative, and “offer counter-representations” to the official text.¹⁹ Without the possibility of these kinds of compositions, the *Twilight* Saga remains by and large intact and unquestioned. Equally important, fans of the saga remain largely frozen in fervor, without critique or the options for interruption or (re)invention. Creatively speaking, the Time Capsule serves Summit Entertainment and not the fans, promoting its commodities while limiting fan agency.

In addition, Summit does not allow “pornographic, obscene or sexually explicit” content or, more vaguely, content “which is intended to shock or disgust.”²⁰ Possibly because of these constraints, I have been unable to find any “slash” materials on the site. A popular cross-fandom practice, “slash” generally refers to

fan-created texts—often fanfics—that “posit a same-sex relationship, usually one imposed by the [fan] and based on perceived homoerotic subtext.” Fan studies scholars have argued variously about the significance of slash. It has been read as a feminist practice of fantasy that enables women to both have and be the objects of their desires; it has also been read as a liberating practice with the “potential to change women’s lives” through its depiction and support of genuinely egalitarian relationships.²¹ Regardless of how slash is interpreted, it is a widespread fan practice, and the Twilight Saga fandom is no exception. By removing all pornographic and sexually explicit and shocking content, Summit disregards the erotics of fandom, closing down the possibility that fans desire sexual—or at the very least corporeal—expression and play. The absence of slash equals the absence of all of that slash offers. Speaking more generally, the Time Capsule paints a sanitized, normative, and overzealous picture of Twilight Saga fans, depicting them as well-behaved and enthusiastic consumers, even though fans (and their compositions) are also messy, innovative, expansive, proliferative, and erotic.

In addition to being asked to avoid sexually explicit and shocking content, fans are asked to use only Twilight Saga–related materials and no other copyrighted content. Although this restriction is, of course, understandable considering the currently omnipresent fear of being sued for copyright infringement, it contradicts and thwarts the ways fans create—that is, by assembling and reassembling, editing and amending, dissecting and revivifying existing material. By disallowing explicit content and the use of copyrighted materials beyond the saga, Summit risks sterilizing and contracting the fan experience. In other words, fans are encouraged to be Twilight Saga fans and only Twilight Saga fans on the Time Capsule. The *Twilight*-only constraint prevents fans from posting photos, videos, or works of art that cross one fictional universe with another—for example, *Twilight* with *The X-Files*—and videos that use music not included on the Twilight Saga soundtracks or in the public domain. The Time Capsule is, then, a “safe” space where fans can play—but only so much and only so far. Users of the site can (and do) post *Twilight* spoofs or photo manipulations that make it appear as though a fan is standing next to or hugging Edward or one of the other characters. They cannot, however, mix those materials with other cultural artifacts, a common form of fannish creative expression. In this way, the Time Capsule can be read as endorsing a certain kind of fan—namely, the ardent but law-abiding, compliant, and discreet fan. This conception of the Twilight Saga fan forecloses some of the important questions raised by fan practices. Fan art, after all, is “not necessarily complicit with legal and economic structures as they stand.”²² By denying that fact, the Time Capsule prevents fans from playing with or reinventing existing cultural artifacts and discourages fans from asking questions about fair use, transformation, and what constitutes originality in this digital age.

Instead, the emphasis in the Time Capsule is on the affective dimensions of fandom: the psychic and emotional responses fans have to the *Twilight* series. Here we can see fans struggling to express the depth of their devotion; the phrase “words fail” comes to mind. One fan describes *Twilight* as “the one thing in life that makes [her] truly happy.” Another writes: “I never felt this way ever,” and a fellow fan expresses her agreement by stating, “I know how you feel. I feel the same way.” Other fans write that the experience of viewing *Breaking Dawn Part I* for the first time was “unexplainable” and “amazing.” These comments echo Matt Hills’s description of fans being overwhelmed and nearly brought out of body by their responses to certain texts: “We are confronted by a moment where the subject [the fan] *cannot* discursively and ‘rationally’ account for its own fan experience, and where no discourse seems to be available which can meaningfully capture the fan’s ‘opening of oneself to another’s experience’ or, indeed, to a mediated text.”²³ Throughout the Time Capsule, fans struggle to account for their reactions to the *Twilight* series; they want to articulate how they feel, but how they feel cannot be expressed discursively—at least not easily. Perhaps this is because being a fan is a powerful psychic, intellectual, and sensual experience that is, at once, too much and not enough. But we do not find explanations for the inarticulateness of fandom (such as the brief one I have offered here) on the Time Capsule, another indication that this space is limited and limiting.

Although the virtually inexpressible enthusiasm fans experience represents only one facet of fandom, the Time Capsule predominantly highlights and values expressions of rapture, validating the internal motivations for being a *Twilight* Saga fan—motivations that are, at times, forgotten in fan studies scholarship and that are always central to the fan experience. The danger here is, of course, that it serves to reify the old stereotypes of fans, the very ones Henry Jenkins worked to dismantle in *Textual Poachers* (1992)—fans as out of control, squealing, inarticulate, and unintelligent. Ultimately, the relationship with the *Twilight* Saga that fans are encouraged to foster and express through the Time Capsule is based on ardor, affective connection, and zealous consumerism. It is a sterile fan space in which the devotional aspects of being a fan are spotlighted while the savvy, critical, and analytical aspects are ignored or marginalized. This purified site feels far removed from what is happening elsewhere online and throughout fan-run fan communities.

Inferences and Possibilities

The *Twilight* Time Capsule poses a number of hermeneutic problems. How should we read sites like these that claim to be “all about the fans” but in fact are run by corporations and are intended to serve those corporations’ interests?

What, if anything, do these sites offer to fans, and how are fans using them? Does “corporate-run” necessarily mean “exploitative”? What do such sites reveal about the ever-shifting relationship between producers and consumers? As sites like these continue to appear and as media producers continue to interact with fans in new and unusual ways, we must ask these and other challenging questions.

Although the *Twilight* Time Capsule can be interpreted as epitomizing corporate attempts to construct fan communities and archives, like fandom at large, the Time Capsule is complex and contradictory, embodying many of the issues, possibilities, and strange juxtapositions associated with convergence and fan culture. In mapping the relationships formed and articulated through the Time Capsule and in exploring some of the ways *Twilight* Saga fans have expressed themselves on the site (or remained silent), I have come to understand it as a space that needs not to be taken at face value as the go-to site for celebrating and commemorating fan experiences. The picture it takes of *Twilight* Saga fans is partial, though the way the site is rhetorically, discursively, and structurally situated ignores that partiality. The sterility and narrowness of the permitted contributions to the Time Capsule directly contradict the inevitable expansiveness and disarray—the playfulness—of fandom. The fan behaviors and activities the Time Capsule promotes include all the ardor of fandom but little or none of its critical awareness and intellectual prowess. If the *Twilight* Time Capsule is a tale of producers and fans intermingling, the moral of the tale seems to be that corporate-run interactive fan sites can never truly be for the fans alone. And, if such sites continue to grow in popularity and continue to define what it means to be a fan—here, a *Twilight* Saga fan—then some of the unique promises and potentials of fandom will become endangered.

Although fan studies scholars have worked recently to articulate the intricacies of fan culture and to identify fan and producer practices that should be more thoroughly investigated, we are still in need of “new theories of production and reception” to fully comprehend the fan-run and corporate-run texts, spaces, and practices that are becoming increasingly noticeable these days. As we continue to study the works and experiences of fans, and as rhetorically dubious sites like the *Twilight* Time Capsule grow in number, we must, in Jenkins’s words, be “attentive to the ethical dimensions by which we are generating knowledge, producing culture, and engaging in politics together.”²⁴ Specifically, we must find innovative *rhetorical* figurations, imaginaries, and frameworks to help us answer the difficult queries and manifold meanings such sites provoke. We must take a multipronged approach grounded in rhetoric—that is, in theories of persuasion, communication, and meaning making—to reveal, comprehend, and analyze the various and contradictory arguments instantiated throughout both corporate-run and fan-run fan sites. We must generate and employ new methodologies and ways of seeing that both account and allow for the rich multiplicity and frenzy of fandom, that resist singularity,

and that permit us to experience the tensions, risks, and potentials of sites like The *Twilight* Time Capsule (and fandom at large) from a range of positionalities.

NOTES

1. "Little, Brown to Publish Official 'Twilight' Guide," *Publishers Weekly*, October 6, 2010, <http://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/childrens/childrens-book-news/article/44733-little-brown-to-publish-official-twilight-guide.html>; "The Twilight Saga: *Breaking Dawn Part 2*," Box Office Mojo, <http://www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=breakingdawn2.htm>; statistics current as of February 12, 2013. Box Office Mojo updates its statistics almost every day.
2. "Twilight Time Capsule Demo Video," narrated by Nikki Reed, <http://www.twilighttimecapsule.com/>, accessed October 13, 2011; Reed plays the character Rosalie Hale.
3. For examples of early fan studies, see Henry Jenkins, *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 278; Lisa A. Lewis, ed., *Adoring Audiences: Fan Culture and Popular Media* (New York: Routledge, 1992); Constance Penley, "Feminism, Psychoanalysis, and the Study of Popular Culture," in *Cultural Studies*, ed. Lawrence Grossberg and Cary Nelson (New York: Routledge, 1992); John Fiske, "The Cultural Economy of Fandom," *Adoring Audiences*, 31.
4. For examples of this type of recent scholarship, see Rhiannon Bury, *Cyberspaces of Their Own: Female Fandoms Online* (New York: Peter Lang, 2005); Jonathan Gray, Cornel Sandvoss, and C. Lee Harrington, eds., *Fandom: Identities and Communities in a Mediated World* (New York: New York University Press, 2007); Karen Hellekson and Kristina Busse, eds., *Fan Fiction and Fan Communities in the Age of the Internet* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2006); Matt Hills, *Fan Cultures* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 7; Cornel Sandvoss, *Fans: The Mirror of Consumption* (New York: Polity Press, 2005); and Alexis Lothian, "Living in a Den of Thieves: Fan Video and Digital Challenges to Ownership," *Cinema Journal* 48, no. 4 (2009): 136.
5. Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 16, 322, 344.
6. Anna Silver, "Twilight Is Not Good for Maidens: Gender, Sexuality, and the Family in Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight* Series," *Studies in the Novel* 42, nos. 1–2 (Spring–Summer 2010): 121–38; Alexandra Owens, "Limited by Stereotypes: Gender Bias in Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight* Series," *LOGOS: A Journal of Undergraduate Research* (Fall 2011): 124–37; Deborah Mutch, "Coming Out of the Coffin: The Vampire and Transnationalism in the *Twilight* and Sookie Stackhouse Series," *Critical Survey* 23, no. 2 (2011): 75–90; and Lydia Kokkola, "Virtuous Vampires and Voluptuous Vamps: Romance Conventions Reconsidered in Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight* Series," *Children's Literature in Education* 42 (2011): 165–79.
7. Leisha Jones, "Contemporary Bildungsroman and the Prosumer Girl," *Criticism* 53, no. 3 (2011): 455, 448, 442, 453; and Sarah Summers, "'Twilight Is So Anti-Feminist That I Want to Cry': *Twilight* Fan Finding and Defining Feminism on the World Wide Web," *Computers and Composition* 27 (2010): 315–23.

8. Sonja K. Foss, *Rhetorical Criticism: Exploration and Practice*, 4th ed. (Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, 2009), 3.
9. Ibid.; "Twilight Time Capsule Demo," <http://www.twilighttimecapsule.com>.
10. Tanya R. Cochran, "Toward a Rhetoric of Scholar-Fandom" (PhD diss., Georgia State University, 2009); Rosi Braidotti, "Post Human, All Too Human: Towards a New Process of Ontology," *Theory, Culture, and Society* 23, nos. 7–8 (2006): 200.
11. Amy C. Kimme Hea, "Riding the Wave: Articulating a Critical Methodology for Web Research Practices," in *Digital Writing Research: Technologies, Methodologies, and Ethical Issues*, ed. Danielle Nicole DeVoss and Heidi A. McKee (New York: Hampton Press, 2007), 275.
12. Debra Journet, "Literate Acts in Convergence Culture: Lost as Transmedia Narrative," *Rhetoric and Technologies: New Directions in Writing and Communication*, ed. Stuart A. Selber (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2010), 198–218; "FAQ," <http://www.twilighttimecapsule.com/faq.html>, accessed October 14, 2011.
13. Karen Hellekson, "A Fannish Field of Value: Online Fan Gift Culture," *Cinema Journal* 48, no. 4 (2009): 118; for a more comprehensive discussion of Fanlib, see Fanlore, Organization for Transformative Works, "Fanlib," fanlore.org/wiki/Fanlib, accessed June 2, 2012.
14. "FAQ," *Twilight Time Capsule*, <http://www.twilighttimecapsule.com/faq.html>, accessed March 22, 2013.
15. Kimme Hea, "Riding the Wave," 269–86; Anne Frances Wysocki et al., *Writing New Media: Theory and Applications for Expanding the Teaching of Composition* (Logan: Utah State University Press, 2004).
16. Hellekson, "A Fannish Field of Value," 114, 116.
17. See, for example, Nancy Baym, *Tune In, Log On: Soaps, Fandom, and Online Community* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2000); Angelina Karpovich, "The Audience as Editor: The Role of Beta Readers in Online Fan Fiction Communities," in Hellekson and Busse, *Fan Fiction*, 171–88; and Summers, "'Twilight Is So Anti-Feminist.'"
18. Hellekson, "A Fannish Field of Value," 118.
19. "FAQ," *Twilight Time Capsule*, <http://www.twilighttimecapsule.com/faq.html>, accessed March 22, 2013; Angela Thomas, "Fan Fiction Online: Engagement, Critical Response, and Affective Play through Writing," *Australian Journal of Language and Literacy* 29 (2006): 229; Anne Kustritz, "Slashing the Romance Narrative," *Journal of American Culture* 26 (2003): 374.
20. "Contribution Guidelines," *Twilight Time Capsule*, <http://twilight.thismoment.com/guidelines.htm>, accessed October 14, 2011. The guidelines were later modified.
21. Hellekson and Busse, "Introduction: Work in Progress," in *Fan Fiction*, 10; Kustritz, "Slashing the Romance Narrative," 383; and Penley, "Feminism, Psychoanalysis, and the Study of Popular Culture," 488.
22. Lothian, "Living in a Den," 132.
23. *Twilight Time Capsule*, <http://www.twilighttimecapsule.com>, accessed February 14, 2013; Hills, *Fan Cultures*, 7.
24. Journet, "Literate Acts," 213; Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*, 294.