

The semester is over. The memo report is done and archived; now it is time to move on. The following is my next project in progress – an invited paper.  
FIRST DRAFT is in progress.

## Writing at a Moving Target: A Rhetorical Examination of Warring Narratives

... [written words] seem to talk to you as though they were intelligent, but if you ask them anything about what they say, from a desire to be instructed, they go on telling you just the same thing forever. Plato in Phaedrus

When will the ceiling be finished? Pope Julius II  
It'll be done when it is done... Michelangelo Buonarroti

### ABSTRACT

In September and October of 2004, I found myself in the crosshairs of a group of bloggers. The event generated an interesting series of exchanges that became narratives weaving into new narratives describing actions that evolved even as the narratives were written. The narratives themselves took on lives of their own, so that there were narratives about the narratives. In it all, logic was seldom a participant and fallacies were the norm. This paper is an examination of organic, written narratives found in texts that shift as fluidly as sand, and logical fallacies in these narratives used as weapons of personal destruction.

### INTRODUCTION

This past election continued more than three decades of increasingly intense animosity between two communities in America. At a narrative level, this animosity has devolved into a raging war. Even the most innocuous events are “spun” by each side into narratives that depict the other as nothing less than evil.

Recently, I examined the Killian memos with the hope of identifying the font family used to produce them. I concluded that the typeface belonged to a family of fonts called “Typewriter,” a subset of the “Slab Serif” font family, and they seemed to have been typed. I then described my reasoning in a report. The result was both amazing and painful. During a two week period in September, I received hundreds of emails, the most coherent of which accused me of fraud, charlatanism, academic misconduct and worse. Others contacted the administration at my university insisting that I be immediately fired. Then, as suddenly as it started, it stopped. The attacks appear to have been orchestrated by a fellow named Kevin Alward at a blog site called Wizbangblog.com.

This paper, however, is not about the memos or about the bloggers, it is about the arguments I saw and how, in an organic text, I was able to respond to the arguments and the bloggers were able to respond to mine. The discussion became a collection of narratives that evolved into a larger narrative. These narratives were all produced in a

dynamic and organic environment with bloggers attacking sections of my report as they were being produced and me making changes based on their attacks, with them accusing me of fraud because I rewrote around their objections. In the mean time I countered with the fact that they were looking at an organic text in progress and I could change it any way I wanted until I decided it was done and even then, it is my text and I can change it any time I wished in the future.

The arguments I saw from the bloggers were seldom logical, ranging from classic *ad hominem* arguments to personal attacks, to straw men and red herrings, and even prestidigitation, and their ultimate purpose was to poison the well. I suggest that their logical lapses are not lapses at all. They see character assignation as a tool which they store in their toolbox right next to the red herrings, prestidigitation, oft repeated lies, and other tools.

Names attached to submissions and emails are withheld as a courtesy. Copies of all citations, however, are archived at IMRL and are available for inspection if necessary.

### **MY NARRATIVE**

In September 2004, 60 Minutes released a collection of four memos allegedly written by Lt. Col. Jerry Killian. The memos suggest that while a lieutenant in the Air National Guard, President Bush had disobeyed both verbal and written orders to take a flight physical. Although most civilians see this as not very important, in the military it is a serious crime. In 1970, I was on casual duty prior to discharge, and I guarded a man who was processing out of Ft Lewis, sentenced to three years in the FT. Leavenworth prison for exactly this crime.

A large community on the Internet took great offense at the CBS accusations and began a blog attack on CBS in general and Dan Rather in particular. They found experts that proved to their satisfaction (and ultimately to the satisfaction of the media) that the memos were faked. The prevailing theory was that proportionally typed memos were improbable in 1972 and certain characters within the memos were inconsistent with typed texts. Adding to CBS's problem were revelations that the people who should have typed them had never seen them before. And even worse, the CBS source, Bill Burkett, had lied about how he came to have them – their provenance was impeached. Ultimately, on 20 September 2004, Rather announced that CBS could not prove the authenticity of the memos, and apologized for using them in his earlier report.

The case remains open, however. The authenticity of the memos remains neither proven nor disproven. Moreover, most of the allegations advanced by the experts have been shown to be untrue. One expert claimed that the capability of producing a superscript "th" did not exist when the memos were produced. IBM says that the superscript "th" is an option they offered on their typewriters of the day. Another expert said number 4 always has a bottom serif on typewriters. This is also untrue. Many experts argued that the text was proportional and that there was no such thing as proportional texts in 1972 and 1973. Others acknowledged that proportional texts were possible but expensive and unlikely to ever appear in a National Guard unit. But the Whitehouse, itself, released proportionally written texts from The Texas Air National Guard during that period. The prevailing opinion within the conservative right became that the memos were done in Times New Roman. If true, this would guarantee the memos were fraudulent. Dr. Newcomer looked closely at the kerning in the document

and concluded that it was consistent with Times New Roman (TNR) – posting his results on his personal web site. He became their expert of choice.

On the other hand, to me the documents did not look like TNR. While they were in very bad condition, they looked like the old, Army, typewriter typefaces I had seen in the past in countless documents I had typed.

When examining a site, archeologists will carefully dig through the rubble searching for artifacts that will identify the original users of the site. Few of the artifacts may be recognizable, but the archeologists look for the few artifacts that are in good enough condition to identify. A single pot shard with a bit of color is sometimes all they need. But sometimes they find a fluted blade and mammoth bones . . . . My fluted blade was the number “1.” Some of the “1’s” in the memos seem to be in excellent condition, and if they are, can only have come from a typeface in the Typewriter family. The question arises, “is this the tag that deconstructs the prevailing narrative?” Whether the memos are authentic or not, they pose an interesting problem for a quick and simple study if someone has the proper equipment. The question becomes, “are these memos done in a typeface common on typewriters?” The answer to this question leads to other questions: “if they seem to have been done in a typewriter typeface, were they typed?” and “if a close examination of the memos implies they were typed, is CBS as culpable as critics argue?” I began answering these questions as I worked on the problem. My answers are as follows: “I believe the memos are done in a typeface named “Typewriter.” “They appear to have been produced with a typewriter or daisy wheel printer.” “This the information I would have provided CBS, had they asked me.”

Beginning with the “1,” I began seeking out and replicating the best versions of each character until I had a nearly complete alphabet. Then I used the alphabet to make a comparable memo. My first replicas were done with ITC American Typewriter Condensed, but later replicas were produced by scanning and condensing text from a project report I typed in 1984.

On 15 September 2004, I began writing my report on the work done so far, making it the first draft available to my students, colleagues at ATTW and friends via the Internet. Within 48 hours I began receiving attacks from members of several conservative blog sites, with one site appearing to orchestrate the attacks. At the height of these attacks, I received scores of emails each day such the following:

No wonder you're holed up on a college campus... people in the REAL WORLD who have to deal with REALITY don't have time to teach you the basics of HONESTY. You goddamned lying piece of shit ... no tenure for YOUUUUUU!  
Bwaahaahahahah

I found myself the foolish orator who infuriated the crowds of Rome, facing an angry mob throwing rotten fruit, fecal matter and rocks at me, and demanding that my academic career be put to death.

### **ALTERNATIVE NARRATIVE**

Of course, my narrative contains my point of view, but all narratives have alternatives. From the point of view of the conservatives, I produced a half-baked report in an attempt to save the election for John Kerry which I publicized among liberals. I

failed to produce a typewriter capable of reproducing the memos. Worse, as they examined the report, it quickly seemed clear that I was “manufacturing evidence” (some of my characters which I then cut and pasted from Photoshop) even as I claimed the memos were “Typewriter.” To them, I was obviously faking my findings, and when they pointed out the “faked” materials in the document, I often corrected my content the same day. For example, at one point a blogger/hacker loaded the index of my server onto his system and downloaded all of my files. He found a PSD file where I had created a superscript “th” that subsequently appeared in my reproduction of the memo and immediately posted it as proof that I was falsifying my evidence.

And Professor, if you are reading this- and I know someone will mail it to you, I have downloaded your entire website as evidence and I saved screen caps of it, so don't bother delete it. **I also had an interesting phone call with the head of your department. You might give him a call.** (Posted on Wizbangblog.com by Paul, emph. mine, name included because I believe it to be a pseudonym).

My response was to rewrite, making it clearer that all of the characters I used were produced in PhotoShop. Furthermore, I spoke to Kenneth for the third time and explained for the third time that my work was in progress and that all of my characters were cut-and-paste, that I was attempting to replicate the characters in the memos and not produce a typewritten version (conversations he never reported to his blog community). These bloggers were looking at a work in progress – it was, indeed, half baked.

### **AS THE NARRATIVES ENTANGLED**

I would often make a statement or produce an image which I later decided was inaccurate or invalid, and I would remove it. In one case, I created a 111th in Times New Roman in very large format and compared the superscript to a 111th found in the memos. The difference was striking. The position of the TNR “th” was significantly different from the memo. The evidence seemed to prove that the “th” in the memos could not have been Times New Roman. Within hours, I received email from an editor at PC Magazine who pointed out that I was basing that analysis on mistaken assumptions.

Times New Roman positions superscripts differently depending on the number of pixels per inch in the output device. On the screen, with about 100 pixels per inch, the superscripts are relatively low on the line. On a printer, with perhaps 600 or 1200 pixels per inch, the superscript is much higher. You may want to look into this for your revised version.

I checked; he was right. In Times New Roman, a person can make the superscript any size and make it appear anywhere he or she wishes. In this case, my argument was clearly inaccurate, and I immediately removed it from my report. From the point of view of the bloggers, this was another example of me using improper cover-up tactics.

The bloggers see changes in documents, even organic documents, or documents in progress, as cover-ups, as can be seen in the quote from Wizbang.com.

**revisions** [sic]. If you read the current version of the report, the discussion below may seem confusing. The two versions of the Hailey report PDF's addressed in this post are now linked to locally archived versions of the article. To understand the context of this report is important to know what was in, and not in, the Hailey report before and after our discoveries.

The implication is that they “discovered” elements of fraud, and I covered the elements up as they disclosed them. Their attitude about change in organic documents can also be seen in one of their comments about a “Rathergate cover-up.”

Rathergate.com has proof (in the form of screenshots) that **CBS covered their tracks** on the deceptive draft story, by going back and **adding a line** to their website story that was not in the original broadcast. (emph. theirs)

But the Web components of the media change as the news changes. One commonly sees an article with a check and the word “updated” next to it. The news media sees their web sites as organic, and updating justified if corrections are necessary.

On the other hand, after issuing a retraction and apology for defaming me and the university, Wizbangblog.com removed the most damning material from their site. Later, they also removed the retraction and apology. Now the site presents their latest and completely different narrative without the defamation and without retraction and apology. (As of this date, 13 December 2004, their site has no reference to me or these narratives.)

### **NOT DAVID AGAINST THE PHILISTINES**

This was not a case of me against them. For every letter I received full of hate, I received another filled with support.

Just a note of support for your recent research efforts regarding the Texas Air National Guard memos. I, and others like me, applaud you. Don't let the benighted of this country (e.g., neocons) deter you from honest research. I hope that USU supports you in your work.

And for every “you’re a moron!” there was a “Thank God for heroes!”

Not all of the letters of support came to me. Many went to my administrators.

While the link seems quite damning, I have to confess that when I read Dr. Hailey's article, I found it quite consistent, and indeed it seems that the blogger above is the one guilty of sloppy scholarship.

Even participants in the site suggested that Wizbangblog was going overboard. A few argued that I had specifically explained how it would be possible to prove the memos were fraudulent. One was harsher toward them:

Hailey has always been scholarly, professional, courteous, and honest. You have been none of those. [This is the tenor of his statement. The exact quote has been removed from their site. I have it in hard copy, however, and will insert it here.]

But the support was not simply rhetorical. In many cases, like the PC editor, supporters began assisting me with my writing. As I wrote furiously during the worst of the attacks, Dr. Bruce Adler watched over my virtual shoulder, pointing out mechanical errors, misspellings, misplaced calls to figures and the like. A physicist explained how an examination of the original documents (even if they were photocopied) could date them. Perhaps providing support for document authenticity. Others offered hopeful and helpful advice.

Even the bloggers helped. Rather than see their attacks as damaging, I saw them as peer reviews. In fact, few of them were as harsh as some reviews I have received from my peers. When a reviewer is concerned with my statistics he or she does not usually express that concern with a rhetorical hug. They assume my argument is not valid or is weak, and I need to rewrite to make its validity apparent. I am expected to take that review into account as I rewrite. When the bloggers found my discussion of the “th” too limited, so I expanded it. When they pointed out something I had failed to cover, I covered it. When they failed to understand something, I rewrote for clarity.

Two of my professional associations also became involved – sending encouragement and letters of support for my right and capabilities for doing the research.

Most important from my point of view is the behavior of the administration of USU. Kermit Hall, President of the University, is well known on campus for his support for creativity and creative processes. He is now also well known for his unyielding support for academic freedom. In a time of limited funding for universities, my first and only meeting with upper administration concerned how to reply to the attacks, setting aside whatever funds necessary to defend me. Their first words to me as I walked into the meeting was, “This is not a trip to the woodshed,” followed by, “you realize that this is defamation of character, don’t you?” I simply cannot express how much support I received from the administration the university. And from the other faculty, I quickly learned the meaning of the Latin phrase, “Don’t let the bastards get you down.”

In the end, my report was no longer my report. It was written by a web of strangers – some supporting me, some attacking me, but all helping me write. On Friday, December 13th, Wizbangblog removed all reference to me and Haileygate from their site. I had hoped they would help me write this paper, but I guess I will have to find it elsewhere.

## **NARRATIVE TACTICS**

Narratives have genres. Except for news interviews and letters of apology and explanation to the more rational of my attackers, my genre was silence and continued work on the report. The bloggers used a narrative that goes back though history as the justification for bigotry, mass murder and hate, and based in logical fallacy. Their most common tactic is *argumentum ad hominem* and personal attack. Not content to attack the message; they insist on destroying the messenger as well.

### ***Argumentum ad Hominem***

Translated, *argumentum ad hominem* means “argue the person,” but it is commonly and accurately described as “attack the person.” In logic, “attack the person” means to attack the person within your syllogism.

A says B  
A is an ex-convict  
Therefore B is a lie.

The above is somewhat different from personal attack existing outside the syllogism. Paul's attack described in the third section above is different. It is a simple case of rhetorical battery, designed not to advance an argument but to hurt me emotionally.

A: I have stolen your files  
B: I have destroyed your career.  
C: Go talk to your boss.

*Argumentum ad hominem* and personal attack of Paul's sort pervade virtually all rhetoric in the Wizbangblog site.

***Ad hominem abusive*** means to abuse the person's character (syllogism above).  
***Ad hominem circumstantial*** involves impugning the messenger's motives.

A says B  
A is a liberal Democrat  
Therefore, B is a lie.

***Ad hominem Inverted*** means to appeal to authority.

A says B  
C says D  
C is an expert  
Therefore, B is untrue.

In this case, the bloggers at Wizbangblog.com consistently used all three.

I don't know if this guy committed [sic] fraud or not. But I do know he's not real bright. I saw this stuff about a week before wizbang posted about the flaws and I dismissed his argument in less than a minute. Its [sic] silly.

or:

Boy, if that doesn't rise to "intent to deceive" it certainly rises to "reckless disregard for the truth."

or

Contributor HAILEY, DAVID RICHMOND, UT 84333  
Occupation UTAH STATE UNIVERSITY/ASSOCIATE PRO  
Date 5/25/2004

Amount \$250  
Recipient Kerry, John

or:

As someone who has worked with type and PhotoShop professionally for more than 15 years I have to say that calling what the Nutty Professor produced and (sic) exact match is beyond ridiculous. [In this quote, the author changes my actual "close match" statement to "exact match."]

or:

I'll take a teacher from Carnegie Melon over one from Utah any time.

The only response available to the object of these attacks is to treat them like review comments and use them to improve the report.

### **DANGEIOUS ATTACKS**

More sophisticated and dangerous attacks accompanied these personal attacks. The intent of these attacks was to have me fired. The one below was to the University President

I wrote to Dr. Hailey and his chair expressing my concern that he did not disclose his financial contribution to the Kerry campaign within the article. I think this was unethical since it presents a potential conflict [sic] of interest (and thus tends to impeach Dr. Hailey's objectivity and thus his analysis).

The above writer, however, was perhaps honestly concerned. Others from the same community, were not so gentle and simply used the rawest forms of attack. The following emails were sent to my department head and the university president and represent the bulk of emails we received.

I have read the fabrications put forth by Dr. (how did that happen?) Hailey on his website. He is obviously a corrupt individual, and I am wondering why he is allowed to fabricate on behalf of USU.

And :

Dip shit:

When are you going to give up? I mean, you were caught once, and then you tried to cover your tracks . . .

Like they say, Einstein: "It's not the crime, it's the cover-up".

Hey Smitten, crack staff you have there. He must have inhaled something while in New Mexico.

Kermit - what's the next step with this blight on your institution? He's on several blogs. . .

Pack 'em up, Doofus.

Try Canada.

Administrators at USU shielded me from most of these, so I have no idea how many they received. At a strategic level their arguments were entirely *argumentum ad hominem*.

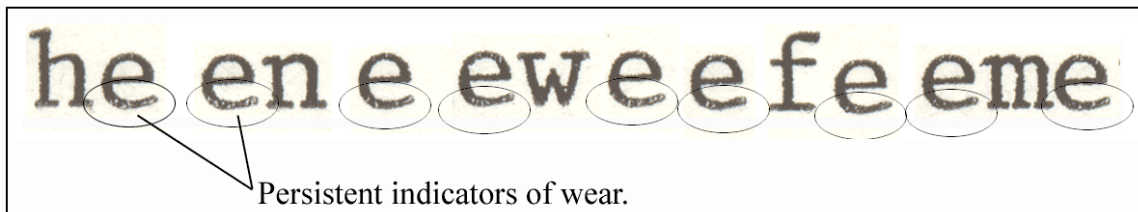
### OTHER TACTICS

Tactics directed toward my report were different. While they were. While examining my report, they used red herrings and prestidigitation. For example, in an article posted on the Internet Dr. Joseph Newcomer, President of FlounderCraft, Ltd., addresses my report at length. In the discussion, prestidigitation and red herring proves to be his tools of choice.

In one case, he examines the following images from my report. His conclusion, “but I frankly do not care to waste my time proving what is completely evident, that this piece of legerdemain has nothing to do with the actual topic under discussion. It is a poor experiment, proving nothing.”



He carefully constructs an argument that the white flecks do not appear in the same places on the “e” and so my suggestion that they represent damage is spurious. He does this without showing the first of two related figures where I expressly state that in this example “all of the “e’s” show indications of wear on the bottom stroke indicated by a weakness and inconsistency in the stroke and failure to achieve full density blackness.”



**Figure 12.** These characters are extracted from a high-resolution scan of a government letter typed with an IBM Selectric typewriter using a carbon ribbon. Note that all of the “e’s” show indications of wear on the bottom stroke indicated by a weakness and inconsistency in the stroke and failure to achieve full density blackness (cut accompanying the document).

The first image above was merely meant to show that these indications of wear are sometimes more obvious in high contrast photocopies. The other characters shown with the un-photocopied image were used to show that they did not display the same problems.

A red herring is used to direct reader attention away from the point.

Person A says  $B=CD$   
Person B says  $B=CD^*$   
Therefore A is false (or faking his results).

He combines red herring with *argumentum ad hominem* later in the discussion:

I frankly do not care to waste my time proving what is completely evident, that this piece of legerdemain has nothing to do with the actual topic under discussion. It is a poor experiment, proving nothing.”

The work he discusses, however, is not an experiment; it is an example. In the above case, his combined syllogisms are:

A says  $B=CD$   
I say  $B' \neq CD$   
I cannot see  $B=CD$   
I am a scientist.  
I declare  $B'=CD$  unworthy of my time.  
Therefore  $B'=CD$  is a fraud.

The legerdemain refers to the example in figure 12, where he simply cannot see any signs of wear. Because he cannot see the wear, I am presenting a fraudulent argument. As to the failed experiment he keeps bringing up? This is not an experiment, it is an example. In fact, I do no experiments in this project; it is a project of examination and discovery.

I call the above syllogism “Prestidigitation.” It is a term I developed to describe a red herring when a part of the process is intentional equivocation (or intentional misunderstanding) not of words but of intent. I am confident that others have a better name for this syllogism.

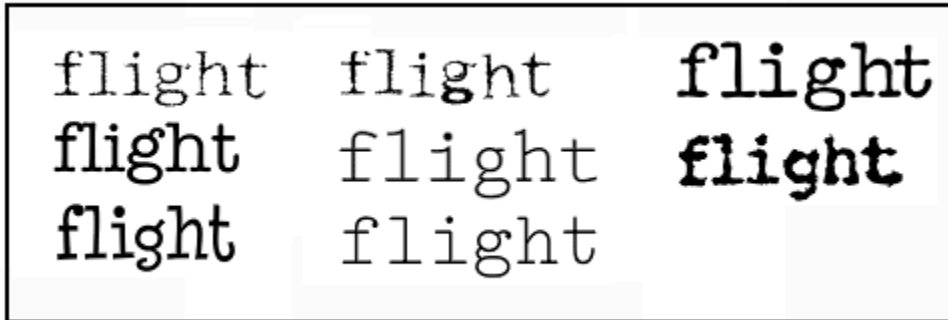
Person A says  $B=CD$   
Person B says  $B^* \neq CD$   
Therefore A is false

Application of prestidigitation occurs throughout the Newcomer’s study. For example:

He apparently shows several computer-based fonts, and the relevance of a computer-based font to anything meaningful with actual typewriter fonts in terms of demonstrating anything relevant to this issue. While he makes the claim that

certain characteristics are common across the various fonts, nothing meaningful seems to result from this comparison.

The image he refers to follows:



**Figure 8. The above provides examples of variations in Typewriter, digitized. In some cases, the examples are taken directly from antique typewriters and digitized for use on computers. The Bush memos are done in a species from this genus.**

Newcomer subtly equivocates “Typewriter” (a specialized font) to “typewriter” (term for any font on a typewriter). In the example I describe above, I am showing eight good examples of the font called “Typewriter.” By changing “Typewriter” to “typewriter” he is able to make the true claim “the relevance of a computer-based font to anything meaningful with actual typewriter fonts in terms of demonstrating anything relevant to this issue.” In doing so, he creates the following syllogism.

A says these are digital examples of “Typewriter.  
Digital examples of “typewriter” are irrelevant.  
Therefore, A is wrong.

In addition to consistently calling my examples, “experiments,” Newcomer specifically makes the claim of being a scientist, and that I have a bad hypothesis.

"for a person to begin by assuming that he is dealing with an actual typed document, and then continue with the assumption that he can successfully divine the proportions is not unlike..." Oh, never mind. A scientist actually starts with a hypothesis, which I did, performs a set of experiments to validate or refute the hypothesis, and arrive (sic) at a conclusion. I started with the hypothesis that the documents were modern forgeries; every test I could think of only confirmed this hypothesis. . . . I have seen no similar validation of Hailey's hypothesis.

In fact, his project is not experimental. Like mine it is a project of examination and discovery. “Entering such a project with the hypothesis [assumption] that the documents are modern forgeries forces the researcher to look for answers with a prejudiced mindset—just as was his approach to examining my report. Discovery should be approached with an open mind. A scientist, especially a scientist who bills himself as an experimentalist would know that. For examples of experimentation see my articles in the

Journal of Engineering Education or the Journal for the Society of Technical Communication.

The above are commonly repeated tactics in Newcomer's work, but this is not to say that his arguments are all wrong. At one point he takes me to task over a statement I made that the "t's" in the memos are always missing either top or left stroke. He was able to find a number of them that seem not to be missing either. I do not, at this point know for certain how much this undermines my argument, but I know that I need to reexamine my "t's."

He and I have different and conflicting narratives. Plato suggests that when two good men come together with different ideas, the truth is somewhere between them. I will examine Newcomer's ideas and will adjust mine somewhere toward the middle.

### **NEW NARRATIVE**

The narrative evolves and changes even now. Perhaps in response to this article, information about me is disappearing from the blog sites. On the other hand, I began receiving so many hack attacks, I had to remove virtually all information from my server. The blog sites consider themselves members of the press, and Wizbangblog.com even has a Code of Ethics and a DCMA compliance statement.

Wizbang will process notices of alleged infringement which it receives and will take appropriate actions as required by the Digital Millennium Copyright Act (the "DMCA") and other applicable intellectual property laws. Pursuant to the DMCA, notifications of claimed copyright infringement should be sent to Wizbang's Designated Agent.

Meaning that Kevin should have known that it was illegal for his posters to seize my images and other files from my site and use them on his. Yet, until today, my images were posted all over his site. It is possible that he considers himself sufficiently an investigative reporter that he can do whatever he pleases with my documents. Possibly, he uses the argument that my files were not behind my firewall, and so they were in the public domain. But stealing files from the bed of a pickup is no different from stealing files from within the cab. I can't accuse Kevin specifically of taking my files from my site (a person named Paul claims to have done it), but Kevin permitted Paul to post them on Wizbangblog.com. And he used them in articles of his own.

As for the scholarship of Newcomer, one of the things one learns with scholarly publishing is that it is illegal to capture other peoples' art and display it in your article without their permission. You will note that at no time have I used anybody else's art in this or any other of my articles. Newcomer neither seems to know this nor care about this rule. Repeated, polite requests (such as the one below) to him his colleagues to remove my art and return it have all gone unheeded.

Dear Dr. Newcomer,

I have read your discussions of my work several times and find it interesting. I also read your own report. I worry that you cannot examine the issues you examine, but you already know that.

In the end, physical evidence will win out. But then I'm prepared to accept that; it's simply part of the process.

You may have noticed that although I discussed your work obliquely, I was not so rude as to use your images.

As a patent holder, you are, I assume, familiar with the various ownership issues involved here. Unless you get my permission first, you may not display any art I have produced -- even the press is not allowed to do that. Nor may you adapt my art to your purposes. You may point to it on my site, but you have no permission to serve it from your site.

My document specifically reserves all such rights except by permission. Please remove any images you may have taken from my site from any documents (digital or otherwise) you have produced until you receive my permission to use them.

David E. Hailey, Jr., Ph.D.  
Associate Professor -- Technical Communication  
Department of English  
Utah State University

## **CONCLUSIONS**