

From the Publisher

Every once in a while, we are lucky enough to meet and work with someone who not only seems to “get” what we think we are thinking or saying, but is so gifted—and possesses so subtle and gentle an approach—that they actually improve upon our best thoughts and actualize what, in truth, we had only imagined we were trying to say. That’s what great authors and artists do. It’s also what great graphic designers do. John Svatek was such a designer.

Broadly educated and artistically accomplished, John was also a deep and creative thinker, a devoted and doggedly-patient collaborator, an efficient and effective manager and producer of results, and a cheerful “envisioner” and “revisioner” of images, graphics, and messages, of signs in general. He was, in the tradition of Roland Barthes, intellectually engaged, at the deepest level, with thinking about how meanings are made. It was, therefore, both a shock and a tragic loss when John died suddenly last September at age 49 of a brain aneurism. We mourn his death today and celebrate his life by calling attention to his great contributions to our work.

This Journal—and the National Center that sponsors it, as well as the SENCER program, which brings to life the ideals of the Center—benefitted from John’s talents. He revised this website, chose the fonts, styles, and graphics, laid out the articles all while working, as so many designers have to do, with some “givens” that he might not have chosen himself had he been able to do the design from scratch. He did this with his customary effectiveness and good humor. That wry humor emerges in the little promotional piece he did for the Journal—check out the book titles.

His vision of our Center’s SENCER work, as connected and overlapping waves of communication, you could say, is reflected in the “chop” or logo like design he chose for SENCER, when, working with his long-time collaborator and dear friend,

Marcy Dubroff, SECEIJ’s managing editor, he designed and developed the SENCER viewbook.

Our Center, this Journal and our projects have never been in a position—financially or morally—to spend much money on marketing. When given a choice on how to spend the grant or donor funds with which we have been entrusted, we have always

opted for programs and service over promotion. This has the unfortunate effect of limiting our dissemination efforts and, in some ways, making our “stuff” (website, materials, etc) look a little dated. John helped us overcome these conditions.

Conscious of our frugality but convinced of the value of what we do, John shepherded us to develop more effective and attractive materials, ones that convey our values and our purposes. He helped us become better at what we thought we were doing—and better at what we really do—than we could have without him.

Francis Bacon wrote: “...I think a painter may make a better face than ever was; but he must do it by a kind of felicity (as a musician that maketh an excellent air in music), and not by rule.” John possessed “a kind of felicity” and he helped us and many other clients “make a better face than ever was.” We shall miss him and we extend our condolences to his family and friends who were fortunate to know him longer and better than we did.

—Wm. David Burns
November 2011

