It's time to stir the pot...

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Yet another scholarly journal. Haven't we enough of them—habitats where academic minutiae quietly flourish? Volumes of vast but narrow knowledge of little practical use to most. Perhaps. Yet, the best of these types of publications have proven, in different ways and by fulfilling different roles, their usefulness to scholar and practitioner alike. Some serve as forums where all that is new relative to a specific area of thought or study is brought to light for critical examination and reflection—places where dynamic idea exchange sparks the kindling of future learning. Many function as repositories of collected wisdom—bodies of knowledge built up through slow-learned accretion. Still others endeavor to set and shape, or *re-set* and *re-shape*, the boundaries and focus of disciplinary theory and practice—forging the whats, whys and hows of scholarly investigation within and between areas of study. Moreover, with the popularization of content unfettered by the worldwide web, scholars, students, and, more recently, professionals can now access knowledge and insights through a proliferation of open access journals.

Dialectic, this journal, aspires to fulfill the dual role of provocateur and standard bearer. It seeks to occupy a place where the status quo is always in question, and to provide a forum where asking “why?” will be more fundamental and vital than asking “how?” or “what?” It will value the inquisitive and the analytical over the merely descriptive, and will foster a setting within which rigorous examination and interrogation are guided by high standards of analysis and reasoning. *Dialectic* will be an *open access* gathering place for those who wish to critically and thoughtfully propose, question, and argue about the ideas, systems and processes central to the nature of design education and practice.

Simply stated, there is much to hash out. By simultaneously being a part of *and* molding a discipline as comparatively new and fungible as

design(ing), design education has more blanks waiting to be filled in than do the educational domains of other academic and professional disciplines. One of the more prominent of these vacancies is framed by the following fundamental question: what is, or what should be, the unifying phenomenon of study for design education and research? Inherent in this query are challenges for designers that examine how we design, who we design for, and the ‘things’ we design. This begs a series of follow-on questions:

- if we so freely borrow theory and methods from other disciplines, what constitutes our unique domain of knowledge?;
- must our pedagogy merely ape design practice, so that educators are restricted to operating the classic—and still largely prevalent—atelier model, or should our approaches to teaching design evolve (and, if so, *how* and *how not*)?;
- on what basis does design education claim legitimacy within the academy (specifically, should our legitimacy be rooted in knowledge creation and dissemination, like the other scholarly disciplines, or should it arise out of service to our profession, as claimed by business or law schools)?;
- should our educational focus be on nurturing our students to effectively engage in the best practices of our industry as defined by those who practice within it, or on tipping the sacred cows now grazing in the increasingly co-opted fields of design practice.

The one trait common to all of these questions is that there exists no consensus about how to address any of them. We have yet to effectively describe, much less *attain*, any of the ‘settled matters’ that form the basis and boundaries of an established discipline and its practices.

And so...*Dialectic*. A place where those who wish to stir the pot, and perhaps add new ingredients to it, are welcomed. And, unlike academic journals in thrall to the written word as the sole standard bearer of knowledge creation and dissemination, *Dialectic*’s editors and reviewers will embrace all manner of academic expression, be they written or visual or some combination of these. The standard of scholarly inquiry *Dialectic* will endeavor to maintain will not dictate that academic expression must exist in written form alone, but, rather, that academic expression, in all of its many forms, be critically rigorous in nature.