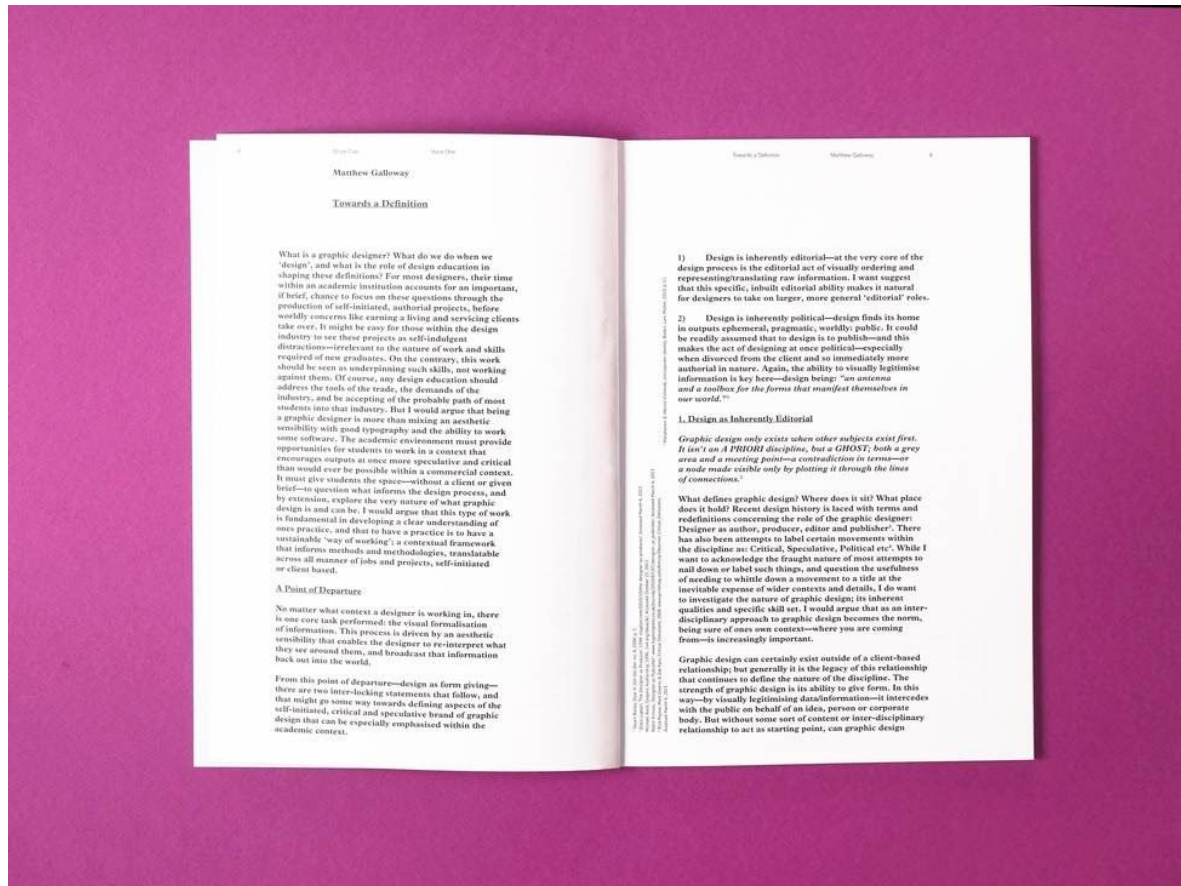


# Towards a Definition

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What is a graphic designer? What do we do when we 'design', and what is the role of design education in shaping these definitions? For most designers, their time within an academic institution accounts for an important, if brief, chance to focus on these questions through the production of self-initiated, authorial projects, before worldly concerns like earning a living and servicing clients take over. It might be easy for those within the design industry to see these projects as self-indulgent distractions—irrelevant to the nature of work and skills required of new graduates. On the contrary, this work should be seen as underpinning such skills, not working against them. Of course, any design education should address the tools of the trade, the demands of the industry, and be accepting of the probable path of most students into that industry. But I would argue that being a graphic designer is more than mixing an aesthetic sensibility with good typography and the ability to work some software. The academic environment must provide opportunities for students to work in a context that encourages outputs at once more speculative and critical than would ever be possible within a commercial context. It must give students the space—without a client or given brief—to question what