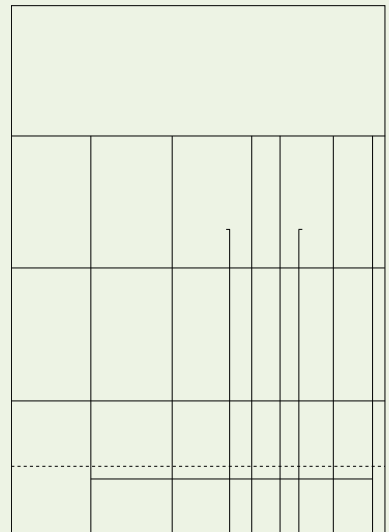


**JOSEF MÜLLER-BROCKMANN DIVIDED AND ORDERED GRAPHIC DESIGN INTO THE GRID OF SWISS TYPOGRAPHY. HE TOOK DESIGN ELEMENTS THAT WERE SUBJECTIVE, IRRATIONAL, AND CHAOTIC AND BROUGHT THEM UNDER TIGHT, MEASURED CONTROL.** He delved deep into form and content, spending his life in Zurich paring down his work to the essentials necessary for what he considered an objective—even timeless—method of communication. The grid was key to this pursuit. As Müller-Brockmann's notes in the essay at right, "Working within the grid system means submitting to laws of universal validity." He popularized the grid while spreading the principles of Swiss typography internationally through graphic design, lectures, and publications. In 1958 he founded *New Graphic*, an influential trilingual magazine promoting Swiss typography. He embodied the expansive precision of this movement. When asked about David Carson, postmodern designer and surfer, in 1996, Müller-Brockmann replied, "I don't surf, I dive."<sup>1</sup> His intense quest to achieve a universal system of communication calls to contemporary designers seeking ideal global forms for the world of new media.

<sup>1</sup> See Kerry William Purcell, *Josef Müller-Brockmann* (New York: Phaidon Press, 2006), 277.



**JOSEF MÜLLER-BROCKMANN**  
 The "musica viva" poster is built up on a grid 4.5 fields wide and 4 fields deep. The two words "musica viva" are arranged in a cross, the letters of "musica" being set at irregular intervals so that a rhythm is produced. The lines of the program in small type align with the letters

of "musica viva." In this way an impression is created of a severe but elegant architecture. Format: 128 x 90.5 cm, upright. Colors: blue-green-white.

Illustration and caption from *Grid Systems in Graphic Design* by Josef Müller-Brockmann.

# GRID AND DESIGN PHILOSOPHY

JOSEF MÜLLER-BROCKMANN | 1981

The use of the grid as an ordering system is the expression of a certain mental attitude inasmuch as it shows that the designer conceives his work in terms that are constructive and oriented to the future.

This is the expression of a professional ethos: the designer's work should have the clearly intelligible, objective, functional, and aesthetic quality of mathematical thinking.

His work should thus be a contribution to general culture and itself form part of it.

Constructivist design that is capable of analysis and reproduction can influence and enhance the taste of a society and the way it conceives forms and colors. Design that is objective, committed to the common weal, well composed, and refined constitutes the basis of democratic behavior. Constructivist design means the conversion of design laws into practical solutions. Work done systematically and in accordance with strict formal principles makes those demands for directness, intelligibility, and the integration of all factors that are also vital in sociopolitical life.

Working with the grid system means submitting to laws of universal validity.

The use of the grid system implies the will to systematize, to clarify  
the will to penetrate to the essentials, to concentrate  
the will to cultivate objectivity instead of subjectivity  
the will to rationalize the creative and technical production processes  
the will to integrate elements of color, form, and material  
the will to achieve architectural dominion over surface and space  
the will to adopt a positive, forward-looking attitude  
the recognition of the importance of education and the effect of work  
devised in a constructive and creative spirit.

Every visual creative work is a manifestation of the character of the designer. It is a reflection of his knowledge, his ability, and his mentality.