The Children's Commune
Hannes Meyer's Kinderheim in Mümliswil

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View of the Children's Home in Mümliwsil by Hannes Meyer, 1940s. Betty Stoll.
From Staatsarchiv BL, PA 6438 8.3.1.04.090.

In the village of Mümliswil, in the rural canton of Solothurn, stands one of the few built creations by Hannes Meyer: the Kinderheim, or Cooperative Children's Home. It was designed between 1937 and 1938 and was inaugurated in 1939. Despite being called a "home," it was planned as a vacation camp based on the principle of cooperative solidarity. Today, rare architecture pilgrims visit to admire this progressive social project dressed in untypical forms that combine functionalist logic and characteristic elements of modernist architecture with references to local construction culture. Even though repair work in the seventies and eighties has compromised much of the original design, the smart incorporation of the two-part volume in the Jura landscape, wooden "bridge" on pilotis, and the panoramic view from the glazed circular dining hall are all still impressive.[01]

Since 2013, the building has served as the National Memorial Site for Children in Homes and "Contract" Children (*Verdingkinder*), established by the Guido Fluri Foundation.[01] The permanent exhibition describes the tragic fate of children taken from poor families and exploited as free labor in foster families across agricultural Switzerland until the 1970s, as well as the abuse they endured in care institutions. The memorial, housed within Meyer's building, now attracts a different type of visitors to Mümliswil: victims of these forced social care measures, who finally have a place where the injustice they went through is recognized and accepted, as well as school groups on educational trips, social workers, and pedagogues.

Since 2013, a wooden sculpture by Stephan Schmidlin, titled *Weggeschaut* (Looking Away), has stood in front of the entrance. The sculpture depicts a group—a teacher, a policeman, and a nun—all turning away from a child at the center. For a Meyer-enthusiast, weary after a long trip, the sight can be disappointing: not only does the sculpture disturb the photo you want to take, but its message seems at odds with the (positive)

01 "Contract children" or "indentured child laborers" were children in Switzerland who were removed from their families by the authorities due to poverty or moral reasons and placed in foster families, often poor farmers who needed cheap labor.

intentions of the architect and his client, the cooperative. I was intrigued by the contrast between the initial project I knew and the sad reality of the museum and started wondering how the first could turn into the latter. I decided to look into the conceptual background of the Children's Home and to trace the history of its use in order to determine whether the encounter between an architecture-admirer and a traumatized victim in this shared space is a mere coincidence.

BERNHARD JAEGGI: FROM FREIDORF TO MÜMLISWIL

The idea of the Cooperative Children's Home came from Bernhard Jaeggi-Büttiker, one of the leaders of the Union of Swiss Consumer Associations (USC), and his wife Pauline Jaeggi-Büttiker. This initiative is best understood in connection to the major project of Bernhard Jaeggi and his comrades—Johann Friedrich Schär, Karl Munding, Henry Faucherre, and others—the cooperative settlement of Freidorf, in Muttenz, near Basel. Freidorf, the first "total" cooperative in Switzerland, was a radical attempt to establish an alternative economic and social order.[02] Members of the cooperative and their families could obtain a house in the settlement, which gave them significant economic benefits but also came with a very tight net of rules and obligations.[03] Residents were obliged to shop exclusively at the cooperative store using a special internal currency, participate in various tasks, and take on responsibilities like night watch duties. Through these rules and restrictions, the community aimed to emancipate its members and offer them a standard of living they could never achieve as individuals.

Education was central to this model. In the founders' vision, Freidorf's inhabitants were to transform themselves into new people who organized their lives rationally, collectively, and based on moral and ethical principles. Educational programs were intended for children, youth, and adults and were supervised by a special commission. The school followed a reformist pedagogy inspired by Johannes Pestalozzi, focusing on developing students' independent thinking, spirit, and heart, while also helping them understand the essence of the community.[04] Children had another special role. Every Friday, members were expected to contribute to a collective savings bank, and children were responsible for collecting these donations, directly involving them in both the economic and pedagogic framework.[05] During the winter months, a special Evening School initiated the younger generation with games, music, and stories. Meanwhile, groups known as the "Young Men" and "Daughters" organized classes for teenagers between 15 and 19 years of age.[06] Through these educational measures and their involvement in adult life, children and youth were to internalize the Freidorf philosophy and ensure its continuity.

In 1923, Bernhard Jaeggi founded the Cooperative Seminar, a structure formally independent from Freidorf, but which was nevertheless tightly

02 In a total cooperative, members are fully engaged in the decision-making process and equally share ownership and control. Freidorf was based on the cooperative ownership of housing and democratic principles of management, and it encouraged the participation of members in the cooperative economy through shopping for Freidorf-produced goods in the Freidorf shop.

03 Matthias Möller, *Leben in Kooperation Genossenschaftlicher Alltag in der Mustersiedlung Freidorf bei Basel (1919–1969)* (Frankfurt-New York: Campus, 2015), 78–81; Caspar Schärer, "Geld, Schulden und Kontrolle. Das Freidorfgeld und die Globalisierung," in *Das Freidorf—Die Genossenschaft Leben in einer aussergewöhnlichen Siedlung,* edited by Siedlungsgenossenschaft Freidorf (Basel: Christoph Merian Verlag, 2019), 158.

04 Möller, 104.

05 Ibid., 101.

06 Ibid., 104.

Children in Freidorf, 1940s. Berty Stoll.
From Staatsarchiv BL, PA 6438 8.3.1.01.64

linked to it. The Seminar provided education in cooperative economics taught by invited lecturers who visited Freidorf. Women could train as saleswomen and practice in the village store. The Seminar's publications opened with a picture of Pestalozzi.

In 1937, the Jaeggi-Büttikers purchased a piece of land on a hill overlooking Bernhard Jaeggi's native village, which, like much of the country, was suffering from unemployment and poverty.[07] The childless couple donated their private capital of 250,000 francs "for the foundation of a children's home to accommodate and care for children in need of rest and recuperation."[08] This institution aimed to provide cooperative members with frail children aged six to sixteen a place to spend their school vacations, benefitting from the invigorating air of the Solothurn Jura and physical activities. At the same time, "special emphasis" was to be placed "on character development in the spirit of Pestalozzi and Gotthelf."[09] Formally, the new foundation was a part of the Cooperative Seminar, even though it had nothing to do with the Seminar's primary activity. Soon after the purchase of the land, Bernhard Jaeggi turned to the architect who had worked on Freidorf about 20 years earlier—Hannes Meyer.

"B.A.A. PROFESSOR" BUILDS

In his younger years, Meyer was closely connected to the cooperative movement (notably, with Johann Friedrich Schär).[10] When working on the Freidorf project, he was a young architect at the beginning of his career, fully engaged in every aspect of the project. However, only several years after its completion, Meyer adopted a quite ironic attitude toward the social model and its architectural realization, even though he continued to live in the settlement alongside the founders. During his "ultra-modernist" phase (1925–1926), and his directorship at the Bauhaus in 1927–1930, and even later in his career, he continued to reference cooperative organization and the principle of small groups (so-called "Pestalozzi circles"), which he

07 Secretary of Union of Consumers to the Administrative Commission of USC, 18 October 1937, Kinderheim Mümliswil Collection, VSK Archiv, COOP Zentralarchiv.
08 Ibid.
09 Ibid.
10 Stephanie Savio, "The City of Janus: A Close Reading of Hannes Meyer's Freidorf," *Burning Farm*, No. 1, October 2023. https://www.burning.farm/essays/the-city-of-janus.

believed should form the foundation of a well-functioning society. In 1930, Meyer moved to the Soviet Union and returned to Switzerland in 1936 as a member of the Swiss Communist Party,[11] engaging in clandestine political activities.[12] His enthusiasm for the USSR and his radical views were met with hostility in conservative Swiss society, making it difficult for him to find work. It was during this complicated period that Meyer accepted Jaeggi's offer to design the Children's Home. By this time, he was a mature architect, a Professor of the All-Union Academy of Architecture in Moscow, signing his designs and letters as "B.A.A. Professor."

Meyer dove into the project with the passion of someone who hadn't seen any of his designs realized in seven years. He consulted experts, colleagues, and friends, paying close attention to every minor detail of the future building and even offering recommendations for future employees. The modest construction, with its limited budget, became a chance for Meyer to finally turn some of his recent theoretical thinking into reality. Before leaving Switzerland, between 1934 and 1935, Meyer had written lengthy manuscripts on the question of housing as part of the activity of the Research Department he was heading at the above-mentioned All-Union Academy. His interpretations of socialist realism in architecture were rooted in his own pre-Soviet practice but remained largely abstract and hardly illustrated with concrete examples. The drafts contain notes about the staging of the spatial experience and its psychological and ideological importance; regional crafts and vernacular traditions as crucial source for architectural creation; and the beauty of classical architecture, which he compared to music due to its masterful organization of visual and spatial rhythms.[13]

The echo of those revelations is evident in the Children's Home. For example, Meyer underlined the fact that the chosen two-wing structure had been directly borrowed from traditional farm courts in the surrounding Jura region. The wooden pilotis that support the roof over the main north entrance and the "bridge" of the sleeping wing were also understood as citations. In his correspondence with Jaeggi, Meyer repeatedly mentioned the question of proportions. In the end, the solution was found: "The staff wing (16.4 m in length) is in proportion to the children's sleeping wing (~32.8 m long) at a ratio of 2:4, and the diameter of the round hall with 8.2 m (in the window area) is in proportion to these two wings as 1:2:4, i.e. a classic solution of the building elements that will pleasantly strike any sensitive amateur."[14] Meyer's research into localism, landscape, and artistic qualities of architectural expression went in hand with the quest for a maximum efficiency of employed materials and the standardization of construction elements. Architect and architecture historian Andreas Vass highlights the "didactic" aspect of Meyer's work, noting that Meyer not only used the project to introduce the Mümliswil community to the latest achievements of the construction industry but also carefully documented every step of the process.[15]

It is interesting to see some parallels between the program of the Cooperative Children Home in Mümliswil, designed by Meyer, and the Mösli

11 Apparently, Hannes Meyer joined the Swiss Communist Party while he was still based in Moscow, in December 1935. See Karl Hofmeier (Swiss Communist Party) to Comintern (Moscow), 1936, Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History (RGASPI), fond 495, opis 274, delo 82, sheet 19.

12 Brigitte Studer, *Un Parti sous influence. Le parti communiste suisse, une section du Comintern, 1931 à 1939* (Lausanne: L'age d'homme, 1994), 681.

13 Hannes Meyer, "Überlegungen zur Organisation der Wohnung," n.d. [1934–1935], Hannes Meyer Estate, Deutsches Architekturmuseum.

14 Hannes Meyer, "Genossenschaftliches Kinderheim in Mümliswil. Raumprogramm," 11 November 1937, Hannes Meyer Collection, 164-308-012, Deutsches Architekturmuseum, p. 11.

15 Vass, 68.

View of the Children's Home in Mümliwsil by Hannes Meyer, 1939.
From Gemeindearchiv Mümliwsil.

View of the Children's Home in Mümliwsil by Hannes Meyer, 1939.
From Gemeindearchiv Mümliwsil.

House, a holiday home for children established by the Zürich branch of the youth Red Falcon Movement. Like Mümliswil, Mösli provided weakened children with a strengthening outdoor experience combined with an educational program. The Mösli House was commissioned in 1930

by Emil Roth, one of the members of the ABC group,[16] engineer of El Lissitzky's Wolkenbügel,[17] a collaborator on the pioneering Swiss Werkbund settlement Neubühl near Zürich, and a "shining socialist."[18] Funded through donations, the construction of Mösli was also a social initiative: workers were employed with the help of the Zürich Unemployment Office.[19] Described as "a piece of left-wing utopia realized," Mösli is a cubic, two-storey timber frame building, integrated into a hillside with the help of wooden *pilotis* on one side.[20] Its modest yet elegant construction in wood belongs to a number of similar Roth's creations, such as the larger Fällanden Youth Hostel (1932) and the Children's Home in Wildboden (1939).

Left: View of Mösli House in Stallikon by Emil Roth,, 1931.
From Schweizerisches Sozialarchiv, F_5024, Fd-001.
Right: Children's Home in Wildboden, Davos, by Emil Roth. Ralph Feiner.
From Köbi Gantenbein, ed., *Bauen in Davos —Ein Führer zu historischer und zeitgenössischer Architektur*, (Zurich: Hochparterre, 2018), 125.

Compared to Mösli, the Children's Home in Mümliswil features striking forms that make it stand out as a manifesto within the village landscape, despite all its "regionalizing" elements. This is largely due to Meyer's decision to create a circular hall with panoramic windows on the ground floor, with an open terrace for exercises above it. This form serves as a symbol, visible from afar, as Meyer wrote: "As the 'landmark' of this home to be built under the sign of Pestalozzi, the 'Circular Hall' will also outwardly herald the essence of this 'educational circle.'"[21] It cannot help recalling Meyer's penchant for symbolic gestures as seen in his other works: for instance, in the League of Nations project (1926, with Hans Wittwer)[22] transparency stands for democracy; the three chimneys on the façade of

16 The ABC group was a pioneering avant-garde group of architects and designers in Switzerland. It was founded in Basel in 1924 at the initiative of El Lissitzky, who was in the country at that time. Apart from the Soviet architect and designer, it united the Dutch architect Mart Stam, and Swiss architects such as Hans Schmidt, Hannes Meyer, Hans Wittwer, Paul Artaria, Emil Roth, and Werner Moser, among others. Together, they edited the journal *ABC. Beiträge zum Bauen* (Contributions to Architecture).

17 The Wolkenbügel (cloud ironer) was an architectural project developed by El Lissitzky. It a daring proposal for a series of horizontal skyscrapers in Moscow, designed to "hang" over the city like giant horizontal bridges.

18 Lorenzo Petrò, „Das Rote im Grünen," *Tages Anzeiger*, July 14, 2016, https://www.zuerich.rotefalken.ch/wp-content/files/medien/tagi%2016-07-14.JPG.

19 "Aus der Baugeschichte des Mösli," *Mösliblatt* 21 (Spring 2006): 1.

20 Schweizer Heimatschutz as quoted in "Der Heimatschutz würdigt das Mösli," *Mösliblatt* 16 (Fall 2003): 1.

21 Hannes Meyer, "Raumprogramm. 2. Fassung," 24 December 1937, Kinderheim Mümliswil Collection (VSK Archiv), COOP Zentralarchiv, page 11.

22 Hannes Meyer, "Project for the Palace of the League of Nations, Geneva, 1926–27. In collaboration with Hans Wittwer, architect," in Chaude Schnaidt, *Hannes Meyer. Bauten, Projekte und Schriften. Buildings, Projects and Writings* (Teufen AR, Switzerland: Arthur Niggli, 1965), 25.

the ADGB Trade-Union School (1928, with Hans Wittwer)[23] represented "Cooperative, Trade-Union, and Party"; and his proposal to build twin skyscrapers for the Communist Party of the USSR and the Communist International on the Red Square, connected by a bridge (Project for Greater Moscow, 1932).[24] Each time, a certain poetic symbolism is present—even if denied by the author—and is subordinated to a political message.

The terrace above the glazed circular pavilion, with the exercising children and their fit female instructor, would define the main view of the building from the old village. Back in 1919, Freidorf's visual appearance stood in stark contrast to the surrounding villages. With Meyer's help, Bernhard Jaeggi returned to his homeland and the terrain of his first experiments with cooperative unions carrying the same message: that the consumers' union not only improves living conditions but also transforms individuals.

ARCHITECTURE AS EDUCATOR

In Emil Roth's Mösli House, the main communal space is a large, pillar-free room on a ground floor, used as a dining hall as well as for various activities such as concerts and plays, gymnastics, games, and discussions. Photographs reveal how tables were grouped and moved to suit different events. This low-cost, popular institution embodies key elements of socialist education—collective organization, mutual aid, and responsible participation in household matters. On the first floor, there are two vast sleeping halls with bunkbeds for girls and boys. The underground level, created by the slope of the terrain, provides direct access to a workshop. Photographs show children and youth of different genders preparing meals in the kitchen and engaging in other types of work.[25]

Mösli House in Stallikon by Emil Roth, dormitory for children and dining hall, 1930s–1940s. From Schweizerisches Sozialarchiv, F_5035, Fc-002, F_5035, Fb-007.

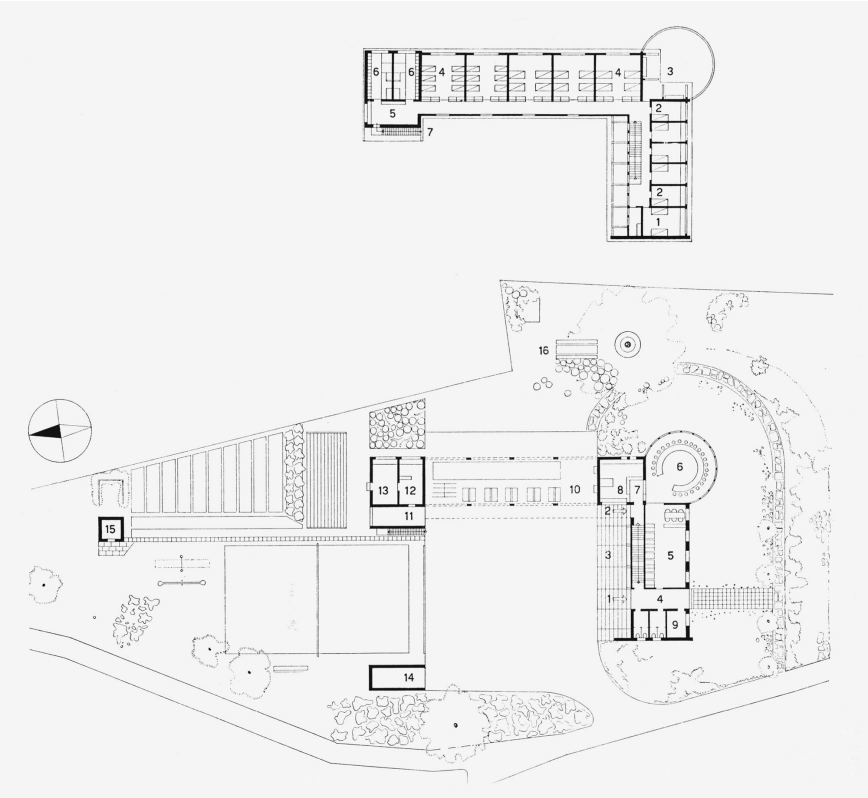
23 Winfried Nerdinger, "'Anstößiges Rot.' Hannes Meyer und der linke Baufunktionalismus—ein verdrängtes Kapitel Architekturgeschichte," in *Hannes Meyer 1889–1954: Architekt, Urbanist, Lehrer*, ed. Werner Kleinerüschkamp (Berlin: Ernst & Sohn, 1989), 21.

24 Hannes Meyer, Peer Bücking, Il'ia Geimanson, "Proekt brigady pod rukovodstvom Gannesa Meiera," June 1, 1932, Hannes Meyer Estate, Deutsches Architekturmuseum, page 7.

25 Collection F_5024, Sozialistische Arbeiterjugend Zürich, Datenbank Bild + Ton, Schweizerisches Sozialarchiv, https://www.bild-video-ton.ch/.

During discussions on the Mümliswil project, Meyer's friend, architect Paul Artaria, found the lack of participation by children in household tasks surprising and likened the building to a hotel.[26] He recommended adding a pavilion somewhere as a workshop for boys and enlarging the kitchen to educate the girls in the matter.[27] However, none of these suggestions were incorporated in the final design. In contrast, Freidorf required its inhabitants to engage in gardening and to plant fruit trees of their own and for the common good.

In the Mümliswil project, Meyer designed the landscape around the Children's Home with great precision so that it formed an integral part of the future building. While there were some vegetable beds next to the house, the majority of the space was taken by flower gardens, bushes of berries, as well as sport areas and playgrounds. No existing photos suggest that children were required to tend the vegetable beds; they were mostly represented playing in the garden. According to a 1944 inventory of objects, there are no lists of gardening tools.[28] Interestingly, when Meyer consulted the Pestalozzi-trained girls from the Freidorf school, they suggested to include this type of activity at Mümliswil.[29]



Plan of Children's Home in Mümliwsil. Ground floor: 1. Main entrance 2. Staff entrance 3.Covered Terrace 4. Entrance 5. Play room 6. Dining room 7. Ofiice 8. Kitchen 9. Management office 10. Covered play area 11. Shed for sports gear 12. Ironing room 13. Laundry 14. Garage 15. Transformer house 16. Handicrafts table in open air
First floor: 1. Guest room 2. Staff rooms 3. Terrace for morning exercice 4. Bedrooms for 4 to 6 children 7. Fire escape
From *Hannes Meyer: Bauten, Projekte und Schriften. Buildings, Projects, and Writings* (Teufen: Arthur Niggli, 1965), 77.

26 Transcript of the discussion of plans and equipment of the Children's Home in Mümliswil, 15 November 1937, p. 1–9, Kinderheim Mümliswil Collection (VSK Archiv), COOP Zentralarchiv, microfilm band 1996/019, p. 4.

27 Ibid.

28 Inventory of Children's Home in Mümliwsil, 30 June 1944, pp. 1–9, Kinderheim Mümliswil Collection (VSK Archiv), COOP Zentralarchiv, microfilm band 1996/013.

29 Hannes Meyer to Bernhard Jaeggi, 24 November 1937, Kinderheim Mümliswil Collection (VSK Archiv), COOP Zentralarchiv, microfilm band 1996/013.

Bernhard Jaeggi never explicitly detailed what Pestalozzian education would look like at the Children's Home. Even though, according to Meyer, his aim was "to plant basic cooperative ideas in new ways into the children's world," it remains more than vague.[30] Unlike Freidorf's organization, there is no mention of specific rules in programs or discussions of the Mümliswil project. One could assume that the instruction was entrusted to the hands of "mothers"—specially trained educational personnel. However, in reality, the collective of up to 25 children at the Children's Home in Mümliswil was to be supervised by just two adult educators: the *Hausleiterin* (female director) and her female assistant. The impressive list of their tasks—from correspondence, arranging repairs, and creating the menu for the week to banking and, finally, taking care of the children—appears in one of the first presentations of Meyer's work.[31] Additionally, there were two other adults: a cook and a house worker.

One gets an impression that in the absence of distinct rules or sufficient adult personnel, the education in the spirit of Pestalozzi was mostly delegated to Meyer's architecture. Unlike Jaeggi, Meyer was explicit about the educational role of his creation. First, the quality of the living conditions themselves was intended to be transformative: "hygienic and culturally progressive"[32] living, combined with food and sport, would create the physical conditions for collective life. Unlike the sleeping halls in the Mösli House, children's rooms in Mümliswil were designed with four to six beds each, individual storage spaces, and individual desks for children aged 10 to 16 (though this remained on paper).[33] The cost of boarding was relatively high, and for children from large, poor families—whose attendance was covered with donations—their first ever holiday here was an experience of luxury. Secondly, Meyer believed that the modern architecture, so different from what they were used at home, would also influence the children's minds. He emphasized that features such as the ceiling height, roof shape, and the circular hall would impress children and make them associate the spatial experience with the values of community. As Meyer put it, "Through such (discrete) arrangements, the architect supports the educator's goal."[34]

Finally, the spatial experience was intended to shape political consciousness. The circular room on the ground floor conveys the idea of equality between children and supervisors, gender equality, and the value of the collective. At its center was the circular Pestalozzi Table, designed by the architect himself and built on site by a local craftsman. When glazed doors opened, the circular room could be connected with the adjacent room, serving as a second, smaller, collective space with tables for games or work and a library. Paradoxically, the table, a fixed and immovable object, assumed a central role as the main educator.

In 1941 Meyer wrote an essay about the Children's Home for the Mexican architecture magazine *Arquitectura*. In his draft, Meyer starts with a description of the Swiss cooperative movement and, being a Communist, he notes its neutral and reformist character. What he describes below looks like his own free interpretation of the cooperative spirit. He refers to the Home as a "children commune" and a *Kindergenossenschaft* (children's cooperative)—something that does not seem to be integral either to Freidorf nor to Jaeggi.[35] According to this text, the Pestalozzi Table promotes a "democratic" sitting arrangement, thanks to which "every child-cooperator feels that he or she is an equal member of the cooperative."[36] As for the inner space in the middle of the round table, it is "an ac-

30 Hannes Meyer, "El Hogar Infantil Cooperativo en Mumliswil (Jura suizo)," [1941], Hannes Meyer Collection, 164-308-025, Deutsches Architekturmuseum, p. 2.
31 Hannes Meyer, "Baugedanken und Analyse," 13 November 1937, Kinderheim Mümliswil Collection (VSK Archiv), COOP Zentralarchiv, p. 16-17.
32 Hannes Meyer, "El Hogar Infantil Cooperativo en Mumliswil (Jura suizo)," p. 2.
33 Hannes Meyer, „Raumprogramm," p. 4.
34 Hannes Meyer, "Baugedanken und Analyse," p. 4.
35 Hannes Meyer, "El Hogar Infantil Cooperativo en Mumliswil (Jura suizo)," p. 5. In edited versions and in final publication both are put in quotation marks, and "commune" is replaced with "collective."
36 Hannes Meyer, "El Hogar Infantil Cooperativo en Mumliswil (Jura suizo)," p. 3.

tivity area for the family circle, i.e. for theatrical and musical activities, for instruction, and for self-criticism."[37] The word *Selbstkritik* (self-criticism), brings us back to Meyer's experience in the Soviet Union. In parallel to the work on the Children's Home project, he was working on a book about his time there, which begins with analysis of his own bourgeois nature and numerous other self-critical observations.[38] It is impressive to see to what point Meyer believed that children aged six and sixteen could engage in such public discussions.

Left: Children's Home in Mümliwsil by Hannes Meyer, "Pestalozzi Table," 1939.
Right: Children's Home in Mümliwsil by Hannes Meyer, Interiors, 1939.
From Gemeindearchiv Mümliwsil.

This kind of trust is evident in other elements of the spatial design as well. For example, it was common at the time to place an adult supervisor's room between the children's bedrooms, often separating the girls' rooms from that of the boys.[39] However, in Meyer's proposal, this arrangement is absent. This absence and the close proximity of girls' and boys' bathrooms raised questions among experts during discussions.[40] In this part of the building, there is no supervision—only a belief in children's mutual respect, organization, and responsibility. As Meyer said, "In this form of cooperative education, cooperative self-help, and the self-education of the child play a leading role."[41] At Freidorf, the children were surrounded by a built utopia and educated accordingly. But Mümliswil was intended for all cooperative members of the USC—420,000 people according to Meyer—and it's doubtful that those families had time to educate children in line with the cooperative ideology. Could the presence of a Pestalozzi Table, the unusual architecture, one overburdened "mother," and her assistant truly transform 25 holiday-makers into young communards?

37 Ibid.

38 Hannes Meyer, „Sovjetische Fuge. In vier Teilen mit zwei Zwischenspielen", n.d. [1936–1939], Hannes Meyer Estate, Deutsches Architekturmuseum.

39 "Richtlinien für den Bau der Erziehungsheime für Kinder und Jugendliche, Herausgegeben von Studienkommission für die Anstaltsfrage, Organ der Schweizerischen Landeskonferenz für Soziale Arbeit im Juni 1951," *Schweizerische Zeitschrift für Gemeinnützigkeit* (1951): 266–267. The separation is clearly seen in plans of houses of the Pestallozzi Village, a project closely followed by Landeskonferenz.

40 Dr. Schubiger, Cantonal Doctor of Canton Solothurn, to Sanitary department of Canton Solothurn, 20 March 1938, and F. Hüsler, Cantonal Master Builder, to the Building Department of the Canton of Solothurn, 21 February 1938, both in Kinderheim Mümliswil Collection, VSK Archiv, COOP Zentralarchiv, microfilm band 1996/013.

41 Hannes Meyer, "El Hogar Infantil Cooperativo en Mumliswil (Jura suizo)," p. 2.

Children's Home in Mümliwsil by Hannes Meyer, Sleeping Room for Children, 1939.
From Gemeindearchiv Mümliwsil.

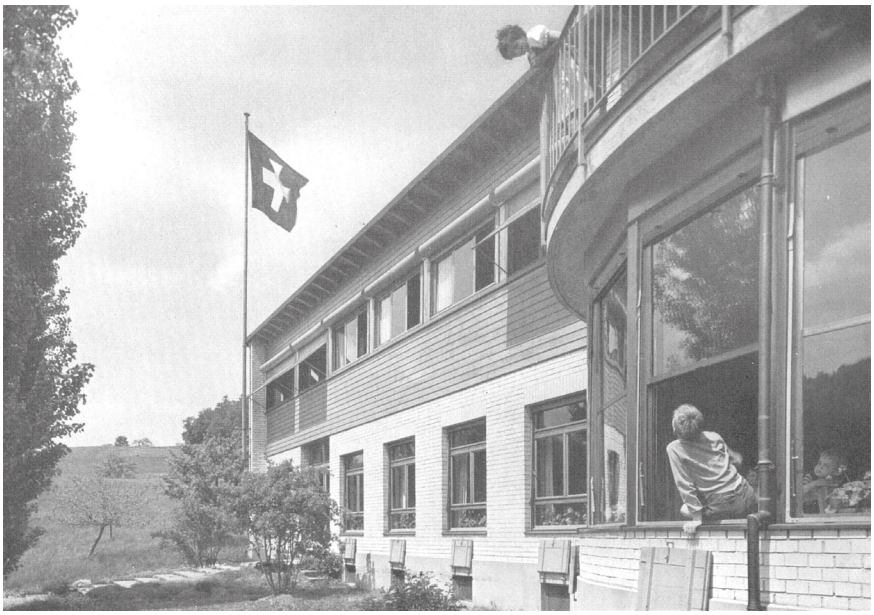
In the final paragraph of his 1941 essay, Meyer concluded that the building and its program were full of contradictions. It was not the true commune he had envisioned: "In this children's cooperative, the child can only express itself to the extent that the adult deems permissible. In other words, it is not a children's commune in which an adult plays an advisory role from afar."[42] He claimed that if such a commune were to exist, it would have had an effect on the architectural design: "If it were, the scale of all the elements of the house would have to be childlike, and the stair tread, window sill, door sash, and table height would all be childlike. Now, however, this home is under the curatorship of adults who impose their very own pedagogical and structural standards on it."[43] Meyer's phantasy of an independent children's commune—beyond mere architectural expression—itself did not seem to fit in the framework of the cooperative ideological program. This led Meyer to conclude: "Once again, this reformist building seems to prove that architecture is socially and economically bound. It stands and falls with its society."[44]

IT STANDS AND FALLS

Soon after the completion of the building, a prominent Zurich photographer, Michael Wolgensinger, came to take pictures of the Children's Home in Mümliswil. It's likely that this shoot was initiated by Meyer, and the photographs were staged according to his wishes. These are almost the only pictures that exist where we see children ruling over their Home, as imagined by Meyer. The terrace is shown in use, though there is one adult among the kids and two more on the ground observing the scene, which perhaps looked extraordinary. More of these very early shots show

42 Hannes Meyer, "El Hogar Infantil Cooperativo en Mumliswil (Jura suizo)," p. 5.
43 Hannes Meyer, "El Hogar Infantil Cooperativo en Mumliswil (Jura suizo)," pp. 5–6.
44 Hannes Meyer, "El Hogar Infantil Cooperativo en Mumliswil (Jura suizo)," p. 6.

the intended use. In all later photos, the terrace is used only by adults.[45] Witnesses confirm that educators used the terrace as a strategic area to relax but simultaneously observe and control children by play.[46] While many children enjoyed their vacations at the Children's Home, made possible through donations from members of the cooperative, this had little to do with the "children's commune." Although the Pestalozzi Table was indeed used during holidays as a stage, there is no evidence of democratic assemblies or of "self-criticism" sessions.



South View of West Wing of the Children's Home in Mümliwsil, 1940s. Michael Wolgensinger. From Hannes Meyer, "Kinderheim in Mümliswil," *Das Werk* 40 (1953): 214.

Existence at Mümliswil was far more linked to the Jaeggi-Büttiker couple, their personal motivations and their economic participation, than Freidorf or the Cooperative Seminar. From its very foundation, the financing of the Home was a concern. Although the Jaeggi-Büttiker generously donated the initial capital, its operation still depended on payments from cooperatives and individuals for each child they sent.[47] The idea of keeping prices affordable while offering decent service presented a contradiction that could perhaps only be solved through the direct intervention of founders. After Bernhard Jaeggi-Büttiker's death in 1944 and after the initial capital was used up, one had to invent new ways of bringing in money and justifying the very existence of the Children's Home. In 1948, ten years after the inauguration of the Children's Home, its director, Elsy Schumacher, wrote desperate letters the Cooperative Seminar's management to remind them of the fact that the Home was a part of their responsibility and to complain about the financial difficulties.[48]

The Children's Home was planned for school-aged children who would come during vacations, leaving little demand during the school year. To increase the number of occupants, the Home had to lower the age of admission to five years in 1940 and then to four in 1947 to fill the house during the school periods.[49] Much later, it was reported that "Miss Schumacher was able to achieve an occupancy rate of 60%, and in some cases

45 See albums of photographs assembled by educators in the collection of Gemeindearchiv Mümliswil (now in showcases inside the Memorial).
46 Huonker, 357.
47 Josef C. Haefely, "Kinderheim Geschichte Kurzfassung," undated, unpublished digital text document, Archiv der Gemeinde, Mümliswil.
48 Elsy Schumacher, Director of the Children's Home in Mümliswil, to Dr. H. Faucherre, Director of the Cooperative Seminar, 14 January 1948, Kindherheim Mümliswil Collection, VSK Archiv, COOP Zentralarchiv.
49 Genossenschaftliches Seminar (Cooperative Seminar), Annual reports 1945 and 1947, VSK Archiv, COOP Zentralarchiv.

over 70%, by accommodating children in bathtubs and staff rooms during the holiday season."[50]

In response to this complicated financial situation, the Children's Home started to systematically host children sent by the various regional institutions of administrative care—the Poor Relief Office, the School Welfare Office, the Youth Welfare Office, the Guardianship Office, etc. As extensive research in recent decades has shown, [51] For many of these "social orphans," Mümliswil could be just a stop in their journey, a waiting zone before being assigned to a family, often in a rural area.[52] Children "from marginalized social backgrounds" who simply had "to be accommodated somewhere" were forced to stay at Mümliswil, sometimes for years.[53]

Children's Home in Mümliwsil by Hannes Meyer, Sleeping Room for Children, 1939. From Gemeindearchiv Mümliwsil.

The building was in no way adapted to such situations. A 1973 report, written before the Children's Home was closed, declared that the building lacked rooms for school assignments or individual activities as well as a variety of play possibilities for different ages. During bad weather, there was practically only one common room available, and the children's bedrooms were too small.[54] The modern and light pavilion-style building could be nightmarish under these circumstances, which became an unfortunate reality for some children as early as the 1950s.

Another crucial problem was the question of education and supervision. As noted earlier, the whole institution was supposed to function through self-organization (presumably lacking), the educational power of architecture and nature, and the care of the Director and her assistant.

50 Dr. W. Kellerhals and I. V. C. Pargmann (Public relations) to Dr. R. Kohler, Director of the Coop-Schweiz, 22 June 1973, VSK Archiv, COOP Zentralarchiv.

51 See Markus Furrer, Kevin Heiniger, Thomas Huonker, et al., eds., *Fürsorge und Zwang: Fremdplatzierung von Kindern und Jugendlichen in der Schweiz 1850-1980* (Basel: Schwabe, 2014); Sara Galle, Kindswegnahmen, *Das "Hilfswerk für die Kinder der Landstrasse" der Stiftung Pro Juventute im Kontext der schweizerischen Jugendfürsorge* (Zürich: Chronos, 2016).

52 Huonker, 357.

53 Dr. W. Kellerhals and I. V. C. Pargmann (Public relations) to Dr. R. Kohler, Director of the Coop-Schweiz, 22 June 1973, Kindherheim Mümliswil Collection, VSK Archiv, COOP Zentralarchiv.

54 Ibid.

Conditions that seemed a luxury in the early 1940s could look outdated in the late 1950s, as happened in Freidorf.[55] The situation with the personnel was even more complicated: the director was underpaid and assistants precarious. In 1967, it was reported that the director, Elsy Schumacher, was the only permanent employee of the USC at the Children's Home. After 20 years of work in this position, she received a "relatively low" salary.[56] She was helped by several "daughters" aged 17 to 20,[57] who were in Mümliswil completing social internships after high school.[58]

In 1971–72, the so-called *Heimkampagne* (Homes Campaign) brought public attention to the fact that the childcare institutions in Switzerland were often run by unqualified people, underfinanced, and lacked oversight. This change in tide affected Mümliswil, too. In 1971, an intern from a school of social work and pedagogy sent a report to the COOP, complaining about "arrogant" way the Children's Home in Mümliswil was managed and also said no one in the house "had time for the children."[59] An observer from the cooperative hinted that the intern mistook the Home for an institution for young people in trouble with education or the law.[60] Since, for them, this was not the case, no special training or program was required, and the director claimed that the Children's Home was more like a family.[61]

Undeniably, the Children's Home in Mümliswil remains a happy memory for many children, but others endured unbearable situations there.[62] The hardest is to imagine the co-habitation of "holiday" guests with those for whom the Home was merely a stop in the uncertain and violent ping-ponging between administrative care institutions and foster families. One such story appears among the touching interviews in one of the cooperative's publications. A boy, aged 11, who had already lived in the Home for three years, is unable to respond to questions because all other children around him are giggling. They explain that he is the Home's main troublemaker, and the interviewer calls him "wild" and "impertinent."[63]

FROM CHILDREN'S HOME TO NATIONAL MEMORIAL

The Mösli House for socialist youth, designed by Emil Roth, still stands and accepts young visitors—although demand must not be as high as it was 90 years ago. It is supported by a network of its former residents. In contrast, the Children's Home in Mümliswil did not belong to any political or religious movement but was a part of the very distinct cooperative ideology defined by the economic conditions of pre-war Europe. Constructed in the late 1930s, the Home was built in a time when this very system was approaching its decline, giving way to an era of post-war consumerism.

In the late 1950s, the cooperative movement underwent radical changes. In Bernhard Jaeggi's schema, the liberation of individuals would come from small social units—Pestalozzi circles—that would then collaborate on a larger scale. For Jaeggi and his comrades, the moral and ethical agenda was as important, as was the economic one. However, the younger generation of the USC employees abandoned these cooperative ideals in favor of more efficient economic activity. To achieve this, smaller cooperative

55 Möller, 165

56 [Dr. H. Mühlemann], "Notiz an Dr. B. Kohler, Mitglied der Verbandsdirektion," 16 October 1967, Kindherheim Mümliswil Collection, VSK Archiv, COOP Zentralarchiv.

57 [Dr. H. Mühlemann], "Notiz an Dr. B. Kohler, Mitglied der Verbandsdirektion," 31 January 1967, Kindherheim Mümliswil Collection, VSK Archiv, COOP Zentralarchiv.

58 Josef C. Haefely, "Kinderheim Geschichte Kurzfassung."

59 Dr. H. Mühlemann, "Stellungsaufnahme," 17 February 1972, Kindherheim Mümliswil Collection, VSK Archiv, COOP Zentralarchiv.

60 Ibid.

61 Ibid.

62 Anonymous testimony, by users AnBi (19 November 2010) and vimo (16 June 2013), Historische Aufarbeiting Kinderheime Schweiz, https://kinderheime-schweiz.ch/kinderheim/mumliswil-genossenschaftliches-kinderheim.

63 Lys, "Sonnenschein für die Alten, Sonnenschein für die Jungen," [1960s], unidentified publication cutout, Archiv der Gemeinde, Mümliswil.

organizations were merged and centralized and all functions economically rationalized.[64] While Freidorf could continue to live on even without fully realizing its social agenda, and the Cooperative Seminar continued to offer training, Mümliswil was perceived as a burden. Originally conceived within a logic of cooperative solidarity rather than capitalist efficiency, the Children's Home could not adapt to the new economic priorities and was closed in 1973.

Forty years later, the building opened its doors as a National Memorial Site for Children in Homes and "Contract Children" (Verdingkinder), founded by the Guido Fluri Foundation. Guido Fluri had been one of the children "ping-ponged" through the Children's Home during the 1970s and had found the experience a painful one. His foundation acquired the building from the municipality, created a display dedicated to this tragic history nation-wide, and organized events such as a 2018 meeting attended by about 800 victims of forced social measures.[65]

The former young occupants now finally rule over the building, but not quite in the manner Hannes Meyer had envisioned. As Meyer predicted, the architecture fell victim to economic and social changes. But, tragically, with this failure, the building began to cause harm rather than educate or liberate. The Children's Home is one of the three standing buildings by Hannes Meyer, each presenting both an aesthetic and intellectual challenge. Efforts should be made to preserve and highlight its original form, but this form cannot be separated from the contradictions in its conception, as noted by the architect himself.

Among those who now come and sit at the Pestalozzi Table are the children who grew up with, if not an idea of self-criticism, then certainly a sense of criticism. Some of them admit that they can finally appreciate the beauty of the architectural project, with one noting: "The view from here is so wonderful. As a home-sick child I could not see and appreciate that view…"[66]

This essay is part of an ongoing artistic research project. If you or anyone you know stayed at the Children's Home building during any period of its history, don't hesitate to contact me at efrussi@gmail.com.

64 Möller, 152.
65 „Ein historischer Moment," July 5, 2018, https://guidofluri.ch/artikel/sommerfest-muemliswil/.
66 Theresia R., Note in the Guestbook, 2018, National Memorial Site for Children in Homes and "Contract Children," Mümliswil.

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