

The Creation of the Big Gate of Wangen

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Summary

The Big Gate of Wangen is a construction consisting of two 20 meter high brick-towers, with a bridge connecting them and an iron gate. It was built during a five year period by voluntary youngsters and asylum seekers as a youth center activity near Stuttgart. It is now the access to the youth center. People with different cultural backgrounds discussed, argued and agreed on a project reflecting the diversity of their abilities and craftsmanship. The gate is an expression of this process. The role of the architect was that of site manager, host, social worker, educator, and artist, as well as that of architect.

Résumé

Le Grand Portail de Wangen est une construction artisanale comprenant deux tours en briques d'une hauteur de 20 mètres, avec une arche les connectant et un portail en fer. Il a été construit pendant une période de 5 ans par des jeunes volontaires et des demandeurs d'asile dans le cadre des activités d'un centre de jeunes près de Stuttgart. C'est aujourd'hui le portail d'accès au centre. Des gens d'origines culturelles très différentes ont discuté, argumenté et se sont mis d'accord sur un projet reflétant la diversité de leurs habilités. Le portail est l'expression concrète de ce processus. L'architecte joua un rôle d'animateur, d'hôte, assistant social, éducateur, artiste et, bien sûr, d'architecte.

When you want to build a ship,
don't urge the men to come together,
to provide the wood, to prepare the tools,
and to give away their work,
but rather teach the men the longing for the endless wide sea.
(Antoine de Saint-Exupéry)

Of course in our case there is no ship, and no longing for the wide sea. There are, however, dreams of far away lands. All along the process, one could witness a longing for distance, for openness, for adventure, for security, for departure...



Fig. 1 The completed construction of the Big Gate of Wangen.
La construction complète du Grand Portail de Wangen.

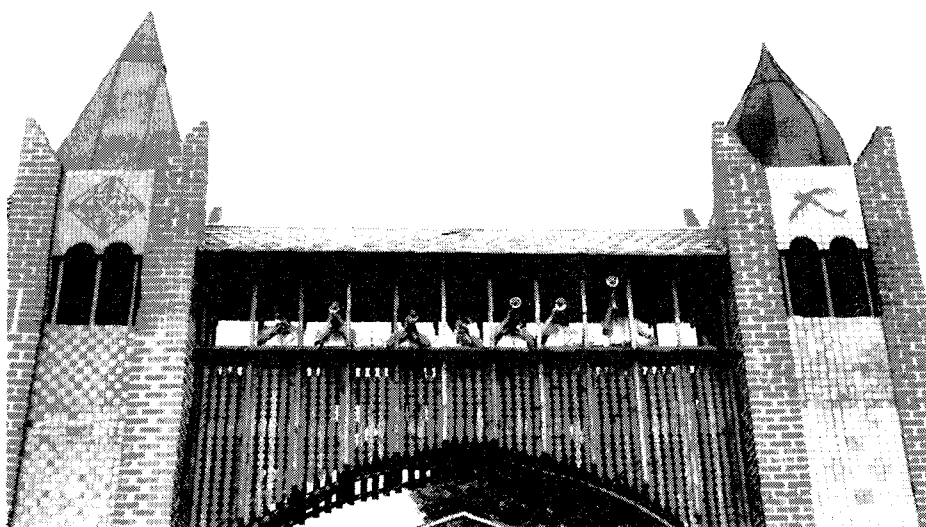


Fig. 2 Opening ceremony of the Big Gate. Details of tower ceramics.
Cérémonie d'ouverture du grand Portail. Détails des céramiques des deux tours.

In Wangen's youth centre near Stuttgart youngsters from the district meet; they are aged between 12 and 20 years. Apprentices, workers, students, together with a large number of second and third generation foreign youngsters, refugees and asylum seekers, come together here. They play, work on their problems, get bored together; they consume together and learn to live with alienation and frustration. Conflicts are experienced and endured; vehement words fall, fists are used and drugs. Youngsters are confronted with major social problems such as unemployment, dissatisfaction, drug consumption and fear of foreigners. Nevertheless there is also, sitting dormant, a flame of spontaneity and enthusiasm and a huge amount of energy.

Wangen is a suburb of Stuttgart that is known mainly for its industry and trade. It has a large vegetable market and an industrial harbour, located on the river Neckar. Nearby is also a large power station, the city slaughterhouse and a transit camp for refugees seeking asylum.

The youth centre of Wangen is a member of the Youth Centre Association of Stuttgart, which supports about 25 youth centres in the Stuttgart area. It is financed by the City of Stuttgart.

The Wangen youth centre was the first building to be financed by the association, via contributions from both the industrial and the governmental sectors.

I became site manager and, in the course of time, I have taken on the diverse roles of host, social worker, educator, artist and architect. We were given the assignment of moving into a raw building, of appropriating it, of shaping it, of furnishing it and of conquering it. In the course of interior building work, ideas arose for the design of the garden. These were given impulses and continuous energy for over seven years.

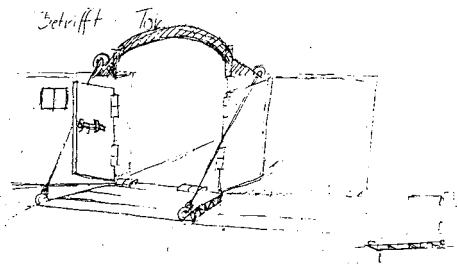
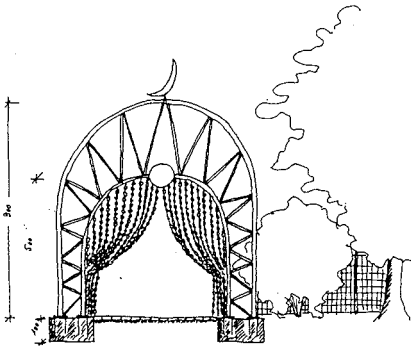
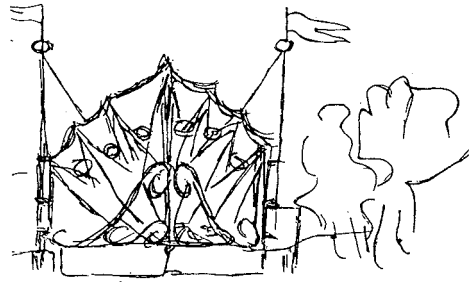


Fig. 3 Plans for the gate proposed by youngsters of the youth center.
Projets pour le portail élaborés par les jeunes du centre.

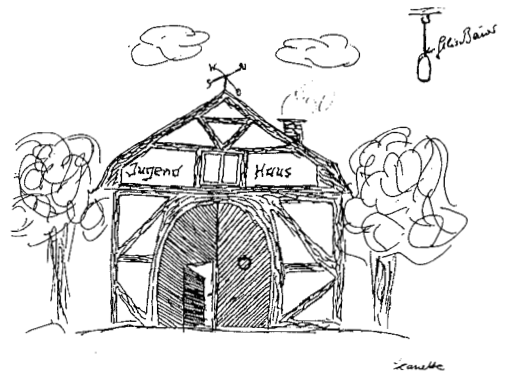
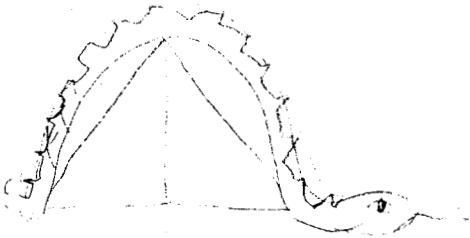
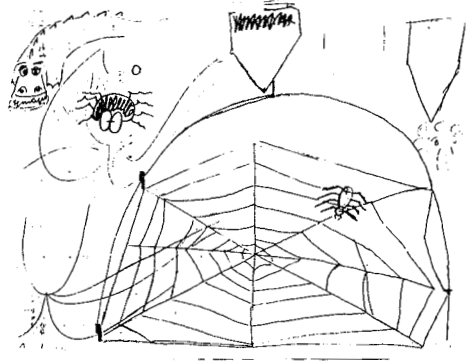
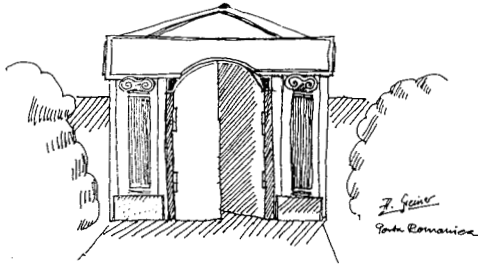


Fig. 3b Plans for the gate proposed by youngsters of the youth center.
Projets pour le portail élaborés par les jeunes du centre.

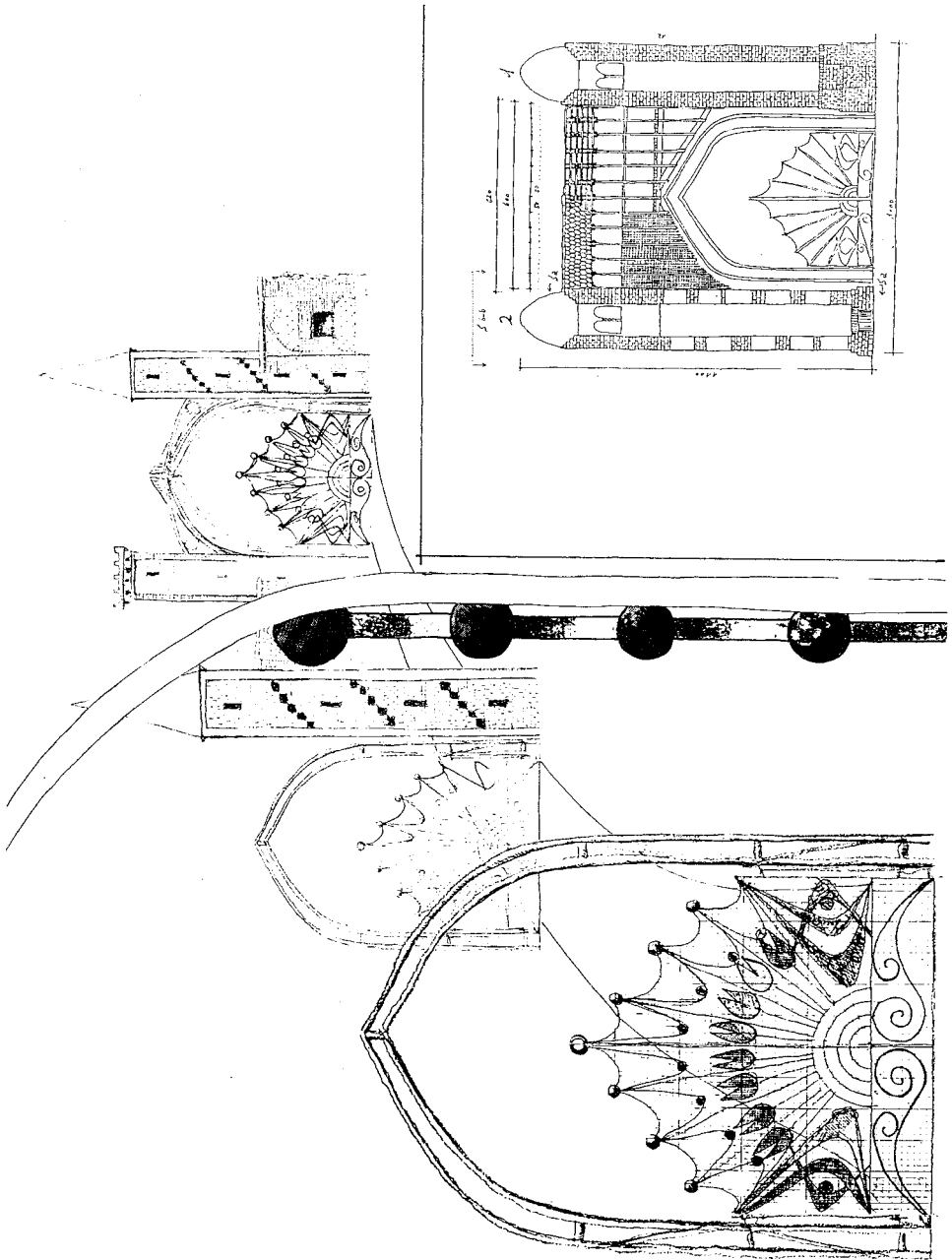


Fig. 4 Planned phases of development and architect's draft before beginning the construction of the two towers.

Les phases planifiées du développement du projet et dessin de l'architecte avant le début de la construction des deux tours.

THE BIG GATE OF WANGEN:

Construction timetable: Dec. 85 - Jan. 86: Planning
 June 86 - Sept. 86: Execution of the two-winged gate
 May 88 - Sept. 88: Completion of the towers and bridge
 Jan 90 - June 90: Sundial with Gnomon, opening ceremony

Building owner: The registred association of the youth center.
 Paulinenstr. 47, 7000 Stuttgart 1.

Architect: Wolfgang Zaumseil, Dipl.-Ing. Architect
 Stafflenbergstr. 18, 7000 Stuttgart

Collaborators: Friederike Pawlik-Zaumseil, Kindergarden-teacher
 Michel Kussl, locksmith and ceramist
 Lilo Zellner-Zipfel, welfare worker

Voluntary laborers: about 30 youngsters of the Youth center
 8 asylum seekers from Iran
 3 asylum seekers from Irak
 17 asylumseekers all over from Africa
 6 asylum seekers from several countries of Asia
 3 European asylum seekers

Workers: 7 unemployed people, paid by employment exchange

Course of activites:

- 1986
- sewing of a flag - a yellow dragon on blue ground
 - slide show, gates from all over the world
 - opening of a planning bureau
 - foundation of a newspaper, accompanying the project, called "Industrial Spying"
 - collection of drafts for the gate
 - publication of "Industrial Spying" no. 1
 - petition of planning permission
 - Tschernobyl
 - publication of "Industrial Spying" no. 2
 - construction of a locksmith's shop for building the iron gates
 - putting up the arched gate-pylons
 - beginning of the construction of one tower
 - topping out ceremony of the the two-winged gate
 - stopping of construction, because of a lack of funds
 - construction of a model made of sugar on a scale of 1:50
- 1988
- continuation of the construction
 - modification of the draft
 - construction of a kiln for the ceramics
 - modification of the tower's top
 - dismanteling of scaffolding
- 1990
- construction of a sundial
 - solemn celebration of inauguration

We took seriously our wish to create pictures from the world of fairytales, such as a dragon, an enchanted pond, a waterfall, an underground well. These dreams culminated in the building of a big entrance gate to the youth centre, which was to be bombastic, colourful and at the same time a visible expression of young strength.

In the first years of continuous work at the youth centre, our dreams grew and took shape within us. I won the trust of the boys and girls and, at the same time, was accepted by the neighbours and the local community. I then began to feel the power of this developing social organism increasing.

Youngsters want to experience their strength and to push themselves to the edge of their physical abilities; they experience their rising emotions and the fascination involved in developing their thoughts may even bring about a certain solemnity. One must look at this in the light of the harsh perception of reality they grow with. They live in the world as it is, with all of its ugliness and problems.

In this conflict-loaded complexity youngsters, while confronting themselves, have to fight, to resist fear, to flourish and stand up against the hard, inflexible adult world. A child-like spontaneous impulse to build a big gate allowed the youth in the centre to give direction to their process and to translate it into a concrete experience - at least within a limited context.

The work acts as a mirror of one's inner self and enables one to discover one's creator within. As the child develops in play, so the adult grows and develops through work, in a group or alone. Adults thus recognize who they are and at the same time develop an understanding of others. They take life into their own hands and make the world their own business. People and the environment, the individual and society, within and without, the space between the poles fills itself with life. Public space is born.

These processes were not strictly planned in the case of the Gate of Wangen. A mutual consensus about a direction, rather than detailed planning, was the point of departure. The path was to be discovered and agreed upon by all the participants. The direction became the goal. Individual dreams became challenges. The architect's role was to prepare the ground, like the farmer ploughs his field. He had to be at once a labourer, an educator, a social worker, an artist, a poet, a catalyst and he had to keep the process going.

The end product shows how much the process was influenced by the diversity of backgrounds and forces, by shared experiences, by all participants sharing with their heart and with their hands.