A new ‘Haus der Freundschaft’ as unlocker of spatial-political contention.

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This paper explores parallels between the Realpolitik of the refugee deal between the European Union and Turkey initiated by Merkel and Erdogan in 2015-2016, and the German-Ottoman alliance in 1914. In the framework of this parallelism this paper attempts to identify and describe possible relations between politics and architecture. More specifically this paper investigates how one can shed new light on a political constellation by means of Design Driven Research and motivates how an architectural design can function as ‘unlocker’ of the hidden aspects of a political contention. The research case for this design was found in the 1916 architecture competition for a ‘Haus der Freundschaft’ in Constantinople, restaged here as a fictitious competition so as to circumscribe and expose the material and ideological conditions of urban renewal processes in Istanbul in relation to the alterations in the current German-Turkish friendship.
This research case both exploits and critically questions the actual political situation, and takes into account the assumption that architectural design can function as a scalpel that dissects aspects of the urban politics in Istanbul on the one hand and the geopolitical relations between Turkey, Germany and the European Union on the other.

The presented fictitious competition proposal therefore relates to both symbolic meanings attached to contentious heritage which played a crucial role in contemporary urban politics in Istanbul and to building typologies and propaganda in the streetscapes of the city.

By using the strategy of over-identification with the monumental scale of the neo-Ottoman architectural identity the design hypothesis supposedly joins ranks with the ruling authorities and their presumed ideology. This reversal of the traditional dialectic, i.e. the sabotage of an easy interpretation of the intervention, makes this design hypothesis a subversive tool which tries to unmask connections between the neo-Ottoman built ideology and the neoliberal urban politics in Istanbul.

• Author(s) Biography (200 words each):

Bert Stoffels (b.1993) is an architect and junior researcher at KU Leuven Faculty of Architecture. His research is focused on the connection between architecture and ideology. He graduated as a Master in Explorative Architectural Design in 2016 at the KU Leuven Faculty of Architecture, Ghent. During his BSc and MSc Architecture he studied at the Yildiz Technical University in Istanbul, Turkey and at Universidad de Ibagué, Colombia. He collaborated on research projects for the Ghent-based research cell ‘the Drawing and the Space’ and worked with Alt-architectuur and URA in Belgium. Currently he is part of the Decolonizing Architecture course at the Royal Institute of Arts in Stockholm, working on the upcoming Manifesta 12 in Palermo this summer.

Thierry Lagrange (b. 1970) is an architectural engineer. He runs the ALT-architectuur architecture office. He is a lecturer and researcher at the Faculty of Architecture, KU Leuven. He is also active as a photographer. Both architecture and photography are key elements in his PhD (Look Here Now, Mapping Design Trajectories, 2013) and in his ongoing research work on analogous spaces.

Jo Van Den Berghe (b. 1961) teaches experimental architectural design at KU Leuven Faculty of Architecture, Campus Sint-Lucas Brussels/Ghent, Belgium, in the experimental Studio Anatomy. He is a researcher at KU Leuven Department of Architecture in the field of Techné and Poiesis in making architecture (the poetics of making). In his current research he is developing innovative versions of the architectural drawing as an indispensable locus between Techné and Poiesis. He is a visiting professor at Politecnico di Milano, Queen’s University Belfast, RMIT University Melbourne (campus Barcelona), and EPFL Lausanne. Jo Van Den Berghe is a reflective practitioner-architect with a critical reflective practice in Belgium since 1986.