

# Lavapolis

## Friday in Venice

Designing Contemporary Political Media

Michael Schindhelm

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# Lavapolis

## Friday in Venice

Michael Schindhelm

**0.**

## **Introduction**

**1.**

### **Where we come from: The Heterotopia Lavapolis**

Lavapolis is a fictional island, virtually located between Crete and Sicily. Its inhabitants are the pioneers of a social experiment, part of a heterotopia that simultaneously mirrors and questions the real world. This chapter provides an insight into their lives and the ever-changing conditions of their society.

**2.**

### **Friday's Search for an alternative political reality**

#### **A Travelogue**

From Strasbourg to Berlin, from Cyprus to Moscow, Friday's virtual journey across Europe culminates in Venice. The 32-year-old Lavapolis inhabitant of unknown origin keeps a travelogue of all the places he's visited, whom he met there and what he observed on the way. The ensuing chapter is a collection of his impressions.

**3.**

### **The Internet Agora as a Debate Forum**

www.lavapolis.com: an interactive forum on which to discuss an alternative future for Europe. As the moderator of this platform, Friday manages the debates on everything from climate change to unemployment. Although the debates of this chapter took place anonymously and virtually, they without doubt mirror the opinions of a politically interested community of young Europeans.

**4.**

## **Re-emerging in the physical public realm**

### **Conversations and observations inside and outside the 14th Architectural Biennale in Venice**

The transmedia story comes full circle at the 14th International Architecture Biennale in Venice. Its Monditalia section in the Corderie dell' Arsenale turns into a stage for a series of public events, all centered around topics that were discussed on www.lavapolis.com. One of these is the story of Poveglia, a real island in the Venetian lagoon that was scheduled to go to private auction. This last chapter contains the public conversations as well as essays and observations around the topics discussed.

#### **conversations**

Chus Martinez

Ippolito Pestellini Laparelli

Michalis Hadjistyllis

Giovanna Silva

Marco Ferrari

Ramak Fazel

Rem Koolhaas

The Panel

Lorenzo Pesola

Gezim Pacarizi

Olilga Milentiy

Ilka and Andreas Ruby

#### **scenes**

Applied Strollology

Applied Strollology II

#### **essays**

What became of Atlas

Europe from head to toe

Method Reenacting

Border gods

Islanding

Critical Cartography

Terra Incognita

Soaring to New Sights

Remediterraneanization

A book reports on the fictional island of Lavapolis, located in the Mediterranean, where people of today live in a parallel society. One of their inhabitants appears in reality: in the European Parliament in Strasbourg, mere weeks before the 2014 European elections. His name is Friday. In the months following he travels through Europe, recounting this journey on his website. He launches debates on whether the social conditions on the Continent can be improved. In the summer he arrives at the Architecture Biennale of Venice and there he reenacts the online debates with artists, curators, actors and activists for a live audience. Thanks to literature, theatre, video, blogging, social media, interactive design and conferences, a discourse on Europe is created between people from different generations, jobs and countries.

This publication documents the “making of” of this discourse. It describes the attempt at designing a new form of political media and offers insight into the experiences of a group of artists, actors, architects, journalists, and students (among them students from the Zurich University of the Arts and the Free University of Berlin). We have undertaken an experiment and tried to create a communication platform where people of all ages could come together to engage in a conversation about important political matters of the day. This includes discussing whether and how aspects of today’s social reality could be changed.

This book is the report of an ongoing experiment. We hope that it will encourage others to experiment as well.

**Why did we undertake this experiment?**

The current societal crisis in Europe is undermining the power of traditional methods of communication (i.e. print media, television etc.).

More and more, these outlets reach only predetermined target audiences, even though the questions they raise concern most people. These people no longer perceive themselves as a majority. Leading media outlets like the Financial Times said that the World Economic Forum had lost its exclusivity. Panel discussions and lectures, even if they included top politicians, the CEOs of corporations or of NGOs, or pop-stars, no longer have the media impact they have relied on until very recently. A growing percentage of the world’s population does not believe global leadership can provide solutions to their social problems, even though they have arrogated themselves the responsibility for doing just that.

The same Financial Times outlet insistently suggested that the World Economic Forum should follow Silicon Valley’s example. Silicon Valley is said to have established a new communication culture in which members of all classes are able to converse together in a virtual, public space. Silicon Valley created the Digital Newsroom strategy, whereby news and messages are published on popular mediums around the clock in order to market its brands. Apparently politicians and economists are now able to adapt this strategy as well. Election platforms, draft laws, investment data – all of this can now be translated into a marketing narrative.

Indeed, politicians and political media have made great efforts to

modernize their communications technologies. Political speeches are delivered and the news is staged much differently today than it was only a few years ago.

However the gap between the political class and its voters keeps growing, despite efforts to make politics more “accessible” to the public. Political establishments across the world must sense that they are gradually losing their influence and control over public opinion. Distrust is growing. Government incompetence has surely played a role in this, but the communication crisis is without doubt another cause.

When traditional forms of political mediation are no longer able to reach the majority of society (for whom they were created), a new language is needed in order to have a conversation about the dramatic changes our Western society is currently undergoing.

A major cause of the societal crisis is its growing complexity.

Public space has lost its function as a center, in which many gathered, and also as a periphery, where more or less acknowledged minorities had a physical presence.

The concept of the “network society” was invented to describe how a concentric space has turned into a confusingly coupled, multipolar landscape. Pressure groups with accidental opinions and interests have been created. Inside this community there is only accidental or temporary loyalty. Such groups try to separate themselves from the rest on the outside. Our society consists of a growing number of minorities and a dwindling majority. In order to imagine a public space as a political medium, in which these minorities are able to mingle, a different communicational culture is required. The complexity of social and technological reality calls for an equally complex communication system.

## A Narrative for the Present

**Transmediality** – the fusion of traditional and contemporary media on the one hand and the fusion of reality and fiction on the other – could offer the possibility of producing a new and equitable dialogue between the digital and the analog, the young and the old, the established and the marginalized. Traditional explanatory models, such as those used in religion, class societies or nationalism, have been exhausted. However, the absence of a comprehensive worldview has not diminished the desire for an overarching explanation for the present and its evolution.

Finding a convincing way of explaining our contemporary society depends on how we interpret the recent radical changes and developments in communication. Any candidate for a contemporary Grand Narrative would also have to be a **transmedial** narrative.

## Attempting a Design

This book reports on the attempt to begin, based on a hypothetical, experimental design, a cross-generational narrative about a contemporary artificial society. This society functions differently from ours, without differing completely from it. It is not a utopia, a non-place that can only be imagined in isolation from reality.

Diverse ideas came together on how the most important issues of our time have to be or could be addressed. No one dominates this narrative. It doesn't have an omniscient narrator. It is, however, driven by several moderators, who might contradict each other.

**In so doing, they validate the multiplicity of truth and the over-determination of social explanation. This book recorded the course of this narrative experiment and draws conclusions from the experience we have gained in the process.**

**The following chapters show how Lavapolis/Friday in Venice sets a complex and unpredictable progression of transmedial political-opinion-making into motion.**

**In the Lavapolis/Friday in Venice Project, diverse media and technologies combine in order to promote a collective speculation on the relevant issues surrounding the state of European society.**

**A project of this complexity would never have been possible without our partners. These include: the European Parliament in Strasbourg (as the location for a large scale democratic experiment); the Alfred Herrhausen Society in Berlin (as a think tank for politics in the 21st century); the Rem Koolhaas-curated Architecture Biennale in Venice (as an exploration of modernism in architecture); the television station Arte (as a European media outlet); the Center for Media and Interactivity Giessen (as a research platform on digital culture); and the center for Cultural Publishing Studies at the Zurich University for the Arts (as a leading place of cultural education).**

**An experiment such as ours replaces neither politics nor traditional forms of political discourse. Instead, Lavapolis/Friday in Venice plays with the possibilities that result from the transmediality of our time, opportunities that emerge as soon as someone asks: What if...?**

**Michael Schindhelm**



Friday · @FridayInVenice · Sep 2

**our deed sets the example for possible deeds of others. We are calling for involvement, not liberation #lavapolis**

WAVA

POLIS



# 1. Where we come from: The Heterotopia Lavapolis

Our experiment begins on an island that does not (yet) exist: LAVAPOLIS. We have undertaken the attempt to answer the question: what is possible? A look at our current media world gives the impression that Everything Is Possible. But opinions on what is desirable are divergent and confused. Some say the world should become freer, while others say it should become safer, or eco-friendlier, or more just, or more holistic. A single demand is possible to satisfy; but when they are taken together, this becomes impossible.

These sometimes antagonistic, often contradictory voices indicate an apparent or at least latent discomfort with the present. The present is experienced as an almighty power, whose unsolvable problems (climate change, overpopulation, terrorism, economic crises, poor job market, etc.) necessitate the submission to realpolitik. The future is currently viewed as an extension or even a continuation of the present. Unless a miracle happens, things will keep getting worse.



This hasn't stopped the fortunetellers from proliferating. You can now get prognoses and prophecies over the counter like medicine. The theory of probability suggests that predictions become more difficult when there are more factors involved. And certainly our living conditions are exposed to many more elements in the age of globalization and digitalization than they were only a few years ago. Optimized techniques for prediction making have not, however, matched the increase in complexity. Prophecies have shorter half-lives. They must therefore be quickly corrected in order to give way to new prophecies, and so on. The triumph of the forecaster is based on a vicious circle: uncertainty about the future increases demand for forecasters, whose ever-changing predictions increase uncertainty about the future.

The island of Lavapolis—virtually located in the Mediterranean between Crete and Sicily—is literally the starting point for our project. It is a heterotopia, a counter-place, simultaneously mirroring and interrogating the real world. The history of the island provokes a transmedial speculation on political reality, which differs from the seemingly real state of affairs, but is not completely separated from it.

Fictional reports from the inhabitants of this island have been collected and published in LAVAPOLIS (German: Matthes & Seitz; English: Sternberg Press). Thus our experiment begins with a traditional publication that has only a single author. Lavapoleans talked about the circumstances that brought them to the island and what their life is like there. Their opinions about Lavapolean society sometimes agree and sometimes disagree. In a different world they might have been enemies. But from their

very first day on the island they become part of a social project. Life on Lavapolis is different from that of present-day Europe, even though it is 2014 and the island is located in the Mediterranean. Lawmaking procedures, immigration regulation, time-keeping, and many other crucial facets of social life are subjected to the experiment.

Grass-roots democracy prevents the management of the island from getting out of hand. Although there was an autocratic ruler at the outset, the island is now on its way to an alternative democracy. The society is still incomplete. And it will stay this way, because its social contract was built on the notion that the social conditions will continuously transform.





**Simone:**

“We are the vanguard.  
Each vanguard has a common fate: it is either  
guided by a new truth or led astray by a new error.  
We won't be the ones to learn if the  
journey will be worthwhile.”



**the repetition of history. But who is listening to them? Nationalist populism is growing in France, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Italy, Greece, and the United Kingdom. Elections are imminent. Friday's journey through the fictional and the real 2014 therefore commences in the Strasbourg Parliament, mere days before the polls open in the member states.**

**There, during the European Youth Event upfront the elections, Friday, embodied by the German-Hungarian actor Gabor Biedermann, together with his author Michael Schindhelm, meets with young journalists who have traveled here from the member nations in order to talk to politicians about the issues that matter to them: youth unemployment, immigration, social justice, codetermination. Friday is there, listening, making observations. Contemplating.**

**We designed a website for Friday, our fictional activist: [www.lavapolis.com](http://www.lavapolis.com). This website contains a video collage of life on the island of Lavapolis, featuring actors from seven countries and a puppeteer. It also functions as a platform for documenting Friday's activities.**

**As of May 8, 2014, Friday has been using this platform to report on his travels through the European reality of the summer 2014. He meets a long-distance truck driver in Denmark, football fans in London and Amsterdam, a gardener on the border of Switzerland and Italy, an Afghan orphan in Monaco, a Ukrainian artist on the road in Slovakia. He makes observations and posts videos he recorded in various hotel rooms across Europe. (Since Friday speaks a foreign language, they have been subtitled in English.) The following travelogue is the result.**





Friday · @FridayInVenice · Sep 2

Dubai, Singapore or #lavapolis.  
Reasonable alternatives to the  
Western world?

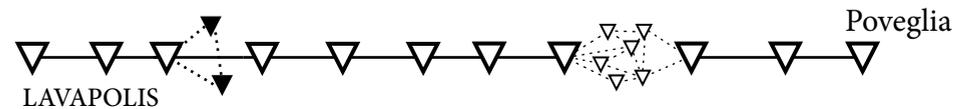
# TRAVELOGUE

Strasbourg  
8th May

## Entry 15

# POVEGLIA

45°26' 13" N  
12°19' 57" E

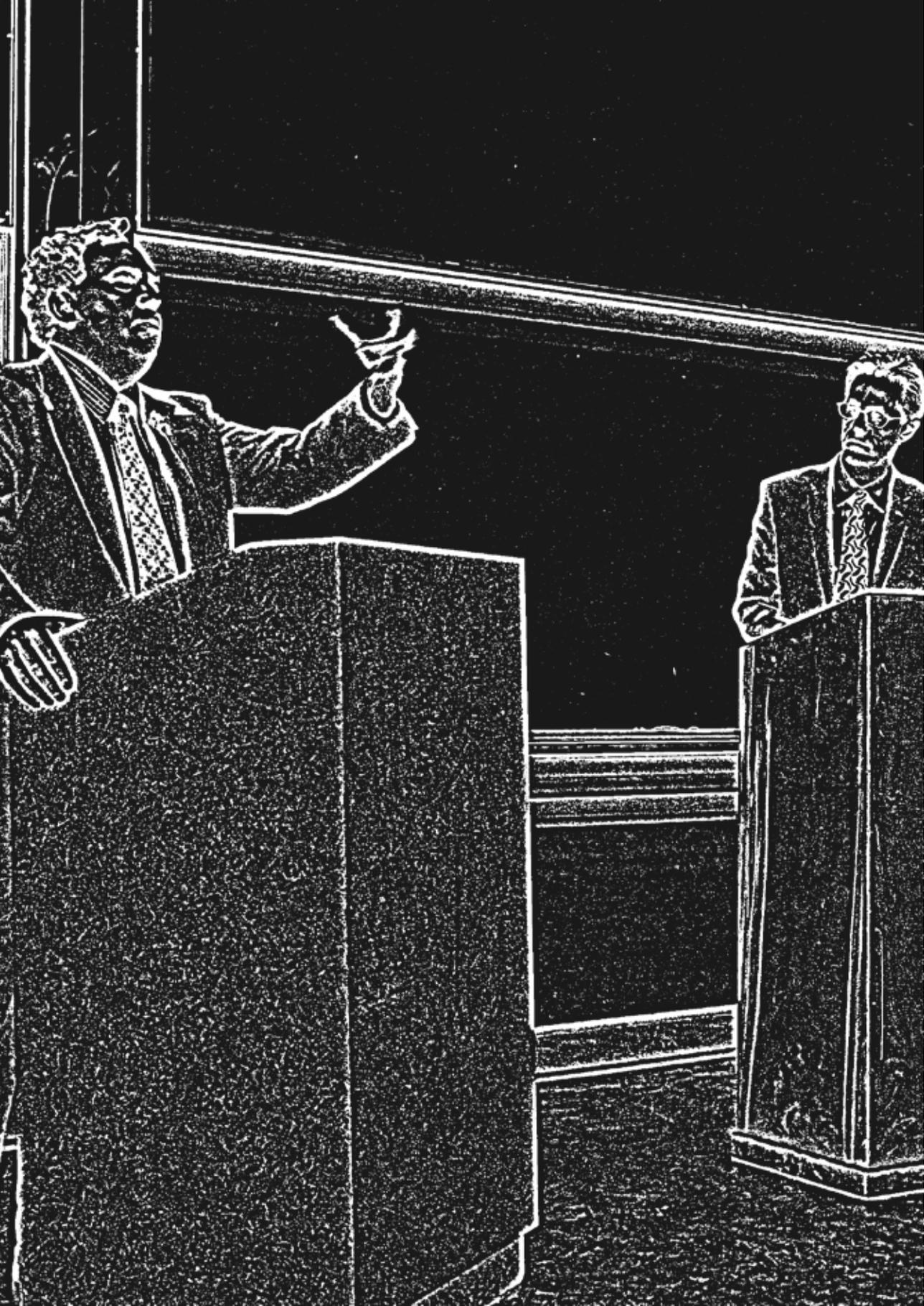


Francesca, Piero, and Lorenzo belong to an activist group called Poveglia Per Tutti. Poveglia is an abandoned island in the Venetian Lagoon and “Tutti” are around 4,000 members who support the idea of reoccupying Poveglia. The island has a long history, in which Romans, Napoleon, and even a giraffe play a part. It was also home to a quarantine station and, later, an orphanage run by a mad director. Today, the former orphanage is a ruin engulfed by a wild forest. The island is allegedly the most haunted in Europe. Francesca, Piero, and Lorenzo assure me that there are no ghosts on Poveglia; it is the Italian economic policy that is haunted, they say. The Venetian government is trying to auction off the lease for Poveglia. But the activists believe that, if privatized, the island will become just another tourist resort. They’d rather use it to create a new common ground. To reinhabit it. To start life on Poveglia from scratch. Sounds like my home island of Lavapolis. So I have invited Francesca, Piero, and Lorenzo to participate in “Friday in Venice.”



## 3. The internet Agora as a Debate Forum

[www.lavapolis.com/friday-in-venice](http://www.lavapolis.com/friday-in-venice)



In cooperation with the political forum of the Alfred Herrhausen Society in Berlin, we compiled a catalogue of issues concerning the political status of Europe.

Under the auspices of the Foreign Secretary of Germany the Alfred Herrhausen Society held a conference on May 9, 2014 called **EUROPE: DREAM AND REALITY**. Leading politicians, artists, and intellectuals from all over the world had a chance to speak there. Naturally most of them belonged to an older generation. For us—a team of transmedial storytellers (artists, actors, architects, designers and students mostly in their twenties or mid-thirties, originating from different countries, from Brazil to Israel)—the task was to translate the issues generally discussed by the political class into an easily accessible format for a younger, politically-active Internet audience, in hopes that this would motivate them to participate in the discussions.

To this end, we let Friday assume a new role: as the moderator of [www.lavapolis.com](http://www.lavapolis.com). On his journey, Friday begins to ask questions about all the various things he sees and experiences in Strasbourg, London, Berlin, Moscow and Venice. Why do young

people from Italy, Spain, and Greece leave their homes in droves to try their luck in the wealthier societies of the North? How can the Netherlands or England, say, protect itself against flooding given current forecasts of future climate change and the examples of real flood catastrophes from last spring? If Europe had its own government, should Edward Snowden lead it? Do shared European values even exist?

In fifteen debates, around one hundred participants join Friday to speculate collectively about questions like. Suggestions are made; comments and objections are posted to the debate. An interactive forum on the important issues that interest predominantly, but not exclusively, young Europeans has been created. An evaluation method, which we have implemented, allows the suggestions of the community to qualify based on the votes of all contributors. The result: a ranking of the best suggestions to remedy the problems discussed during each debate..

The foreign minister, captains of industry, important authors, and intellectuals all contributed to EUROPE: DREAM AND REALITY, which is no doubt why the media was so interested in it. Projects like Friday's debates cannot replace such a forum.

Our platform and its debates, however, served another purpose. Although [www.lavapolis.com](http://www.lavapolis.com) operates anonymously and virtually, it mirrors the opinions of a politically interested community of young Europeans. They engage, in their own way, with the issues of our time, which are otherwise almost always confined to official channels.

Only the future (and not expert forecasters) can answer the question: will this community grow?

## Debate NAVIGATOR



Vote for the  
official proposal



User Name



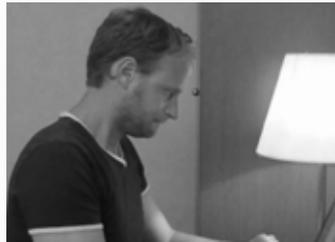
User Proposal  
Support/ Oppose




Friday's Proposal

User Response

## Friday's DEBATE LAUNCH



Debate 6

## What's the solution to the population decline in Europe?

6 official proposals      15 comments

4 community proposals      12 comments

In countries like Germany, Italy, and Spain, the population is declining by as much as 30 to 40 percent. With not enough new people being born to replace those who are ageing, these countries rely on immigrants to work and sustain the tax base. But immigration is no panacea. Germany alone would need 300 million new immigrants over the next hundred years to counterbalance this demographic trend. So are there any solutions?

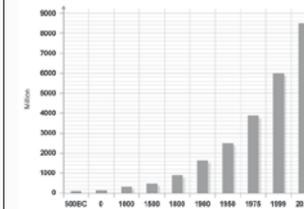
## Friday's PROPOSAL



✓ 4

### NO SOLUTION NEEDED

Overall, the world's population is still growing tremendously. National demographics have become irrelevant in a globalized world.



✓ 1

### CHINA'S AND INDIA'S BEST TALENT

This statement only tries to weaken the argument for immigration. But immigration remains the only solution. Chinese and Indian people will spread all over the planet anyway. Why not attract their best talent by offering them otherwise hard-to-get European citizenship?



✓ 0

### RETIREES ARE OUR FUTURE

All power to the retirees! People will likely live and work longer and be healthier anyway. An aging society does not necessarily mean a less powerful one

# User RESPONSE

👤 samson  
⬆️ +2 ⬇️ -1

## END OF WHAT?

There is a certain chance that we will blow up the planet during this century. I believe this is a more real danger than aging societies. But if mankind survives it will probably not survive in nations and not even in ethnicities. In the end, there will be another type of mankind. People's ancestors may have been Germans and Japanese and Americans. It will have the same meaning to them like to us the descent from Celts or Romans.

I am fine with this. But the lack of responsibility between generations is not a German, Italian or Japanese thing. It is universal. It is a result of prosperity and egotism. It will take over other countries to the moment they become wealthier. Education has to re-establish the responsibility between generations.

👤 aphta  
⬆️ +1 ⬇️ -0

How you wanna explain this to your children? Seems you don't have and neither intend to have any...

👤 noisy  
⬆️ +1 ⬇️ -0

The same loftiness. There were a lot of disasters between us and the Romans. Does this proposal imply that we have to go through more Barbarian migration? I believe that Europe needs to fix its issue with Muslims. Their integration will decide over everything.

👤 toltchok  
⬆️ +1 ⬇️ -0



👤 autobahn  
⬆️ +0 ⬇️ -0

Or the Muslims will fix the issue with Europe

👤 bic34  
⬆️ +2 ⬇️ -3

## CYBER MEN

There will be a fusion of man and machine over the next fifty years or so. The dream of philosophers will come true. Technologically more advanced societies will adopt the cybernature faster but over time here will be cybermen all over the place. Birth and death will become footnotes to the past history.



I am very much looking forward to this future. Making love with one of these guys must be fun. This is what we all dreamed of. Only a beer can is more sexy!

👤 r.cormier  
⬆️ +1 ⬇️ -0

Just silly.

👤 autobahn  
⬆️ +0 ⬇️ -0

Still sing the song of the cyber mystics? This may work in Silicon valley where people like Ray Kurzweil still enjoy an absurd admiration. In fact, we shouldn't talk about a fusion but about a handover: man hands himself over to the machine. We are already patronised by our smartphones and alarm systems etc. This will become much more so.

👤 twixy  
⬆️ +1 ⬇️ -0

I like that. Although in France (Tour Eiffel) it is not the population but the society being on decline.

👤 Serge  
⬆️ +0 ⬇️ -0

## 4. Re-emerging in the physical public realm

Conversations and observations inside and outside the 14th Architectural Biennale in Venice

Our storytelling project has run through four phases so far: First, a story about the virtual island of Lavapolis. Next, Friday, a virtual inhabitant of this island, sets out on a journey through Europe. Embodied by the German-Hungarian actor Gabor Biedermann along with his author Michael Schindhelm, he faces the questions of young European journalists at the European Youth Event held on May 8th at the European Parliament in Strasbourg. From there, he embarks on a virtual journey through various European cities, which he records on the website [www.lavapolis.com](http://www.lavapolis.com). Soon he will transition from the role of an observer to that of a moderator. Friday launches debates on important social issues around Europe. Friday arrives in the lagoon city Venice in the summer. For centuries, Venice has been a paradigm for the exchange between



cultures. Venice itself is a heterotopia. Much like Lavapolis, the place where Friday began his journey.

As part of the fifth phase, three students from the Master Course in Publishing Studies at the Zurich University of the Arts are simultaneously preparing the Friday-Special Edition for the online magazine Zollfreilager ([www.zollfreilager.net](http://www.zollfreilager.net)), a project that aims to assemble impressions and observations from the discourse surrounding Lavapolis/Friday, the Architecture Biennale, and the city of Venice.

The storytelling experiment, as well as the story Lavapolis/Friday in Venice, thus enters its final chapter. During the first stages, the project utilized different formats: book, video/theater, digital discourse and digital reportage, social media. It blurred the lines dividing fiction from reality and assembled an anonymous Internet audience to help find alternative solutions to current social problems.

Now the virtual-public and physical-public spaces will interact. Friday and the participants from our team take the stage at the 14th International Architecture Biennale in Venice.

In preparation, we set up an interactive wall display in the Monditalia section of the Biennale, the Corderie dell'Arsenale. It displays the happenings on [www.lavapolis.com](http://www.lavapolis.com) in real time. Visitors of the Biennale have the opportunity to follow Friday's travelogues, to participate in debates on-site or to comment via Twitter. Their contributions are immediately visible on the wall display.

The virtual community and the audience in Venice mingle and deal with the same topics, such as climate change, the South European brain drain, or shared European values.

Friday arrives in Venice. During the first three weekends of August 2014, the Monditalia section of the Biennale turns into a stage for a series of about thirty public events. During these events, Friday and our team of transmedial storytellers take up the topics that were until now discussed exclusively on the Internet platform [www.lavapolis.com](http://www.lavapolis.com).

Artists, curators, architects, diplomats, and Biennale-director Rem Koolhaas are invited to participate in the discussions and speculations on an alternative political reality for Europe. Occasionally the discussions on the Arsenale stage are supplemented by Skype-interventions, in which actors speak from the virtual island of Lavapolis.

Although the experimental design is fictional, we are dealing with real problems. This is most evident in our collaboration with the activist group Poveglia per Tutti.

Poveglia is a real island in the Venetian lagoon. It is an island with an eventful history, in which Tizian, Napoleon, and a quarantined giraffe played their part. Most of all, however, Poveglia is symbolic of the demise of the Italian state. The attractively located island was scheduled to go to auction in order for the state to raise funds to pay off its debts. But the movement Poveglia per Tutti (Poveglia For All) has successfully stopped the privatization process. Now the 4,000 members of the movement are looking for an alternative use for the island. Just as on Lavapolis, the speculation on the possibility of an island has now also emerged in Venice.

The Friday in Venice Events will be realized through the research of the Zollfreilager reporter team, thereby completing an experiment of transmedial, political opinion making. Such

different mediums and techniques as theater, literature, panel discussions, video, web design, reportage or participatory voting, intertwine to promote collective speculation on important issues surrounding the state of European society.

In the following chapter it all comes full circle: the research, the speculations, the debates. This chapter features the “Friday-Conversations,” the “Friday/Venice-Scenes” and the corresponding “Essays” as a complete narrative. Friday may return home and propose some of the ideas he collected on his journey to his fellow Lavapoleans. Other journeys could begin. New transmedial speculations could be created. Lavapolis may continue to live on as a heterotopia for our society.



## **Rem Koolhaas**

Venice — August 2, 2014



REM KOOLHAAS — is an architect, architectural theorist, urbanist and Professor in Practice of Architecture and Urban Design at the Graduate School of Design at Harvard University. He is the founding partner of Office for Metropolitan Architecture, Rotterdam, and has curated the 14th International Architectural Exhibition.

### **Have we learned our lesson? / “Lack of Generosity”**

MICHAEL SCHINDHELM — In the video she also quotes Malevich: “Think of a world and live in it.” The Biennale actually looks back over hundred years. Of course, we are actually forced to look at what is coming up. Do you think that it is possible to make any predictions about what is going to happen? How much have we learned from the last hundred years, so as to avoid the kind of disastrous atrocities we had in the last century?

REM KOOLHAAS — Again, I find it difficult to answer that particular question. But what I think is a characteristic of the current moment is an unbelievable lack of generosity on the part of almost any political entity. Very often vis-à-vis its own citizens—but certainly vis-à-vis almost every other kind of political system, country, or entity too. What I find moving is that, if you look at the cumulative result of this Biennale, many of sixty-six national entrants speak about very specific moments of generosity. For instance, of the Norwegians to Africa, or of the Russians to Chile. In many cases, the whole thing is actually a record of people looking with incredible interest and generosity and commitment to other cultures and other entities, and to worlds different from their own. For me, the reservoir of generosity that accumulated here—and, of course, Malevich is a kind of champion of that discipline - is still a deeply relevant form of generosity. I find it interesting that many of the curators—and I have to say that I was modally involved in their choices—focused on this generosity as an ingredient that is missing from the present moment.

### **How the Biennale helps to read the European condition today**

M.S. — I wonder how much the Biennale helps us read the European condition today.

R.K. — In a way, I deliberately didn’t want to talk about Europe in this Biennale, because I feel that it’s a personal effort to represent Europe in a different way. And I wrote myself largely out of the script of this Biennale, because I didn’t want to burden anyone with my own agenda. That said, I think that looking at Italy as a condition – Monditalia – on one hand, of an extreme and infinite promise, and, on the other, of an apparent political inability to make the most of that promise. We could call it emblematic. Emblematic for many countries and many situations at this moment. And certainly emblematic for Europe.

### **Systematic optimism**

M.S. — Today, there is a widespread view, not only in Italy, but across the entire West, that things are going down the drain. And yet we are also witnessing an enormous explosion of creativity and vibrancy.



Friday · @FridayInVenice · Aug 16

Whether or not a #monarchy is the most promising political form, at #lavapolis we are proud we haven't shed any blood.

R.K. — Even if I did think that things were going down the drain, I would never admit it. Because I think that systematic optimism is the only viable position, even if, at certain times, this means being very naïve. Many things are decaying, but I think that you can also see in this apparent decay—and Monditalia is a very interesting example—many signs of new beginnings.

#### Italy/Lagos

M.S. — What makes architecture different in African countries?

R.K. — You can see how the profession of architecture is changing and becoming richer in terms of what architects can do. I also think that there are similarities between what I observed when I first went to Africa—I went to Lagos—and Italy. What I saw in Lagos was that the near-absence of government actually seemed to stimulate an enormous amount of initiative on the

part of the citizens. Italy is in a vaguely similar position. Of course, there is too much government here. But the effect is, paradoxically, relatively similar. A kind of paralysis. The population as a whole—and I emphatically include all of the immigrants—is obviously creating new forms and possibilities.

#### How is the Biennale still contemporary/ how does it represent its countries?

M.S. — Still, the Biennale is organized by national representation. To what extent is this contemporary and legitimate at a time when architecture is viewed as something transnational or universal?

R.K. — I'm very skeptical that architecture can be universal. Therefore our emphasis on the retrospective—rather than on the contemporary or the futuristic—was intended to document specific qualities and specific issues that are inherent to each country's history and which have largely defined the uniqueness of each country. In the beginning, it was a way to provoke those who suggested that the last century had seen the erasure of national qualities in favor of some kind of global language. In this Biennale, there has been no erasure of any national features. It is actually a symphony of national features. It's amazing that something as apparently monolithic and simplistic as modernization actually fractured into so many absolutely divergent and unique fragments.

#### Architecture can express values and the intentions of others

M.S. — But what is driving architecture if not super-egos?

R.K. — Of course, it's difficult to generalize. But if you look at all these histories together, you see that there is a certain expectation that architecture should express values. It depends very much on who mobilizes architecture to express their values. Is it the state? Is it a political system? Is it an individual? Is it someone with good intentions or somebody with bad intentions? It seems very, very clear that architecture is capable of articulating and expressing intentions in a compelling way. This is both the beauty and the weakness of architecture. Whose intentions is the architect expressing? The intentions of others, or their own? It is always a back and forth between the two and the result is inevitably a kind of combination of the two. But looking at these sixty-six hundred-year-histories, I would say that by far the most dominant role that architecture has played is the expression of the intentions of others.

## Border gods

Daniela Bär

The codenames for German military operations conducted in the European Theater of World War II still sound oddly meaningful today. *Polar Bear* and *Leopard* landed on Greece; *Cyclamen* never made it from the planning stages to Albania; *Sea Lion* was only created to apply pressure; *Silver Fox* split into *Polar Fox* and *Platinum Fox* during deployment in Finland. Alongside zoology, Greek mythology, with its gods, demigods and heroes, was also a popular source for codenames: *Hercules*, *Mercury*, *Theseus*.

*Frontex*, an EU institution devoted to the protection of Europe's borders from trafficking, terrorism, and illegal immigration, also makes use of Greek mythology. Here the names refer primarily to areas of deployment: *Hera* stands for the West African coast; *Poseidon* rules the eastern Mediterranean; *Hermes* goes into action along the Sicilian coast. In their research project *Post-Frontier*, architects Pietro Pagliaro and Giacomo Cantoni call the latter one of Europe's most important outer borders. Their project, showcased at the Venice Architecture Biennale 2014, approaches the issue of how borders are perceived.

Three perspectives – *Frontex's* institutional view, that of various photojournalists, and that of the architects – are set against each other. Pagliaro and Cantoni's model unites "frontier-related places": places of border experiences all around the Mediterranean, an ensemble of different realities, all of which are witnesses to or symbols of the fact that there is always an inside and an outside. Here the Frontex Tower in Warsaw rises next to the administrative district of Trapani in Sicily; the Turkish-Bulgarian customs booth stands next to the Malta airport. An oppressive audio collage combines sirens, airport buzz, locks clicking into place and cries for help. You can't tell if the sounds represent fleeing to or fleeing from.

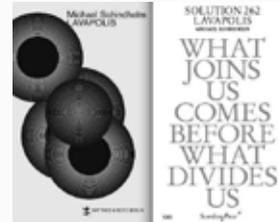
Even though most of refugees, legal or illegal, come to Europe by air, sea crossings receive the most media attention. Ana Dana Beros' Biennale project *Intermundia* relates, by means of a book and an installation, the role of the island Lampedusa in the context of the Mediterranean refugee movement. Operation Hermes 2011 plays a part in this story. Frontex agents were stationed on Lampedusa in order to question and identify North African refugees who had multiplied in the aftermath of the Arab Spring. At first, *Hermes* seems understandable: as the tutelary deity of travelers, refugees would certainly fall within his jurisdiction. But if one were to examine all the roles played by the messenger of the gods, one would come across images of the utmost cruelty: As the son of Zeus, Hermes played the role of a lawmaker only if he delivered the gods' messages to the dying and ultimately lead the deceased to the underworld.

The *Frontex* example also shows that, in the case of contemporary refugee policies, using mythology as a source for inspiration is a problem of semantics: designations are never just a part of a tradition of name-giving, they always stir up connotative dust. This all too quickly turns the name of an operation into a statement about that operation. While the mythological associations of the *Frontex* operations appear cynical, the term does reveal an important objective of this operation, otherwise hidden. The coordination of the return of refugees to Tunisia bear a comparison with the sealing off of Europe—impenetrably *cum sigillo hermetis*.

Sources:  
- *Post-Frontier* and *Intermundia* were two of 42 projects displayed in the *Monditalia* exhibition.

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the transmedia storytelling project Friday in Venice by the following team:

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<b>Sound</b>	Max Bauer
<b>3D surrounding</b>	FettFilm
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