

Foundations, Principles and Inspirational Resources of **Integral Politics**



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7. Hanzi Freinacht: Metamodern Politics

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Chapter 7

Hanzi Freinacht: Metamodern Politics

A third approach that, inspired by Integral Theory, provides itself rich inspiration to integral politics is Hanzi Freinacht's concept of Metamodern Politics. In a series of so far two books published with Metamoderna in 2017 and 2019, a publishing house founded especially for this purpose, two authors writing under the pseudonym of Hanzi are undertaking the first systematic attempt of creatively translating integral insight and wisdom into a comprehensive, theory based vision for politics and society. Taking up inspirations from a number of sources of integral and likeminded thinking and from recent post-postmodern intellectual debates, they are framing their message in a way that aims to be more accessible to an academic audience than integral theory itself.

Biographical notes and contextualization

The fictional character Hanzi Freinacht is a pseudonym used by two Scandinavian co-authors, the Swedish sociologist Daniel Görtz and the Danish historian and philosopher Emil Ejner Friis. Both of them have a solid background in integral theory and a long record of political activism based on integral thinking (see my [review of the first Hanzi book in Integral Review; Fein, 2020](#)).

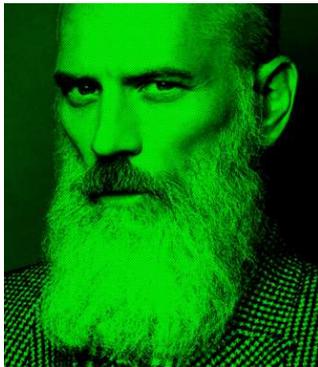
However, living in Copenhagen and Lund respectively, they found it extremely difficult to “land” integral ideas in the Nordic societies' discourse, dominated by late and post-modern thinking and value systems. As we know from Graves (see chapter 3), the latter have a hard time accepting, let alone embracing integral ideas, especially when it comes to functional hierarchies based on vertical growth and development in individuals and societies. Therefore, the Hanzi team decided that a new framing was needed in order to get the necessary attention and support for their ideas.

Moreover, “Hanzi” also criticizes “integral” for coming across as too “woo-woo” spiritual, without enough of a solid, read: academic basis – which might be a reference to Wilber's not having completed any postgraduate academic degrees, his reluctance to frame his work in any “proper” disciplinary way and to discuss it in academic contexts altogether – and therefore, his not being taken seriously in academic circles. This is the shortcoming that “metamodern” tries to heal.



Daniel and Emil, for their part, did work their ways through the academic system, not without suffering through the tensions and limitations any integrally informed person is bound to experience when trying to get a less-than-integral system to give them credit for visionary ideas that clearly go beyond the boundaries of what is commonly accepted there as “canonical” theory. Daniel Görtz went the whole way until a [PhD in sociology](#) at the university of Lund, focusing on the role of ethnicity in the work of Swedish police officers. After some internal struggles, he decided to use a mainstream approach in his dissertation, thereby proving to himself and the system that he was able to “play by post-modern academic rules and values”.

Yet, after completion, it was clear that he was done with this system. After spending three months with the co-founder of the Model of Hierarchical Complexity, Michael L. Commons in the US, Daniel took the opportunity to take a whole year off to work on his lifetime project together with his friend Emil: a more timely interpretation of “integral” that would zoom in on its implications for politics and society. As he was offered to spend this writing sabbatical in the generous chalet of a friend and mentor in the Swiss canton of Vaud, the two co-authors came to invent the ironic persona of Hanzi Freinacht. Their introduction of “Hanzi” as a philosopher residing “in the French-speaking part of the Swiss Alps, living (...) a quiet and contemplative life, alone in a big house, but (...) driven by a tempered fiery zeal for revolution” hence somehow portrays Daniel’s life during the writing sabbatical (apart from the latter’s long, daily zoom calls with his girlfriend), as well as both of their political aspirations.



“Hanzi”’s photo equally plagiarises a real person, alluding to the Swiss cultural “institution” of Johanna Spyri’s Alpöhi. It actually shows [Paul Mason, also known as “fashion Santa”](#) who apparently authorized free copies of his picture to be used. So, as the [Integral Europe Conference \(IEC\) 2020’s conference website](#) ironically states: “Hanzi is born at the crossroads of fact and fiction, part scholar, part guru, part joker, part revolutionary activist, part calm reformist. He lives and breathes between and beyond the disciplines, a thousand voices crisscrossing in his mind, oscillating between tormented confusion and blissful clarity.”

Indeed, as to the deeper motivations of Hanzi’s metamodernism, some aspects of the model layed out in his books can also be explained by Daniel’s own inner journey. This is particularly the case for Hanzi’s comparatively strong focus on subjective states and depth (“My friend, I write this from a subtle longing of my heart”, p. 6).

Part of the reason why Daniel and Emil decided to publish their books under a pseudonym supposedly was, first, to somehow go beyond a common reflex of mainstream publishing and academia, namely to claim praise for individual work. Instead, the author(s) suggest that transcending certain natural impulses of the ego is an important feature of the to-come meta-modern phase and stage of societal development. Also, “Hanzi” seems to make it easier for them to ride their attack against the green meme mainstream, a confrontation that purposefully transgresses the usual moral boundaries of academic politeness and respect time and again (see Fein, 2020).

Since the publication of *The Listening Society* (TLS, 2017) and *Nordic Ideology* (NI, 2019), Hanzi’s Nordic School of Metamodernism, as it came to be called, has started to build up a considerable community of readers and (predominantly male) followers. The two authors have set up a Facebook profile and discussion forum where they not only regularly share thoughts and ideas from the (so far) two books, but are also commenting current politics from a metamodern perspective.

For the time being, they earn their living in more or less regular jobs, but are increasingly successful in raising funds and being offered paid consulting, teaching and research work based on their metamodern approach. With the two initiators still in their early forties, a solid theoretical basis in place and an increasingly thriving community gathering around their ideas, metamodernism can be

expected to gain increasing influence in the years to come. At the same time, its practical implementation remains to be observed.

Summary Box: Key concepts, claims and elements of Metamodern Politics

* Metamodern Politics as proposed in the books of Hanzi Freinacht (a pseudonym used by Daniel Görtz and Emil Ejner Friis) is work in progress, combining integral theory with metamodern philosophy. It also identifies as “the Nordic School of Metamodernism.”

* Main publications: “**The Listening Society**” (2017) and “**Nordic Ideology**” (2019)

* Aims at transcending and “outcompeting” our current democratic and capitalist systems through personal development and psychological growth, to be supported and scaled by politics and society.

* **Core concepts:** individual cognitive development (as of Piaget, Commons/Model of Hierarchical Complexity), cultural code (as of Graves/Spiral Dynamics), subjective state and psychological depth.

* Metamodern Politics suggests a “Master Pattern” of six new political forms (policies) which, carefully woven together, would constitute a balanced equilibrium of a more holistic, listening society.

* **The six forms of Metamodern Politics:**

- **1. Democratization Politics:** aims to widen and deepen the quality of democratic participation throughout society in view of a more “listening society” that truly hears and considers the needs and perspectives of its citizens.

- **2. Gemeinschaft Politics:** aims to rebuild connection, trust and mutual support between citizens in their everyday lives and as a precondition for deepening democracy.

- **3. Existential Politics:** addresses our deepest questions of meaning and purpose and our existential relationship with reality and turns them into shared concerns_worth public attention and political support, thereby reconnecting us with our roots and visions.

- **4. Emancipation Politics:** aims to address and counter the inevitable, new subtle forms of oppression that emerge in the course of an increasing “intimacy of control” as our societies develop.

- **5. Empirical Politics:** aims at raising the level of conscious awareness and critical thinking within society, thus enabling it to intersubjectively cross-check, verify and empirically test the knowledge that is used as a basis for public decision-making.

- **6. Politics of Theory:** aims at formulating a new, more complex metamodern theory and narrative as a basis for reframing how we see and interpret what is going on in the world.

* New kinds of Ministries should be in charge of developing, implementing and promoting each of these new policies with the necessary power and resources.

* **Practical implementation** is envisioned through a “metamodern aristocracy” (i.e. community of practitioners) and a “process oriented party”, seeding and spreading the metamodern virus throughout society and facilitating cross-sectoral and transpartisan dialogues about the future of politics.

Essentials of Metamodern Politics

The Nordic School of Metamodernism, which we present here, is currently emerging based on Hanzi Freinacht's book series "A Metamodern Guide to Politics". Different from other streams and schools of metamodernism, it has its focus on transforming politics and society based on integral thinking and ideas. At the same time, it refrains from referring to these ideas as "integral", and rather frames them as "metamodern" instead. This term implies a cultural phase, structure of consciousness or mindset that transcends and includes post-modernism, as well as all other previous structures as described by the developmental models we have already discussed in chapters 2, 3 and 4.

Hanzi's vision of politics is so far laid down in "**The Listening society**" (TLS, 2017) and "**Nordic Ideology**" (NI, 2019), with more volumes announced to come. TLS starts by spelling out metamodern politics' vision of going beyond the systems that we know in all areas, essentially through "personal development and psychological growth". It wants nothing less but to "outcompete liberal democracy as a political system, outcompete all of the political parties and their ideologies, outcompete capitalism as an economic system, and outcompete and replace our current welfare system" (Freinacht, 2017: 3f). Therefore, it dedicates considerable space to spelling out, first, why and how it thinks that personal happiness is a matter of personal growth that should be supported by society and politics. Second, Hanzi fleshes out how stage theories are essential tools for mapping and supporting personal and cultural growth and development. As to the former, he puts a particular focus on **cognitive development**, represented by Michael Commons' Model of Hierarchical Complexity (MHC), while for the latter, he stays with Graves' stages which he reframes as "**cultural code**". In addition to these two dimensions (upper and lower left quadrants in Wilber's model), Hanzi also adds two dimensions of his own: **subjective state** and **depth**, by which he means "a person's intimate, embodied acquaintance with (a range of, EF) subjective states" (ibid.: 281). Added up, he claims, these four dimensions could build a new category and indicator of overall development which he calls the "effective value meme (evm)".

In Hanzi's second book, **Nordic Ideology**, the tone changes, from polemic to constructive ("the last book was written for enemies; this one is for friends"; Freinacht, 2019: 11), and the focus shifts more directly towards the actual vision of metamodern politics and steps to implement it. In his own words: "TLS was broadly about developmental *psychology*, this one is about developmental *sociology*", ibid: 1f., my italics). *Nordic Ideology* spells out a set of **six new policies** designed to politically support individual and collective development, growth and depth. These are the *Politics of Democratization*, *Gemeinschaft Politics*, *Existential Politics*, *Emancipation Politics*, *Empirical Politics* and *Politics of Theory*. Together they form a "Master Pattern" that constitutes the main pillar of metamodern politics. Due to the interrelated and reciprocally balancing nature of the six forms, Hanzi frames this Master Pattern as a metamodern version of Montesquieu's separation of powers ("Montesquieu 2.0").

From integral to metamodern

Since Hanzi's approach to politics is not framed as "integral", but "metamodern", let us start with a brief consideration of the term and of Hanzi's uses of it.

The term “metamodern” was originally coined by the Dutch art scholars Timotheus Vermelen and Robin van der Akker who used it to describe a new trend of “pragmatic idealism” in arts already two decades ago. They define it as both a product of and a reaction to postmodernism, embracing “doubt, as well as hope and melancholy, **sincerity and irony**, affect and apathy, the personal and the political, technology and techne.” (Levin, 2012). On this basis, Hanzi adds more specific meaning to the term, in particular that of a developmental stage and related philosophy, with the aim of making the concept attractive and accessible to the social sciences and political practice (see Fein, 2020: 2).

Note that in this chapter, we exclusively refer to the “Nordic School of Metamodernism” represented by Hanzi Freinacht’s books and related publications. According to Adrian Wagner, it is only one of at least four different strands, movements or schools of metamodernism that have started to differentiate and can be identified so far (Wagner, 2022). Besides the Nordic School, Wagner distinguishes the Dutch, Mystic and Black Forest schools of metamodernism, focusing on the “cultural between”, the “spiritual beyond” and a more embodied “underneath” respectively.

Hanzi Freinacht and the Nordic School propose three different definitions of metamodernism in his first book, TLS, namely:

- a cultural phase,
- a developmental stage, and
- a philosophical paradigm (Freinacht, 2017, p. 362f.).

The Metamoderna website that is hosting Hanzi’s blog and forum, offers the summary quoted in box 1. Still more detail and terminological fine-tuning can be found in the appendix of TLS, where Hanzi presents a condensed version of his conception of the metamodern paradigm (ibid.: 363 ff.).

As to metamodern’s specific self-presentation in the summary box, a few aspects stick out. First, it closely links metamodernism to the age of the internet and the social media – trends which have heavily shaped the generation of the two Hanzi authors.

Second, compared to integral, it is striking that modern and postmodern philosophies are the main –

Box 1:

Metamodern philosophy enters the scene only once **the Internet and the social media** have become truly dominant factors in people’s lives and when many of us no longer partake directly in the production and distribution of industrial goods. It is a worldview which **combines the modern faith in progress with the postmodern critique**. What you get then, is a view of reality in which people are on a long, **complex developmental journey** towards greater complexity and existential depth. The metamodern philosophy is a whole world of ideas and suppositions that are counter-intuitive to modern and postmodern people alike. But since both the modern and postmodern philosophies are increasingly outdated, these metamodern ideas are set to develop, take hold, and spread. One day, they may become as dominant as the modern philosophy is today.

Metamodern ideas

- * How can we reap the best parts of the other two [modernism and post-modernism, E.F.]?
- * Can we create better processes for personal development?
- * Can we recreate the processes by which society is governed, locally and globally?
- * Can the inner dimensions of life gain a more central role in society?
- * How can modern, postmodern and premodern people live together productively?
- * How can politics be adjusted to an increasingly complex world?
- * What is the unique role of humanity in the ecosystems of nature?

(Quoted from metamoderna.org/meta-modernism)

and almost only – reference points of the new metamodern approach, aiming to integrate both of these “outdated” predecessors, while healing their shortcomings.

Finally, a core specific of Hanzi’s metamodernism is its genuine interest in and focus on socio-political transformation.

Beyond these specifics, its integrative stance, its urge to acknowledge the inner dimensions of life and its overall concern with personal and collective development strongly remind core elements of integral consciousness and thinking as presented in previous chapters. So the question arises, in what way(s) metamodernism differs from integral in its claim to provide a more adequate, holistic approach to addressing today’s complex challenges – and how it relates to integral altogether?

“Even though we call ourselves other things, we also are integral”

(Daniel Görtz in the [Podcast “The Poisoned Chalice”](#), 33:43).

The main Hanzi author, Daniel Görtz, has spoken about the relationship between metamodern and integral at several occasions. One of them is an extended conversation with Bruce Alderman and Pascal Layman in their podcast series “The Integral Stage”. In an episode called “The Poisoned Chalice”, Daniel shares his story with integral. He recalls that when he first got to know integral theory, “it blew my mind; (...) I sucked it up like a sponge”, since it “re-coded the way I thought about things” (“[The Poisoned Chalice](#)”).

However, when starting to engage in integral circles in his region, he often found himself amid people with a deep interest in inner dimensions and spiritual development, but less interest for social transformation based on integral thinking. Also, he found that his admittedly “unreasonably high expectations” were often disappointed by people in the network who failed to apply the theory to their own life and behavior (“I felt like a stranded whale”, *ibid.*). While acknowledging that “deep inner, spiritual practices are real” and have substantial effect on those who engage in them, he started to become skeptic of some of the ways in which “integral” was preached and (not) practiced in certain networks.

In the same conversation, Pascal Layman differentiates between “integralists” (adherents of integral theory) and “integralites” (those who actually practice what integral consciousness proposes, even if they might not be aware of the theory at all). And he stresses that what we need is integral practitioners, rather than just “evangelists” (Layman, [“The Poisoned Chalice”](#)). Staying with the metaphor, Daniel Görtz frames his own move from integral to metamodernism as a process of turning into “**a reform protestant of the integral church**” (*ibid.*). Building up on the “best of integral”, namely metatheory, a holistic approach and developmental awareness, Hanzi’s metamodernism tries to reframe these in a less “spiritual” way, in order to make its core ideas more accessible to people who come from academic, rather than spiritual backgrounds.

Pascal Layman also notes that everybody who discovers integral thinking and tries to apply it in a specific subject area, typically that which they have a particular competence in, is bound to experience the tension between “trying to include all things, but actually wanting to work on certain things more than others”. The same is true for Hanzi and his focus on societal transformation. In his response to Layman, Görtz therefore explains Hanzi’s metamodernism as a “more **conservative integralism**”, which focuses mainly on integrating modernity and post-modernism, rather than all previous levels of

existence or stages of consciousness at a time. Why? “Because we didn’t get that integration right, so why try to do all of them at the same time?”

Similarly, Layman argues that “no matter how comprehensive you have to be, you can’t help but specialize” in some way (ibid.). Hence, he proposes to understand metamodernism as “**a stripped down socio-political integralism**” while, inversely, “integral is a scaled up psycho-spiritual metamodernism” (ibid.).

Summing up Hanzi’s relationship to integralism, Görtz states that his metamodernism essentially sees itself as a differentiation that is “post-integral only in that it came after integral on the calendar” (Görtz, ibid.). So metamodernists do see themselves as part and product of integral theory and its vision of a “marriage of sense and soul” (i.e. rationality and intuitive, spiritual wisdom), building up on its concepts and distinctions, while evolving the prism when it comes to societal transformation.

Note that when the Nordic School of metamodernism first entered the scene in 2017, this initially created a moment of “constructive irritation” about metamodernism’s aspiration and potential to be a competitor of integralism. Fortunately, with the above quoted positionings, stemming from the spring of 2022, five years after the publication of the first Hanzi book, the focus now seems to bounce back towards a more constructive cooperation. As Bruce Alderman puts it: “Let 1000 flowers bloom! (...) There is no evangelical interest, but a **need to make common cause** between similar approaches” in view of a more pluralistic, yet more coherent ecosystem of post-postmodern thinking and practice, based on a clearer delimitation and positioning with regard to less-than-integral cults. ([“The Poisoned Chalice”](#), min. 45-48).

So what are the **specific innovations** proposed by the Nordic School of Metamodernism with regard to an integrally informed transformation of politics and society?

The Vision of a Listening Society

“I am not only introducing the field – I am redefining it” (Freinacht, 2017: 155).

I have offered an extensive book [review of “The Listening Society” in Integral Review](#) in August 2020 which takes a detailed look at what the volume has to offer beyond the ideas that integral theory proper already proposes, as well as at some of its methodological shortcomings (Fein, 2020). This section will therefore focus on its genuine socio-political claims, ideas and suggestions without repeating the critical discussion proposed earlier.

The term “listening society” summarizes the core idea of the book, the vision of a societal and political culture of deep, holistic awareness that actively listens – and responds to the needs of its citizens in a much more encompassing way than what we know from current politics. While the latter seem to be primarily concerned with people’s physical and material needs, trying to solve problems through money, redistribution and transfers, Hanzi’s *listening society* goes way beyond that by also including the **deeper longings of the human heart, mind & soul**. It spells out elements and first steps of how we could “**create and reproduce a society in which the average human life experience is more emotionally satisfying and spiritually productive**” (Freinacht, 2017: 95). Its assumption is that more happiness,

in turn, will cause people to give something back to society. This, then, is expected to lead to better communities, more sustainable economies and a healthier planet.

The way to this transformation of society is essentially a much more deliberate focus and deep attention for the inner dimensions of human life, as well as political support for human growth and development on all levels. Hanzi discusses four of these inner dimensions in some detail, two of which are largely adopted from integral thinking, while the fourth is a genuinely new one:

1. cognitive complexity
2. cultural code
3. inner state
4. depth.

Hanzi's discussion of **cognitive complexity** mainly revolves around Michael L. Commons' Model of Hierarchical Complexity (MHC), which is likely the most prominent and epistemologically most solid neo-Piagetian model of cognitive development (Commons, 2008). Based on a mathematic foundation, it distinguishes up to 16 stages of complexity by which the capacity to solve tasks can be accurately described, not just for humans, but also animals and computers. Therefore, Hanzi's analogy of this dimension as the **cognitive "hardware"** of a person appears plausible. An individual can only grasp and meaningfully process the amount of complexity that their "hardware" allows them to process. Otherwise, if confronted with higher degrees of complexity, the person will inevitably deal with these based on their available "hardware", i.e. in less than adequate ways. For example, they will make broad generalizations or come up with simple, undercomplex answers where a more differentiated approach would be needed.

Obviously, this dimension is highly **relevant to politics**, since different people, including political leaders, voters, stakeholders etc. are all reasoning and acting based on different kinds of cognitive "hardware", depending on their level of education, life experience and cognitive complexity. Hence, they will experience and make sense of the same situations differently. And based on their own meaning-making capacities, they will come up with different and variously complex answers.

Second, the dimension of **cultural code** is roughly taken over from Clare Graves' model (see chapter 3) which has been popularized by Don Beck and Christopher Cowan as "Spiral Dynamics" since the 1990ies. Beck & Cowan have widely used it in their work on social conflicts, such as in post-apartheid South Africa and Israel, which is why Spiral Dynamics has become known as a model of cultural development. Hanzi essentially uses the same stage descriptions, some of them by different names, as indicators of what he calls collective, symbolic development or "cultural code".

Metaphorically again, he calls this dimension the "software" of a society, consisting of the system of values, norms, rules etc. that are shared in a particular society or group. As a person is socialized into a particular environment, they learn its specific cultural code while growing up. This, he claims, is like downloading a particular **software**.

As to the differences and interrelations between individual and collective/cultural development, these metaphors are nice and helpful analogies. Hanzi argues that it needs a certain cognitive stage (the necessary "hardware") to be able to function properly at the respective level, while the cultural code of a social context can be adopted through socialization. This is like installing a software, which can work well, provided the corresponding hardware/cognitive level has sufficient "hard drive space". The

analogy illustrates that with a given kind of hardware (or, more precisely, operating system), only equal or lower level software can be run successfully, whereas higher level (more complex) software can possibly be downloaded, but might not function properly based on the existing hardware (operating system, *my term, EF*).

Again, the dimension of cultural code, as well as its connection with cognitive stage is highly relevant in the realm of politics and society. While traditional societies tend to be dominated by one more or less clear-cut cultural code (some form of traditionalism, often dominated by a major religion or cult), modern and postmodern societies tend to host several cultural codes next to each other, often accumulating in different milieus or cultural niches. At the same time, they will generally have a dominant modern or postmodern code (with its distinction between public and private spheres, and/or its tolerance for diversity respectively) that governs the ways in which the different existing sub-codes can co-exist and live together peacefully.

Finally, Hanzi discusses the dimensions of **subjective states** and **psycho-emotional depth**, both of which he refers to as “the organism’s own inner experience”. By “subjective state”, he means “higher” and “lower” inner states of being, beyond and “more fundamental” than emotions proper, which include “some kind of sum or totality of how we feel” in each moment (p. 254). As an ordering principle for the phenomenology of subjective states, he proposes a scale from 1-13, reaching from lower states (“hell”, “horrific”, “tortured”, “tormented”) to medium states (“very uneasy” to “joyous, full of light”), up until the high states (“vast/grand/open”, “blissful/saintly”, “enlightened”, Freinacht, 2017: 260). The more of these states someone has experienced personally, the greater the person’s psychological depth. Hanzi speaks of “dark” versus “light” depth, depending on whether the experience of a person includes more of the lower or more of the higher states. As with any experiential category, he stresses that “we are generally only capable of recognizing the forms of depth that we have developed ourselves” (ibid.: 298). This implies that, for the time being, it remains difficult or even impossible to validate the empirical basis of this dimension of the model (Fein, 2020).

Even though the states and, consequently, the depth dimension, are rather difficult to measure, Hanzi suggests that they are an attempt to **cure a widespread “inner dimensions blindness** – the failure to recognize and understand the primary importance that peoples’ inner lives have in society” (ibid.). This leads us to their **political relevance**.

On the one hand, Hanzi points out that “a lot of the less-than-fully-functional people in society tend to out-depth most of us (...). Broken and crazy people, for all their limitations, often live in greater worlds; they have walked to hell and back. A lot of them just stumbled on their way back” (ibid.: 288). Therefore, we should acknowledge the gifts they have to bring to society and offer them the support they might need in order to heal their difficult experiences as a precondition for society to be able to harvest their full potential.

On the other hand, Hanzi rightly points to the relationship between inner states and structural individual development. As has been shown by developmental research, personal growth and development generally requires a benevolent environment, in other words, a safe space that radiates an atmosphere of trust, encouragement and possibility, rather than fear and constraint. Generally, people need this space of relative ease and relaxation for developing – and acting out – a healthy curiosity and motivation to learn. For this mostly implies some kind of letting go of old beliefs, habits

and even identities. This is why Hanzi is right to claim that positive state qualities or, in his words, “high states (...) have lasting impact on our overall psychological development” (Freinacht, 2017: 275).

At the same time, he shows that relatively high/positive/happy states can be brought about quite easily through various kinds of support or “nudging”. This opens up a worthwhile field of activity for **metamodern politics**. Moreover, Hanzi suggest that a truly *listening society* would do two things: First, it would be a **deliberatively developmental society**, i.e. one that actively fosters its citizens’ personal and cultural development. In relation to that, second, the *listening society* would set itself the political goal to care for and actively support the happiness of its citizens, similar as the kingdom of Bhutan is already doing it. Drawing on an impressive list of references from happiness and meditation research, Hanzi spells out the multiple benefits of both (ibid.: 96-103). “Just imagine how differently society would function if many more of us were in higher states a larger portion of the time”, he raves (Freinacht, 2017: 270).

However, while the book does give some examples as to how the idea of providing healthy, scaffolding social environments for psychological growth and development could be implemented, it seems to be primarily concerned with laying the groundwork and seeding the overall vision. More concrete strategies and steps are defined in book 2, Nordic Ideology (see section below).

As to TLS, it extends this general vision to a larger systemic level: Hanzi envisions a **deeper, more complex, more integral kind of welfare system** that, by including and by truly listening to the inner, psychological, emotional and social needs of its citizens, actively supports them to truly thrive. By helping “the average person (to) become much more secure, authentic and happy (in a deep, meaningful sense of the word)”, he argues that “human development (will be) driv(ing) economic growth” (ibid.). Moreover, Hanzi’s dream is that societies will ultimately compete for being the most listening one, as a “competitive edge in the global economy”, so to speak (ibid.: 93).

In other words, the idea of “deliberately and carefully cultivat(ing) a deeper kind of welfare system” is not only an aim in itself. Rather, as a result of a metamodern politics of listening, “such people can then recreate society in a myriad of ways, solving many of the complex, wicked problems that we are facing today” (ibid.: 72).

Besides this bold vision, TLS also offers an inspiring analysis and reinterpretation of the evolution of political governance in response to the socio-economic conflicts that have arisen over the past 2-3 centuries. It culminates in an integrally informed discussion about today’s predominantly postmodern approaches to governance which Hanzi sees in a dangerous dead end, due to a number of inner contradictions. For instance, while claiming the value of diversity with equal rights for different positions, many postmodern voices tend to make moral arguments about right or wrong ways of doing things (leading to sometimes quite intolerant versions of “political correctness, see chapter 3). He makes clear that from a metamodern, more systemic or, more precisely, meta-systematic perspective (in Michael Commons’ terms), “there is no safe political position” (ibid.: 151). Rather, we need an awareness of complexity and multiple interrelations between conflicting and competing values, strategies and constraints. Therefore, he urges postmodernism to face its inner contradictions and to acknowledge its own role in co-producing the challenges we are facing today. Moreover, Hanzi argues that modern and postmodern thinking must now be transcended by a wider, metamodern paradigm that is much more effective in addressing the pressing needs of our times. As part of this, he proposes numerous worthwhile ideas for transcending the left-right divide (Freinacht, 2019: 45). By integrating

the best contributions of each of the previous paradigms and political positions into a bigger, more inclusive picture and strategy, metamodern politics aims to “outcompete” all of them on their own terms (Fein, 2020: 3).

The most concrete hunch of a metamodern politics we get from TLS is Hanzi’s description of the Danish political party Alternativet (The Alternative). It has been initiated by the founder of the “Chaospilots”, Uffe Elbaek, in 2013, and has been trying to bring elements of metamodern thinking, including a political culture of “**sincere irony**”, into Danish politics and political culture ever since (see TLS, chapter 5). A more detailed reflection of the Alternative is contained in the story told by Elbaek himself (Elbaek, 2016 and 2020) and in our [POP international interview with Uffe](#).

Nordic Ideology: A metamodern “to do plan to save the world”

*„My book *The Listening Society* isn't all that good or important. *Nordic Ideology*, that's where the action is, and that's where you'll find most of the ideas you need to truly transform politics.“* (Hanzi on Facebook)

As indicated above, TLS can be seen as laying the groundwork and seeding Hanzi’s overall vision, while his second book, *Nordic Ideology* (NI) follows up on this vision, spelling out its political implications in more detail.

As a general starting point, metamodern politics is presented as fundamentally evolutionary. Not only does it treat politics as an evolving entity in all of its dimensions, trying to understand the logics, driving factors and direction of its evolution. It also uses these insights for promoting a radical agenda of change of its own that is aligned with the basic principles and attractors of political evolution. Consequently, *Nordic Ideology* starts by a consideration of how socio-political evolution takes place and how it can possibly be shaped by human action. In a nutshell, it makes **three core claims**:

1. **Everything in politics** (potentially) **evolves and develops**, from human communities, to their values such as freedom and equality, up until their institutions and states, following roughly similar principles of increasing complexity (transcend and include, see chapter 4 on Ken Wilber).
2. In order to understand how evolution (the “game of life”) unfolds more specifically, it is crucial to identify the **core attractors** which define its overall direction. One such attractor is the vision of democracy itself.
3. We can distinguish three main **attitudes towards this “game of life”** and its evolution: game denial (ignoring it/wishing it away), game acceptance (mistaking the current rules of the game for laws of nature) and game change (actively designing change based on an understanding of its inherent logics and dynamics).

We will explore these claims one after another.

Development matters

Building up on one of the main take-aways from TLS, NI’s starting point is “that development is real and that it matters” (Freinacht, 2019: 1). Similar to the “big pictures” of evolution painted by Aurobindo, Gebser, Graves and Wilber, Hanzi frames this idea in a very broad perspective and essentially subscribes to the same **integral anthropology**: His use of Ernest Becker’s metaphor of humankind as being “gods with anuses” reminds of Aurobindo’s idea of humanity as having progressed half way between our basic material nature and its “all too human predicaments” on the one hand and “our god-like aspirations” on the other (ibid.: 5). This idea also speaks from Wilber’s book *Up from Eden* (2007), especially its German title “*Halbzeit der Evolution*” (1997), suggesting that as humanity, we have so far only realized half our potential at best.

In other words, while nature appears as a barrier standing in front of us as a constant constraint, we also have an almost unlimited potential to flourish, even though “no-one ever reach(es) their full potential” in a given lifetime (Freinacht, 2019: 3). Since by its very nature, “the soul always wants more” (life and unfolding), we can only ever work towards “relative utopias” (ibid.: 36). And, as an example of the attitude of sincere irony, Hanzi rephrases this part of his anthropology/cosmology in his very own hefty style, by saying: “existence has us ‘eternally by the balls’” (ibid.: 39).

Obviously, the main focus of political metamodernism is on **symbolic/cultural evolution** as a precondition for humanity’s self-organization and governance. So how do the state, society freedom and equality develop? As a general lens, Hanzi uses Wilber’s four quadrants to explain that and how “psychology, behavior, culture and economy develop *together*” (ibid.: 18). Hence, in view of suggesting “workable paths for the next step in society’s evolution” (ibid.: 5), their multiple interrelations have to be taken into account.

Attractors: the hidden drivers of development

To this overall idea, Hanzi Freinacht adds the concept of “**attractors**” or “**attractor points**” which indicate the direction of possible, most worthwhile and most sustainable developments. He defines attractors as “a pattern or equilibrium that under certain conditions is very likely to emerge and stabilize within a dynamical system, such as a society” (ibid.: 21). Put differently, attractors are the “gravitational effect” that “the future exerts upon the present”, thereby pulling “developments in the present in certain ways towards the unrealized potentials of the future” (ibid.: 18).

Note that this description is very similar to Otto Scharmer’s account of what happens in the presencing state (pulling future possibilities into the here and now). When the U process unfolds its full power, it actively builds “landing strips for the emerging future” to materialize in our physical reality (see chapter 5).

Box 2:

The development of political communitization and governance
Bands
Tribes
Chiefdoms
Early modern State
Nation State
Welfare State
The Listening Society

In view of our current western societies, Hanzi spells out this idea of an attractor, pulling society to progress to new levels of wellbeing and to more adequate forms of self-organization and problem-solving as follows: “**Progress is** when the game of life becomes fairer, kinder, more transparent, more

inclusive, more forgiving, more sustainable, more rational, more fulfilling” (ibid.: 41). This has implications in all quadrants and areas of life.

For instance, the state has historically emerged and developed out of less complex predecessors such as bands, tribes and chiefdoms. Once formed, states have seen a gradual change and transformation from the early modern minimal (night watchman) state to today’s bureaucratic welfare states (see box 2). And the latter are themselves in an ongoing process of transformation, which, according to Hanzi, follows the logic of an increasing intimacy of their mechanisms of creating order and control (Freinacht, 2019: 57 and 67ff.).

Norbert Elias has described a similar evolution in the socio-behavioral realm. His observation of how manners have gradually changed and softened, along with an increasing internalization of norms, has led to his famous theory about the process of civilization (Elias, 1978). For the development of capi-

talist economies, the Russian economist **Nikolaj Kondratev** has described five major waves or cycles, each of which was initiated by a key innovation or technological development, from the invention of the steam engine to information technology and psycho-social health (ibid.: 63 and Nefiodow & Nefiodow, 2014). Here too, we can observe an overall pattern of technological and related entrepreneurial innovations making life more and more comfortable, easier and more pleasant.

Along these lines, Hanzi goes on to describe the evolution of basic political values and their expression in socio-emotional regimes (the lower left quadrant of evolution), as well as their implementation in political institutions (lower right quadrant). As to the **value of (political) freedom**, Hanzi offers a definition that gives much more attention to the inner, subjective dimension than the standard indicators used by rating institutes such as Freedom House. For him, “freedom must be *felt* and *embodied* by the citizen in order to be real. (...) People are only as free as they really *feel* in their everyday lives” (ibid.: 80f). In this sense, he sees numerical freedom scores as measured by Freedom House only as “the prerequisite for higher freedom”. According to Hanzi, FH’s highest score is “where the path to true human emancipation begins – not where it ends” (ibid.). Consequently, he proposes a scale of (individual) free-

Box 3 (adopted from Freinacht, 2019: 115):

Scale of (in-)dividual freedom	...defined by
Slavery	You belong to another, including your body
Serfdom	You own your body, but are not allowed to travel or own all fruits of your labor
Subjected citizenship	You can travel around and do what you want, but have no say in public matters
Impoverished citizenship	Basic entitlement in public matters, but no real say without significant risks
Basic citizenship	As above, without significant risk when trying to have a say
Socially active citizenship	Meaningful and substantial relationship to public affairs that affect you
Integrated citizenship	Real and effective ways of affecting things around you
Norm-defining citizenship	Real and effective ways of affecting political discourses and arenas
Co-creative citizenship	Society, along with its arenas and institutions are as your home, where you feel comfortable to participate as you wish

dom of his own, reaching from slavery to truly co-creative citizenship (ibid.: 115, see box 3).

The notion of **emancipation** plays an important role in Hanzi’s political metamodernism. It informs his specific sociology of emotions and of emotional regimes, through which he includes the **dimension of emotional states**, which, as described in the previous section, are particularly important in the Nordic School of Metamodernism. We now see that they are important also because according to Hanzi, freedom evolves through these emotional regimes. In this perspective, the evolution of freedom is a process of gradual emancipation from the limitations of the lower states (see below).

Hanzi’s emotional regimes reach from fear to guilt to shame to what he calls *Sklavenmoral* (internalized envy, *ibid.*: 89; see box 4). These four, he claims, are the most common emotional drivers of human social action in most societies today.

Obviously, each of these emotional regimes has considerable implications in the areas of norms, penal systems and socio-political institutions alike, which Hanzi spells out in some more detail. (For more empirical underpinning, please read Freinacht, 2019: pp. 94f.) Since the degree of freedom is limited in all of them, they all keep people trapped in role plays that prevent them from fully showing up as who they are. However, freedom is more limited in the earlier, less developed regimes than in the later ones.

Note that Hanzi probably offers the first **integral sociology of political governance** in connection to the idea of evolving emotional regimes. For he suggests that the different regimes “correspond to different stages of societal development”. As to their developmental complexity, he claims that the emotional regimes

“follow the hierarchical logic described by Maslow: During early civilization, security remained the main concern in most people’s everyday lives, hence the **fear-regime** was the most dominant. Then, as states grew stronger and increasingly managed to protect the life and property of citizens, the need for belonging became a more prominent issue, (...) making the **guilt-regime** the dominant one. And in modern societies, where the majority enjoy the privilege of being considered good citizens and no longer worry whether they’re seen as sinners or heathens, self-esteem has become a greater concern in many people’s lives, which has opened the door for the **shame-regime** to take over.”

Box 4 (adapted from Freinacht, 2019: 105):

Emotional regimes	...characterized by	Socio-historical correspondence
Fear	Hatred, aggression, terror	Early civilizations
Guilt	Judgement, blame, neuroticism	Roughly traditional
Shame	Contempt, disdain, disgust, ridicule, embarrassment	Roughly modern
Sklavenmoral	Envy, jealousy, subtly holding others back, insincere criticism,, self-sabotage, inner resistance, narcissism	Roughly postmodern
Freedom “obsoleted”	(no explicit description)	Roughly metamodern

Today, as the shame-regime loses influence and political cultures “move towards greater acceptance of people’s differences and perceived flaws”, a new, even more subtle regime of limiting our freedom becomes visible: *Sklavenmoral*. Hanzi identifies this as an emerging phenomenon in the advanced stages of modern society”, especially in the Nordic countries where both Hanzi authors come from. As

a result of a growing number of people tending to be more concerned with the higher emotional need for self-actualization” and about “how can I be special, rise above the herd?” (ibid.: 93f. and 104 *italics in original*, E.F.), the authors also perceive an “increased level of *narcissism* in the general population. This, in turn, tends to be combined with the hidden (internalized) envy about others being “more special” than oneself.

Reminding the Scandinavian so-called “Law of Jante” (a “set of attitudes that subtly devalue and ignore people who aspire towards greater achievement, fame and excellence”), Hanzi suggests that the emerging *Sklassenmoral* regime has people making themselves “smaller” than they really are in public. In other words, they attempt to “display humility”, while internally building up envy, resentment and jealousy. This “toxic relationship to our own inner potentials blocks the freedom to put these in service of worthwhile causes” (ibid.: 91ff.).

Metamodern politics therefore seek to overcome the limitations of all of these emotional regimes by making them conscious, addressing their limitations and integrating them (ibid.: 109). Later on in the book, we will learn how metamodern politics can and should help to scaffold this process on the inside and outside, essentially by creating the conditions for people to engage in this deeper kind of self-exploration (introspection) and integration work (see sections below).

Furthermore, Hanzi’s concept of emancipation also informs his perspective on the **value and practices of equality**. Here too, he proposes a deeper, evolutionary notion and understanding of the term. In this more complex view, material and economic equality – as they are usually measured in common statistics – are just the most basic elements of a metamodern concept of equality. He holds that in view of a fuller quality of emancipation, we also need to consider more subtle inequalities, such as social, physiological, emotional, ecological and informational ones (ibid.: 119ff.). As with the value of freedom, Hanzi argues that the degree to which a society and its polity address these inequalities is an indicator of its development and the depth of the equality it has achieved (ibid.: 124f.). And again, providing the conditions for deep equality is a task for metamodern politics. Ultimately, in his vision, “the higher goal of societal development is not so much to achieve ‘perfect equality’, but rather to render the very struggle for equality obsolete” (ibid.: 153).

To sum up Hanzi’s idea of developmental attractors and its implications, based on the various dimensions of socio-political evolution discussed before, we can say three things in view of the vision of integral/metamodern politics and democracy:

- First, while democracy has evolved in many ways and with specific traits in different contexts, the overall direction was similar. It can be described by the general patterns presented earlier, namely increasing freedom, equality and embrace. Moreover, when looking at these general patterns of socio-political development in hindsight, we begin to see that “in a way, we are living our ancestor’s utopia” (ibid.: 31).
- Second, if democracy itself, like the welfare state, is in a constant process of transformation, this means that as an evolving entity, democracy is an *empty signifier* (Laclau/Mouffe, 2014; Torfing, 1999), which holds a visionary promise that each generation can, must and will define and shape in its own ways. In this sense, it continues to be an attractor in and of itself.
- More specifically, third, “**Green Social Liberalism**” seems to be “where every liberal democracy with an industrial capitalist economy and publicly financed welfare is heading” (ibid.: 6), at

least for the time being. In other words, our current societies are developing towards at least **three attractors**: more ecological sustainability, more social justice (deep equality) and more individual and political freedom.

In this perspective, “**getting the attractors right**” is a crucial skill and component of a new, more adequate politics, because it enables us to sense, anticipate and strengthen emerging possibilities. On this basis, we can more easily “push the right buttons’ at the right time” (ibid.: 19) to bring desirable futures into being. Successful examples of this skill are Gandhi’s work towards ending British colonial rule peacefully and Steve Jobs’ understanding of the attractor of a digitized society” which “enabled him to see the computer (...) as a universal tool” even for common people (ibid.: 19).

So for anticipating or, as Scharmer would put it, for sensing future developments, it is just as important to know the past than to read the weak signals of becoming that are “*already* shaping the present”. Hanzi therefore sees the main difference between the winners and the losers of history in that the latter just perpetuate the patterns of the past, while the former know how to read those weak signals. Predicting the attractors thus turns into a competitive metamodern skill.

The notion of working with attractors has made clear the crucial importance of how we relate to change and development. This is the third element of Hanzi’s take on socio-political evolution.

Game denial, acceptance, change

“Life is a game. Always will be” (Freinacht, 2019: 41).

As mentioned before, Hanzi sees life as a game, or, more precisely, a collection of “games with winners and losers”. This is because “we inhabit a world of limited resources” forcing us to interact with others in one way or another about who gets what under which conditions, from material resources to appreciation and social prestige to sex partners. (ibid.). He holds that there are always particular **rules of the game** that are implicitly defined by the facts of life (“reality”), even though for most of us, they remain largely invisible. Therefore, the “question is not ‘game, or no game’, but the nature of our relationship to the game and the evolution of its rules” (ibid.: 52).

Interestingly, Hanzi’s notion of “reality” is not limited to how things “actually work” or what is factually the case (“actuality”). Rather, he argues that “a deeper and fuller reality lies in the realm of what is possible” (ibid.: 49). In other words, **reality consists of actuality plus potentiality** – which is not seen by many people. In terms of their relations to the game(s) of life, Hanzi therefore distinguishes three possible attitudes: Game denial, game acceptance and game change. Let’s briefly look at each of them.

By **game denial**, Hanzi means “the inability to perceive, or a negligence of the logical and behavioral rules that regulate human relations. Game denial is when you ignore or ‘wish away’ certain uncomfortable truths regarding human relations and how reality works. Or simply when you deny the realities of life and forcefully impose your own ‘ought’ upon what ‘is’”, thereby pretending that certain rules of life don’t exist. Very straightforward, he therefore calls this attitude a “**crime against actuality**” (ibid.: 42) or even, against the truth (ibid.: 47).

In the political realm, this phenomenon is mostly observed on the Left, which often combines its criticism of capitalism, inequality, injustice, discrimination, power etc. with idealistic or even utopian visions about a world in which these phenomena were eliminated. However, this often happens without suggesting a workable, sufficiently complex and inclusive path of how to get there from where we are now (“if only everyone could live according to their needs and desires...”; “if only everyone subscribed to my worldview...”). To some degree the moralism that often goes with this attitude makes its holders feel like winners, even if they usually don’t get very far along the road of implementing any of their visions. And the projects that did, often ended in sustainable disasters.

In contrast, the opposite position is called “**game acceptance**”. It can be found mostly in the Conservative part of the political spectrum. Conservatives mostly think of themselves as realists, since their worldview is built around what they see as real life with its actual constraints and limitations. Among these are inequalities and differences between people (“the good person is not whoever can dream up the nicest fantasy and have us drive off a cliff in search of it, but rather (...) who can look at the real world, be strong enough to face it – and from there on, try to do what’s best and most realistic given the circumstances” (ibid.: 47).

According to Hanzi, the problem with game acceptance is, first, that it justifies injustices as necessary evils, concluding that, the “losers only get what they deserve” (ibid.: 50). In relation to that, second, while certain actual rules maybe real, “reality consists of more than ‘actuality’”, namely potentiality. The idea that things could be different from what they actually are in the given moment, is not seen in this perspective. In other words, it mistakes the current rules of the game for laws of nature. Hanzi therefore calls this attitude a “**crime against potentiality** (...) and against all beautiful futures” (ibid.: 49).

Note that “neither game denial nor game acceptance is a consciously held perspective” for most of their holders. Rather, “they are mistakes we make because of unconscious biases and emotional investments in ideas and identities”. Put differently, “they constitute subtle forms of self-deceit” (ibid.: 51). Once you become conscious of them, it becomes obvious that a third perspective is possible and needed, namely game change.

“Our dreams must learn to steer by the stars” (ibid.: 28).

For Hanzi, **game change** is when “you accept that life is a game and you resolve to work to change it” (ibid.: 51). It implies an understanding that reality goes beyond the given actuality and also includes possibility, i.e. the possibility to transcend and progress beyond what is currently the case. Hence, at its fundamental core, “societal progress is about ‘**game change**’. It’s when the background rules of life’s interactions – everyday, normal interactions – change and evolve. **Progress** is when the game of life become fairer, kinder, more transparent, more inclusive, more forgiving, more sustainable, more rational, more fulfilling”. In other words, it implies an evolution of the rules of the game. Thus, “game change is a developmental affair” (ibid.: 54).

Consequently, “the major objective of the metamodern political project is to change the rules of the game” (ibid.: 52). For there is no doubt “that the very social fabric of everyday life can and *must* be intelligently developed” in the direction mentioned above. Ultimately, this is “the essence of political metamodernism” (ibid.: 5). So how does metamodern politics suggest to go about this?

Metamodern Politics: A Plan consisting of 6 new policy forms

“(This book) presents you with an actual to-do plan to save the world.”

In a nutshell, Hanzi’s aspiration is to offer a package of institutional strategies and related socio-cultural policies and practices by which a pattern of deeper governance could be implemented as compared to the “too shallow” one underlying today’s modern society (ibid.: 172). This package consists of 6 elements (Hanzi calls them “forms”) the interplay of which would ideally produce a complex, mutually balancing equilibrium (“Montesquieu 2.0”). It therefore demands a differentiated and fine-tuned attitude and approach. Well combined, he holds that these 6 elements would bring forward a game change comparable to an update or “reinvention of democracy” (ibid.: 183).

Even though this update has implications in all four quadrants, at the heart of it is a shift of focus towards the inner dimensions of human life and *interbeing* and an urge for (supporting) psychological growth (ibid.: 173). While today, we might be cognitively aware of the complexity of certain problems, especially the huge challenges connected to climate change, we are still far away from acting and re-arranging our lives according to this knowledge. Ultimately the aim is to create “greater coherence between human minds and behaviors” (ibid.: 175).

We will now briefly describe each of the six forms and explore their contributions to the vision of a metamodern “coherence at a deeper level”. Note that as an integrally informed political sociologist and philosopher, Hanzi himself introduces them as a general pattern, which comes with a very explicit disclaimer, warning about at least three important caveats:

- None of these forms alone is the answer; it needs the combination of all of them, skillfully implemented.
- It is so far unclear who might be the main driving force of the desired game change in a particular context (state, market, civil society and/or what he calls a “metamodern aristocracy”).
- Each country has its own specific path when trying to implement metamodern governance, depending on its own history, culture and resources (path dependency; ibid.: 176f.).

Form 1: Democratization politics

The first element of Hanzi’s metamodern politics program is probably the most obvious one, given our previous observation that democracies are (potentially) evolving entities: **Democratization politics** is about taking democracy further, to a new, deeper level – and to explicitly turn this into a public task and concern: “The idea is that *the state itself* and its democratic governance in many layers, from the local to the transnational, becomes a developmental project, continuously discussed and improved upon” (ibid.: 206).

Substantially, democratization politics means to include more citizens more actively into the political process in order to improve its quality of “listening” both to the citizens’ existing needs and to their co-creative potential. For this, Hanzi mentions five criteria:

1. effective participation,
2. voting equality,
3. an equal and adequate (“enlightened”) understanding of the political process,

4. control of the agenda,
5. inclusiveness.

While in principle, this update is part of a long-term process, in the course of which democratic participation has already thickened and deepened in various ways over the past decades (and even centuries, *ibid.*: 181), it now needs **active political support** to gain more traction, for example by a to-be-created “Ministry of Democratization” (*ibid.*: 206, 209). And since societal challenges become more complex – and more global –, it needs formats, processes and solutions of higher orders of complexity and broader legitimacy in order to address these challenges more adequately and more effectively.

While Hanzi does mention some concrete ideas about how to further evolve existing democratic systems (chapter 10), his main point in this regard is what he calls **the “true north” of democratization politics**: the claim that its ultimate goal or attractor is the principle of **collective intelligence** (*ibid.* 184). For he argues that the rising demands on decision-making, namely the huge amounts of information to be processed and taken into account and the overall complexity of most challenges, requires both new skills in leadership and a totally new approach.

And in contrast to earlier ideas of increasing participation and inclusion horizontally, Hanzi makes another strong claim: “the majority is wrong” (*ibid.*: 190). In other words, the challenge is not about winning numerical majorities of votes which, as technologies from advertising to micro targeting up until outright manipulation show, can be done for almost any position, provided one has the necessary resources. Rather, it is about developing “a **process of free and sufficiently systematized truth-seeking and dialogue** going on for small groups to be able to prove the rest of us wrong, again and again, so that values, opinions and laws can evolve” (*ibid.*: 190)

So here again, we see the metamodern ambition going beyond both current modern and postmodern concepts and forms of either increasing numerical inclusion or organizing a stakeholder participation that specifically invite and include people from particularly relevant groups. Rather, it targets the dimensions of depth and truth in a deeper, more substantial sense, as **inner qualities** that have no immediate causal connection with numerical or other objective criteria.

Instead, “increasing the collective intelligence of a given society” means to aim for a “tentative approximation of truth”, i.e. intersubjective verification/falsification (*ibid.*: 187). This can be achieved through deepening democratic participation in several ways, such as by dispersing leadership, by increasing the “volume, complexity and efficiency of information processing”, by increasing the accountability of power and the verifiability of decision-making, by extending (“deepening and thickening”) the level of participation and by further developing democratic culture.

Even though “reinventing democracy” is a challenge that has implications in **all four quadrants** of the integral model, Democratization Politics has its main focus on the system of rules and processes (Lower Right quadrant). In view of updating structures and institutions (the meso level of governance), Hanzi proposes to transcend and include the four **democratic forms** that have historically emerged so far: direct, representative, participatory, and deliberative democracy (in this sequence, see box 5).¹ As responses to the challenges of their times, all of these forms have their specific merits and limitations.

¹ Since Hanzi defines deliberative democracy as “facilitating listening, learning and understanding processes that make participation possible” (*ibid.*: 197), we can assume that he considers it as the most developed form so far. More recent integral approaches would add a “co-creative” form, as a necessary pathway to global healing (see my [POP interview with Jascha Rohr](#)).

Consequently, they should be combined intelligently in view of counterbalancing each other's inherent weaknesses in an overarching meta-form that would build the coherent pattern of a larger whole (ibid.: 194).

Box 5 (adapted from Freinacht, 2019, 197, 200):

Democratic forms	Developmental stage	Features
Direct democracy	Ancient	Direct basis of legitimacy
Representative democracy	Modern	Manages higher complexity and issues of scale
Participatory democracy	Post-modern	Introduces perspectives of important stakeholders
Deliberative democracy	Post-post-modern/Metamodern	Facilitates the coordination and development of perspectives

It would go beyond the limits of this chapter to provide more detail about Hanzi's numerous concrete ideas about how to implement Democratization Politics. However, before moving to the second form, three aspects are worth mentioning that point at the **specific metamodern quality** of this vision: First, its urge to include technological innovations in the process of evolving democracy. According to Hanzi, the political system has failed to adapt to the internet age and just remained more or less the same as before. He therefore proposes to include digital tools into the existing systems, in order to turn them into "internet democracies" (ibid.: 201). This can be seen as an attempt to put innovative technologies in service of the deeper essence of democracy and hence, to include technological progress while transcending our traditional forms.

Second, Hanzi is very conscious of the thin line that proposing a visionary ("protopian") political model (Freinacht, 2022) entails in view of potential misuses and degenerations. Hence, the question: "How to fundamentally **transform modern society** into a metamodern (relative) utopia" without falling into the trap of totalitarian derailments? (utopia's "evil cousins", ibid.: 8-9) is raised time and again throughout the book.

One answer to this challenge, third, is metamodern's very self-reflexive and experimental approach. Democratization Politics is conceived as a "journey of iterative improvement" that includes multiple cycles of prototyping, revising and re-doing democratic innovations in designated experimental spaces (ibid.: 204 and Freinacht, 2022). Moreover, Hanzi suggests that there should be at least some intelligent coordination of metamodern political emergence: "There must be central planning which coordinates and strengthens a genuine multiplicity of experimental, iterative emergences, including local and private initiatives" (ibid.: 205).

In his universe, there are two potential candidates and agents for this coordinating role: first, a "**process oriented political party**" and second, the "**metamodern aristocracy**" (a kind of informed community of peers). The first is portrayed in chapter 5 of TLS at the example of the Danish party "The Alternative" ([read its founder, Uffe Elbaek's account here](#)) which at least "did contain many metamodern elements".² The latter is characterized as "the transnational networks of people who understand and

² A recent entry in the Metamoderna Blog discusses "[Why The Alternative in Denmark Failed](#)".

embody the Metamodern value meme (and the symbol-stage Metamodern G9). They also happen to have the time, energy and resources available to commit themselves more or less fulltime to working for a more conscious society” (ibid.: 344, (see also TLS, 118-123). We will briefly come back to this aspect at the end of this chapter.

For the time being, however, neither a metamodern party, nor a more active political movement have gained relevant influence on a larger scale (see footnote 2). Nevertheless, this chapter – and this book as a whole – hopefully raise your, dear reader’s curiosity and interest and help to spread Hanzi’s invitation to co-create: “Either we begin the slow and cumbersome process of continuously reinventing and updating democracy, or it simply drifts away into space (ibid.: 209).

Form 2: Gemeinschaft Politics: “The heart is the limit” (Freinacht, 2019: 2018)

While democratization politics has its focus on the public side of society, its “formal system of rules and regulations” (Lower Right quadrant in Wilber’s model), Hanzi uses Ferdinand Tönnies’ term “Gemeinschaft” (as opposed do “Gesellschaft”) to refer to the more informal, personal dimension that becomes visible in the relationships between people. He argues that besides our formal system of governance, we also need to **actively develop our informal relations in order to build healthy communities**. – Welcome to the Lower Left Quadrant of culture, shared value and meaning.

The dimension of metamodern *Gemeinschaft Politics* builds up on the postulate that the political is personal and the personal political, and that a healthy society always “rests upon personal foundations” (ibid.: 219). This insight becomes more pertinent in view of the consequences of two long-term trends: first, modernity’s gradual and ongoing process of differentiation of the social spheres and second, its strong trend of individualization. Notwithstanding all their blessings and achievements, both of these developments have also led to considerable human suffering throughout our western (post)modern societies. Statistics show that they take the form of shallow materialism, a sense of disconnection and loneliness, up until severe psychological health issues such as burnout, depression and suicidal tendencies.

In line with integral politics’ general **ambition and concern** to heal the pathologies caused by previous levels of existence, metamodern *Gemeinschaft Politics* is a straightforward attempt to address and counterbalance, if not to heal the excesses of both modern individualization/disconnection and post-modern relativism/disorientation.

Why? Hanzi argues that “our future civilization depends on fellowship” (his translation of Tönnies’ term “Gemeinschaft”, E.F.), and on “higher levels of love and friendship”, as the foundation of politics and – quite generally of “a friendlier society” (ibid.: 219, 230). Inversely, dysfunctional social relations in private homes also have marginalizing and other detrimental effects onto society (ibid.: 217). Moreover, if the personal is the foundation of politics, generating positive emotions through better relationships and deeper connection between citizens is not only a means to build more happiness and trust. The latter are also important preconditions for deeper degrees of democracy to be functional: “If society is going to work at all in the future, we have to go deeper in our coordination of human agency and cognition, and we thus need deeper politics. All else is toothless crap” (ibid.: 2020). And if Hanzi’s analysis of developmental imbalances is correct (for instance, with technology being more evolved than we are psychologically), “we have to evolve before civilization crashes under the weight of (these) developmental imbalances” (ibid.: 221).

Beyond these general considerations, Hanzi also mentions several **societal issues and tensions** which he thinks could be productively addressed by a deliberate *Gemeinschaft Politics* that would support transformation on the level of citizens' everyday lives. Two of his most prominent examples are ethnic/inter-cultural tensions and gender relations, including the idea of an integral, transformative (post-) feminism.

As to the first one, Hanzi acknowledges that cultures have a, but no absolute right to exist. This becomes more clearly visible when taking **developmental differences between cultures** into account. While "cultures and ethnic identities (...) generally have *something* to learn from one another, (...) (they) can *always* be transformed, and they *should* be transformed to be the best versions of themselves, whenever this is possible without destabilizing people's lives too much". This is what he calls metamodern trans-culturalism (ibid.: 233). As an example of successful mutual learning, he refers to a trans-cultural project in the Spanish town of Cordoba, where the Christian majority was invited to become more tolerant towards the Muslim minority while inviting the latter to open up and progress, based on the city's history of Islamic science and enlightenment in the Middle Ages.

Second, Hanzi argues that **gender relations** are in need of healing and development, including what he calls our "landscapes of desire" (ibid.: 237). With sexuality being "ever-present in our psyches, affecting our moods, feelings, decisions, behaviors and relations in every moment", most men are suffering from unmet sexual hunger, while many women experience a "sense of unsafety" with regard to men. Both of these negatively affect society, even though they often remain implicit. Hanzi argues that imbalanced gender relations are ultimately due to our own lack of development and our "lacking the right properties to interact in good enough ways" (ibid.: 239). Therefore, we need a "gender game change". Essentially, he urges us as a society to make more important investments in building "secure psychological attachment patterns, thereby, (helping people to) be better partners and lovers". This would serve everyone's psychological health, reduce gender antagonisms (post-feminism) and create more relaxed and better family relations, as well as deeper levels of trust in society as a whole (ibid.: 239, 241).

In view of implementing *Gemeinschaft Politics*, one of the first strategies that Hanzi proposes is, again, the suggestion to set up a public agency, namely **Ministry of Gemeinschaft**, or quite simply, a Ministry of Love (as opposed to existing Ministries of Loneliness, for example in the UK, ibid.: 222). Its role and function could be "to devise, implement and evaluate social innovations, practices and institutions", and, quite generally, "to advance the generative conditions for *Gemeinschaft* to thrive throughout society" in a deliberate, transparent and systematic way (ibid., 223f.).

More specifically, Hanzi also offers a number of ideas in view of practical measures, tools and steps in all quadrants. For instance,

- co-housing and the experience of living in communities could be supported politically to counter the trend towards building "private islands", in which everyone currently seeks shelter from one another (Lower Right quadrant).
- This could help to create an "ecosystem of partnership", while in passing training people in empathy and emotional intelligence (Upper Left quadrant) and fostering what Hanzi calls the key variables of a thriving society: trust and healthy social bonds (Lower Left quadrant).
- We could actively "create spaces in which people can be 'general citizens' and speak their minds on current events and pressing topics and listen to the perspectives of others" as it is

being done in the Swedish *Initiativ Samutveckling's iS! cafes*, Harald Schellander's *Round Tables* or Townhall meetings (ibid.: 227, Lower Right and Lower Left quadrants).

- A corps of professional “listeners” could be trained to work in public service institutions and healthcare, helping to improve conflict management and mediation skills in work-life, and making listening a regular part of health care/public care (Lower Left and Upper Left quadrants; ibid.: 228). This deserves particular attention when it comes to traumatic experiences, and a trauma-sensitive listening skillset.
- We could foster the quality of relationships between citizens, both on a public and on a private level, through downright love coaching. For evolving the “game of love”, i.e. by integrating deeply felt needs, would increase the level of kindness, friendship and love and would “cultivate higher likelihoods for better relationships” throughout society (ibid.: 247).

According to Hanzi, these and similar measures could help to create “deeper, more harmonious resonance in everyday life” and, ultimately, “a social order that people can identify with” (ibid.: 214, 218; Upper Left, Lower Left quadrants). Up to us to put more “flesh to the bones” of this “skeletal structure” (ibid.: 228).³

To sum up, Hanzi's *Gemeinschaft Politics* is an attempt to design politics based on an integral anthropology that includes and actively supports cognitive, emotional, social and spiritual intelligences alike (to name just the most important ones). This anthropology is equally important as a foundation of his next form.

Form 3: Existential Politics

From the Lower Left quadrant that was the main focus of *Gemeinschaft Politics* (even though touching all other quadrants alike), Hanzi's third form now has us move on to the Upper Left quadrant.

It has its main focus on the individual's inner experience and personal development. More precisely, it addresses our deepest questions and existential roots, as a basis for our personal sense of meaning and purpose. In a nutshell, *Existential politics* is about turning “the foundational existential relationship that all of us have to reality itself into a political question, into an issue that can be openly discussed, so that measures can be taken to develop it” (Freinacht, 2019: 255).

This dimension of metamodern politics responds to the growing perception that while we are used to invest in – and identify with – our cognitive and technological developments, our hearts and souls are suffering from neglect. And while we have achieved a great deal in the former realm, we are starving for “value and meaning” in the latter (ibid.: 264). More specifically, Hanzi observes a rising problem connected to “mental health issues among adolescents and young adults in the most advanced economies of the world” (ibid.: 282), which he interprets as the “price for development” (ibid.: 261) or even “civilization's shadow” (ibid.: 288).⁴

³ Recently, the "Live with Awareness, Courage and Love" Project has been taking up this concern, see <https://www.livewithacl.org/>.

⁴ He also claims that “the ‘most civilized’ people, in a sense, tend to be slightly bonkers” – just as many spiritual masters are reported to have been on the edge of madness when going through extreme inner turmoil (ibid.: 287). “We become civilized and we subtly go batshit crazy” (ibid.: 284). Moreover, “the only hope for civilization” might be found in some kind of “enlightened madness” (ibid.: 288).

This developmental imbalance not only harms our psychological health. According to Hanzi, it is a misuse of our human potential, including our cognitive capabilities, since ultimately, quoting David Hume, “reason is destined to be the slave of passion” (ibid.: 253). In other words, we should shift the relation between master and slave and give our intuitive intelligences the attention they deserve.

“If the political is already undeniably existential (and if) nothing is more political than your innermost relation to existence”, he asks, “does it then make sense to leave the existential permanently beyond the political; confined to the personal or ‘private’ realm?” (ibid.: 254). Obviously no. Hence, we need a deeper perspective and “go beyond rationality to determine which goals are worth striving for” in the first place (ibid.: 253). And we need to put this fundamental question at the center of politics, since in our time of multiple simultaneous crises, “our very survival depends upon our collective inner development”, in other words on our collective ability to get the priorities right (ibid.: 263).

Nonetheless, these deepest “whys” are mostly ignored in current political discourses. Having become used to “fixing problems”, if not searching for culprits among political opponents, *politics as usual* has little inner space for truly exploring the deeper root causes of the many wicked problems we are facing today, let alone its own contribution and responsibility for co-creating them in the first place.

From this, Hanzi concludes that we need a whole **new language and framework** for being able to make existential questions a public, political issue (ibid.: 255). If we adopt an integral anthropology as the starting point of a new politics, it matters how we are really doing and feeling deep down, beyond just material well-being. It matters if our needs are met in all or just one or two dimensions. Because ultimately, even though Hanzi thinks that we are “coded to be slightly dissatisfied” (ibid.: 245), having our deepest needs met is the foundation of our happiness. Happiness, in turn, strengthens our ability to put our best selves into the service of others and the world. And it makes a difference whether or not “society consist(s) of people following profound dreams, ideals and moral aspirations” (ibid.: 257) or if they let themselves be driven by *business as usual* or, in turn, *politics as usual*.

If we want to have a chance to navigate our current and future problems successfully, i.e. without “complexity overwhelm”, we “must grasp greater complexity *and* depth”, in other words, include more transrationality and act from the depths of our soul (ibid.: 255, 285). So in order to “turn us into fully-functional individuals”, as a precondition for transforming society into a more “future-ready” and harmonious one, the challenge is no less than to “grow our hearts and spirits”, as a way to grow our personal integrity (ibid.: 279, 282).

Consequently, it is an objective necessity to value and dedicate significant **resources** to personal, psycho-emotional and spiritual exploration and development. One initiative that has started to actively work in this direction is the [Inner Development Goals \(IDGs\) project](#), co-funded by one of Hanzi’s mentors. It is not mentioned in Hanzi’s books, because the two virtually almost co-emerged.

In view of implementing *Existential Politics*, Hanzi himself proposes to set up another government body: a **Ministry of Existential Affairs**. It would be in charge of two things: first, of mapping and monitoring what is going on in citizens’ Upper Left quadrant (subjective states and human experience), in other words, to thoroughly and regularly explore “how everyone is feeling deep down”. Putting together these “existential statistics” would be a basis for, second, taking political action to support existential wellbeing in a targeted way (ibid.: 259).

Box 6 (adapted from Freinacht, 2019: 259):

Existential Politics: Asking the right questions

- How many people honestly feel they are following their dreams?
- How many of us feel a pervasive lack of meaning? To what extent do we define ourselves, our identities, in terms of material wealth and worldly success versus in terms of inner qualities?
- How afraid are we of death, and how does this fear shape our lives? How many of us have profound regrets on our deathbeds?
- How many and how fundamental lies do we tell one another? To what extent do we live with truths that cannot be told to our nearest and dearest?
- How many people get stuck in untreated traumas, so that deep wounds are never healed and greater inner depths never fully integrated into our personalities?
- How many have strong, transformative experiences of a spiritual nature, and how often, and who? How many are on serious spiritual paths, or otherwise trained in introspection, meta-cognition, inner self-scrutiny and useful forms of meditation?
- How accurately and dispassionately are we able to describe our own behaviors, strengths, weaknesses and vices?

This second pillar is then again about creating “**structures, norms and institutions** (that) can help us grow and turn our painful misfortunes into meaningful lessons learnt and (into) an awakened awareness of the suffering of the world” (ibid.: 257). So similar to what has been discussed for *Gemeinschaft Politics* before, establishing public scaffolding structures in itself implies to “normalize” existential questions in the sense of mainstreaming them in political discourse. This allows to shift both public focus and resources to what is ultimately important and desirable. – And it turns deep, persistent **shadow work** and personal (individual and collective) growth into “normal”, state-sponsored social activities.

Therefore, while a completely “**sane society**” might be utopian (because with every new level of civilizational complexity, “we’ll get a whole new level of crazy to go with it”), metamodern politics aims “to create a society where a sufficient number of us develop the resilience to hold on during this crazy ride” (ibid.: 288). It aims to raise the average amount of higher states and greater inner depths, as well as their successful integration in as many people as possible – a truly powerful integral political vision!

More practically, Hanzi also has some concrete ideas for implementing *Existential Politics* in everyday life. Their common “north star” is the suggestion to revive the medieval concept of a “**vita contemplativa**”, i.e. the idea that “a contemplative path ...could be made part and parcel of day-to-day society and politics”. Given that the metamodern approach is transrational, this does not imply “that society needs us to become monks and nuns (in any traditional sense, E.F.), but that more of us are supported through the inner journeys of life” in view of engaging in personal transformation (ibid.: 261).

More specific **strategies** for helping people to develop and integrate greater inner depths, (...) and to cognitively relate to more complex realities include to

- foster the practice and skill of **meditation** on all levels of education in order to harvest the multiple benefits of mindfulness (see the [Mindfulness Initiative's reports](#)),
- offer **therapy to all children** throughout life in order to help them deal with inner and outer everyday challenges in a transformative way,
- foster a more **positive attitude** towards “negative experiences” and crises (the Greek word for decision), thereby training transformative skills, growth-oriented mindsets, personal integrity and a non-judgmental ethic, while at the same time reducing fear (ibid.: 266, 282),
- build and sustain physical **support structures** (metamodern secular monasteries) for all of these skills and practices with the purpose to grow our hearts and nourish our souls (ibid.: 272).

As an intermediate summary of these first three forms of metamodern politics, we can say that all of them put a strong focus on the dimension of depth. All of them intelligently combine a bold overall vision with concrete steps for implementing it. And all of them engage politics in creating public support for mapping and measuring personal growth and development, as well as for training and enhancing new skills in all citizens (ibid.: 225). Hanzi holds that they all “serve to spur subtle but pervasive transformations of society and everyday life, until we reach a higher equilibrium of human well-being, as we achieve a listening society” (ibid.: 289). In some sense, this follows his claim of a “long-term historical trend of increasing *intimacy of control*: larger and larger parts of our minds, behaviors and bodies are coordinated in more complex and deliberate ways” (ibid.: 289).

The next three forms build up on these first three ones, while “shifting to a higher gear of complexity in thinking” (ibid.).

Form 4: Emancipation Politics

As we have seen in relation to *Existential Politics*, Hanzi expects every increase in socio-political complexity to come with an increase of the *intimacy of control*. He describes the underlying mechanism as follows: “As society’s complexity increases, this creates pressure to increase the reach and density of governance, and this creates new sources of oppression (...). This creates an increased need to expand negative human rights and freedoms, i.e. the right *not* to be subjected to new oppressions” (ibid.: 293).

On this basis, Hanzi defines *Emancipation Politics* as “the politics of defending (in)dividual rights and increasing the degrees of freedom”, especially with regard to “the new forms of oppression that can and will occur as the *intimacy of control* increases”, in other words, that arise as a result of progressing civilization and development (ibid.: 289). He mentions four dimensions of this new, more subtle kind of oppression:

1. by external state/market structures (which set or frame boundaries to what behaviors (we think) are possible or desirable)
2. in everyday interactions, i.e. the discrimination of minorities
3. other people standing in your way (parents’ power over kids)
4. ourselves, i.e. inner, cognitive and other patterns and limitations

As illustrations of these new sources of oppression, he offers **examples** like

- psychological tests and sophisticated diagnostics (gathering personal data about us),
- moral peer pressure to “be authentic” or to participate actively in specific democratic processes or collective activities, even if we think that they are a waste of time,
- manipulation of our will by technocrats or advertising
- subtle self-oppression: if you adapt to what (you think) others expect of you, despite your own ambitions or deeper longings pointing you into other directions (ibid.: 290f.).

These examples show that the new forms of oppression that Hanzi sees emerging become much more subtle – which, in turn, makes the new rights and the deeper, more evenly distributed freedoms that he claims necessary to counterbalance them much harder to define. As a side note, some critical questions could be asked as to who can and should ultimately decide what oppression is, where it starts and where it ends, in order to avoid opening the door to narcissism calling any subjective sensitivities “subtle oppressions”. In fact, Hanzi himself raises this issue when asking how we can prevent society from being “bogged down with ridiculous amounts of legal cases, as everyone will feel oppressed by everyone else” (ibid.: 297).

Consequently, he concludes that we need an ongoing political debate about these issues – and a process for facilitating it. It will not come as a surprise that his suggestion for creating “a permanent framework for society’s ongoing debate and dialogue about freedom and oppression” is a **Ministry of Emancipation** (ibid.: 294). Its role would be to gather information about all forms of oppression, analyze them and facilitate not only a permanent public deliberation about them, but also to initiate a developmental process that seeks to increase freedom while reducing oppression.

While this idea might appear far-fetched at first, its underlying principle is a valuable contribution to a new visionary politics of the future: Hanzi suggests to anticipate potential threats to freedom resulting from his own political endeavors (“just imagine how wrong things like *Gemeinschaft* or existential politics can go...”, ibid.: 295) – and to create the necessary structural counterweights to them even before they might have fully manifested. Moreover, Hanzi explicitly presents *Emancipation Politics* as an attempt to counterbalance the integrative, yet therefore also potentially (subtly) oppressive forces of the previous three forms. In this sense, it is a good example for political metamodernism’ appeal to simultaneously “**be**” and “**fight the power**” (ibid.: 300).

Form 5: Empirical Politics

Hanzi’s fifth form may come as a bit of a surprise, since it is not about any specific policy contents (he admits that it is “drier and less exciting”, ibid.: 304), but rather about the foundations of knowledge, upon which we build our political choices. It is less of a surprise though, if we consider that metamodern politics as a whole is about **raising the level of conscious awareness within a society**. In this sense, Hanzi’s *Empirical Politics* is directed towards building up citizens’ meta-skills, namely critical thinking and the “overall capacity of society for intersubjective verification” of what it holds to be true (Freinacht, 2019: 307).

He argues that “policies, regulations and practices can and should be based upon the best available information and empirically tested knowledge”, which he claims, is not the case today (ibid.: 301). Using the example of climate change, he points at data confirming that “today’s society is still largely

unscientific” (ibid.: 304) and that large parts of it are even behaving like in the Middle Ages: “Most people aren’t responding to this [evidence, E.F.], to the sheer quantitative immensity of the task and its rising stakes. They don’t care, they don’t understand, they don’t inform themselves” (ibid.: 308).

Whereas Hanzi does not go much deeper into the reasons for this state of affairs (apart from missing incentives and “our lazy minds”, 314), he dedicates most of this chapter to potential solutions and political responses to this “catastrophically **unscientific behavior**”. These go in the direction of

- “find(ing) ways to be better at sticking to empirically sound assessments of reality” (ibid.: 314),
- creating good “predictive models of reality” (ibid.),
- “optimiz(ing) the process of getting the best possible empirical knowledge and to get all parts of society to commit to using it (ibid.: 302),
- Introducing “a better decision-making process(es) to come closer to a shared truth” (ibid.).

Note that the concept of **truth** plays a crucial role in Hanzi’s *Empirical Politics*. In fact, he calls it the “metamodern God” (ibid.: 314). At the same time, he is conscious of the fact that truth is an “approachable but always unattainable” vision, that it is “always beyond us as we plunge into the mystery” (ibid.: 301, 306), and that as a society, we can only come closer to (ibid.: 307) when it comes to defining what our shared truths could be.

Nevertheless, Hanzi insists on **truth** being the measure of how “empirical” a society is, and on science as its main driver and agent. In his perspective, “good science” has to do with testing “different paths to validity etc. (...) against each other” and with “perpetually answer(ing) and re-answer(ing) questions about practices in society” (ibid.: 302). Moreover, “the level of ‘scientificness’ of society can only be measured by the density and complexity of the **meshwork of intersubjective verification and falsification**” (ibid.: 305).

As such, this appears as a quite “modern” position, presupposing that, if only scientists (and we as citizens) get the right training and education and are provided with the right spaces and necessary time, they/we will ultimately find – or come as close to “the truth” as one can get as a result of joint efforts.

Even though Hanzi is aware that this is not an easy process, full of biases (ibid.: 303), he seems to at least put less emphasis on the postmodern insight that there is no ultimate this-worldly truth, since all perspectives – including those of scientists – always already speak from specific subject positions. And that structural and discursive power (“oppression”, as of the previous section) plays a significant role in what theories or paradigms get to be considered as “true” in a given setting, including in the “church of science”, as one colleague ironically put it.

Rather, Hanzi insists on the ideal of “people verifying or falsifying the findings of one another” as part of some sort of “ongoing, deliberate and *explicitly planned* process for making society more scientifically driven and empirically tested” with support from above, so to speak (*my italics*, EF).

While this idea of a “peer-reviewed society” based on facts and solid scientific knowledge with society itself as truth’s ultimate mentor is, by all means, appealing in times of fake news, it also raises a number of questions, not least from a developmental perspective. First, even though Hanzi acknowledges that “science itself seems to points us beyond ‘rationality’, and towards a meta-rationality that includes our

emotions, relations and narratives” (ibid.: 309), his own considerations come across as **focused mostly on cognition proper**, while disregarding other sources of knowledge.

Even though Hanzi does mention the imbalance (and tension) between the sheer overwhelming quantity of available knowledge on the one hand, and its quality and felt depth on the other, his practical suggestions for making society “more empirical” seem to be mostly directed towards mental skills. For example, he recommends to “gradually increase society’s capacity for *information processing* and *event prediction* by developing our collective capacity for intersubjective crosschecking” (ibid.: 315, my italics). How is this going to happen (and by whom)? How can we reach “higher stages of empiricism” and of “self-scrutiny”, given that our societies are not only made up of scientists? And how could or should meta- or transrational intelligences, let alone the heart and the hand, be included into the process of putting whatever topic is at stake through the “greatest possible number of injunctions” (ibid.: 307)?

Hence, second, there seems to be a certain tension between the intellectual and the democratic endeavor. While we can assume that science, especially as sketched here, will likely continue to be a domain that requires certain cognitive “entry skills”, statistics proposed by developmental research show that these are not necessarily available in the broad public (Rosenberg, 2008).

Moreover, third, Hanzi does not discuss the implications of his own developmental perspective for his vision of *Empirical Politics* and a “peer-reviewed society”. Developmental theory shows that different people are always likely to function at different levels of complexity at any moment in time and that a certain number of them will likely be in over their heads when faced with relatively high cognitive demands such as the ones voiced here. Thus, it leaves open what people at earlier stages of development or with less prominent cognitive skills, let alone what a more holistic anthropology would have to contribute to *Empirical Politics*.

As a side note, I would assume that even if one has no scientific background whatsoever, one can still be a very valuable contributor to processes that invite collective intelligence. Maybe all of that is implied in Hanzi’s idea of empiricism and the processes designed to scaffold and facilitate it, but it is not mentioned very explicitly.

Finally, the Orwellian question that Hanzi raises himself, remains: Who should be the last fact checker or ultimate verifier of truth in this scenario? This remains an open question.

As with Hanzi’s previous four forms, the core strategy for implementing his fifth one is, again, to set up a **Ministry of Empirical Politics**, for which he identifies at least ten pre-defined tasks. They range from science support to facilitating public debates about science, to governing the media and language up until helping to develop a metamodern political and popular culture in a broad sense (see box 7).

While the suggestions about facilitating a new quality of public deliberation are immediately obvious, given that this is already increasingly happening, for example in the context of sortition-based citizens assemblies, the idea of state-driven truth remains more questionable. As long as we are not living in an already integral/metamodern society that has fully embraced the value of metamodern/integral code, doubts remain whether “more truth” can be orchestrated or better managed by state order, rather than by competing minds seeking it as an aim in itself – or at least, as a competitive advantage (see also the above-mentioned tension between science and democracy, at least in the current sense of one person one voice).

Box 7 (adapted from Freinacht, 2019: 310-314):

The “Ten-Fold Path to Enlightenment (2.0)”: Tasks of the Ministry for Empirical Politics:

1. Evaluate, survey, rate and publicize the degree of evidence-based practice in all areas of public sector work and civil service
2. Improve the quality, relevance and reliability of science throughout all branches
3. Cultivate and develop a critical meta-discussion about science and its role in society
4. Institutionalize interdisciplinary contacts and exchanges between scientific fields
5. Increase the average ability for critical thinking and logical reasoning in the general population
6. Cross-check publications of media institutes in order to raise the quality of journalism
7. Support a co-developmental political culture of cooperation, rather than competition
8. Support popular culture (such as the social media) to become more fact-based
9. Promote a more precise everyday language
10. Support the “ontological security’ of the population”, i.e. our sense of order, continuity and fundamental safety (310-314).

Therefore, all things considered, the best – yet most banal suggestion of *Empirical Politics* is probably that we should dedicate substantial public resources to increasing people’s ability for more complex and critical thinking in general. Ultimately, these appear as a matter of personal development, just like acquiring the necessary skills for processing multiple kinds of data more holistically, i.e. with head, heart, hands, and more effectively. Hence, individual growth and development can and should be high up on the agenda of metamodern/integral politics as a more solid basis for further developing our political cultures in the direction of the metamodern “protopia”⁵.

Form 6: Politics of Theory

“The work of metamodern philosophers and scientists is to rewrite the very fabric of what is real”, i.e. to create a new narrative (Freinacht, 2019: 301).

According to Hanzi, *Politics of Theory* “constitutes the very essence of metamodern politics”. At the same time, he frankly admits that “it is the most dangerous of all the ideas in this book” (ibid.: 317). As we have seen in the previous section, one task and concern of metamodern politics is to take care of the **quality of knowledge** that is used as a basis for political decision-making (*empirical politics*). In other words, it is about **reframing how we see and interpret what is going on in the world**.

If you now think of brainwashing, that is what Hanzi explicitly calls it – yet with a positive connotation. For he argues that brainwashing is already taking place everywhere today (think for example of the omnipresence of the liberal ideas of competition or of material wealth as a marker of personal success), yet without anybody monitoring or regulating it – and without most people noticing it at all.

⁵ Hanzi uses this term instead of “utopia” order to stress that a metamodern *progressive utopia* is not “utopian” in the sense of “unrealistic”, but rather very possible, provided our joint focus and efforts (Freinacht, 2022).

In contrast, metamodern politics is about society becoming conscious of itself, of the multiple interrelations of its members⁶ – and of its own social construction of reality. Once this is happening, it becomes obvious that culture can – and should be actively developed and, to some degree, regulated and governed, i.e. moved into desirable directions, in order to support more people to make this move themselves (ibid.: 320). So, Hanzi asks, why not come up with a better narrative and create better myths in the first place (ibid.: 321, 330)?

Therefore, “the basic idea of *Politics of Theory* (or ‘of Narrative’) is to monitor, steer and regulate the fundamental ‘theory of everything’ that people subscribe to, our shared narrative or worldview” (ibid.: 317). In some sense, this is like actively promoting an ideology, except that it happens in a much more conscious, dialogical and self-reflexive way than in the case of most other ideologies we have known so far. Moreover, Hanzi’s somehow ironic and provocative idea of brainwashing us with the metamodern “Nordic Ideology” comes together with a call for “continuous, explicit, democratic scrutiny”, i.e. permanent discussion about and self-improvement of the ideology itself.

As another side note, it might be worth mentioning that politics of theory is a cognitively complex, meta-systematic endeavor which is only conceivable from post-conventional stages of development onwards. Admittedly, this capacity and skill is steadily increasing as we are moving towards postmodern societies. After all, Hanzi seems to think that philosophy has always been a leading edge activity anyway (“it is unavoidable that a certain degree of elitism and unproductive arrogance sneaks in”, ibid.: 356).

As we have learnt by now, Hanzi always recommends to set up appropriate institutions to support and implement metamodern politics in everyday life. In the case of *Politics of Theory*, it is a to-be-established “**Ministry of Theory**”, which would set up, monitor and further develop a norm-system that would promote and reward certain beliefs over others as a result of a transparent, deliberative process of weighing their value. It would also actively create possibilities for different worldviews to meet and argue with one another about their respective strengths and weaknesses, while monitoring and steering the process into metamodern directions.⁷

Given that this requires all involved parties to face actuality and to commit to greater self-scrutiny, this would be an experiment in pushing everyone to grow beyond their current worldview. For according to developmental theory, a self-reflexive attitude is not already a very prominent strength of most of the earlier cultural codes. Hence, facilitating and engaging people in a similar cross-party dialog process is a truly transpartisan, metamodern act.

Admittedly, similar experiments have hardly ever been seriously tried in the political realm, because they would indeed run counter the existing codes (rules of the game) of *politics as usual*. Luckily, Hanzi goes about this competition of worldviews with his usual attitude of **sincere irony and** a good deal of humor and lightness: “we must remain playful, lest we are guaranteed to experience the failures that follow from fanaticism and disastrous consequences of misguided effervescence. We must strive for coherence and harmony, but can’t force it to happen” (ibid.: 172).

⁶ As an **example** of synthesizing different perspectives and their truths, while at the same time tackling the widespread “lacking sense of belonging and direction”, Hanzi refers to the emerging discipline of **Big History** that is being taught in a growing number of schools. Its aim is “to overcome the perceived division between humans and the natural world”, to foster a cosmological approach to history and to invite students to become curious about the deeper patterns that are visible between developments at different levels (Freinacht, 2019, 328).

⁷ For more detail about the kinds of expertise that a Ministry of Theory should gather, see Freinacht, 2019: 331.

So with political metamodernism and its Nordic ideology, we at least have a candidate who (in theory) has or could develop our capacity to hold, coordinate and use multiple perspectives, and to moderate the process of deliberately developing our shared cultural code into the direction of a metamodern narrative (ibid.: 325, 335). With its ideal of a listening society, based on Ken Wilber's assumption that "everybody is right, even if not 100%", in combination with Hanzi's acknowledgement that "truth can only be stated in provisional, playful terms" (ibid.: 329), *Politics of Theory* launches an invitation to dance, grow, and to enjoy the ride.

The Master Pattern: "Montesquieu 2.0"

Having introduced all of the six forms of metamodern politics, we now come to the core question and claim of Hanzi Freinacht's model. How do all of these forms fit together? What are the necessary conditions for them to work in an optimal way? And how can they be introduced in existing democracies without waiting until everybody has embraced integral/metamodern consciousness?

Hanzi's claim is that if implemented correctly, the six forms described above constitute a coherent whole which he calls a "Master Pattern" (ibid.: 337). Indeed, they somehow resonate with each other, and each of them is in a productive tension with at least one of the others. Thus, ideally, they are expected to "**balance each other out**", similar to the mechanism that Montesquieu described for the separation of powers. In his book "De l'Esprit des Lois" (1748), Montesquieu argued that with legislation, executive power and the judiciary designed to constitute a mutually responsive, reciprocally controlling and balancing system, this could prevent one of them to take over control and thus, help to preserve political freedom. Drawing on this inspiration, Hanzi frames his Master Pattern as "Montesquieu 2.0 (...) albeit at a more indirect and abstract level" (ibid. 339). For example,

- *democratization* needs societal trust (the domain of *Gemeinschaft* politics). Invertedly, cultivating *Gemeinschaft* needs democratic foundations in order not to deteriorate into cults or sects.
- *Existential Politics* "must be held in place by *Empirical Politics*", whereas the latter should serve the purposes identified by the former.
- *Gemeinschaft Politics* has an inherent tension with *Emancipation Politics*, while both of them should be embedded in solid and well rooted democratic processes.
- *Empirical Politics* without the social warmth of *Gemeinschaft Politics* and the deep purpose of *Existential Politics* would "amount to coldhearted technocracy without much legitimacy".
- Finally, *Politics of Theory* "builds upon the successful implementation of the other five". It requires all five other forms "to emerge in a functional, healthy way", instead of degenerating into mere ideology. "If you don't have all the other ones in place, this one can and will flip out in every conceivable manner" (ibid.: 339-341).

Hanzi also demonstrates the interrelatedness and complementarity of the six forms by using Wilber's way of coding the dominant perspectives of each of them (1st, 2nd and 3rd person perspectives), showing that together, they cover all perspectives in both directions. Hence, the Master Pattern provides us with a fuller, more comprehensive picture (ibid.: 343). This, he argues, "can bring us-as-society into greater resonance", a term borrowed from German sociologist Hartmut Rosa (Rosa, 2016). And as a

result, it can help us to “manifest a deeper form of society than has hitherto existed: new forms of governance, economy and welfare. New forms of emergent networks of dividuals”⁸ (ibid.: 337).

Figure 1:
The Master
Pattern

Source:
Freinacht
2019: 338

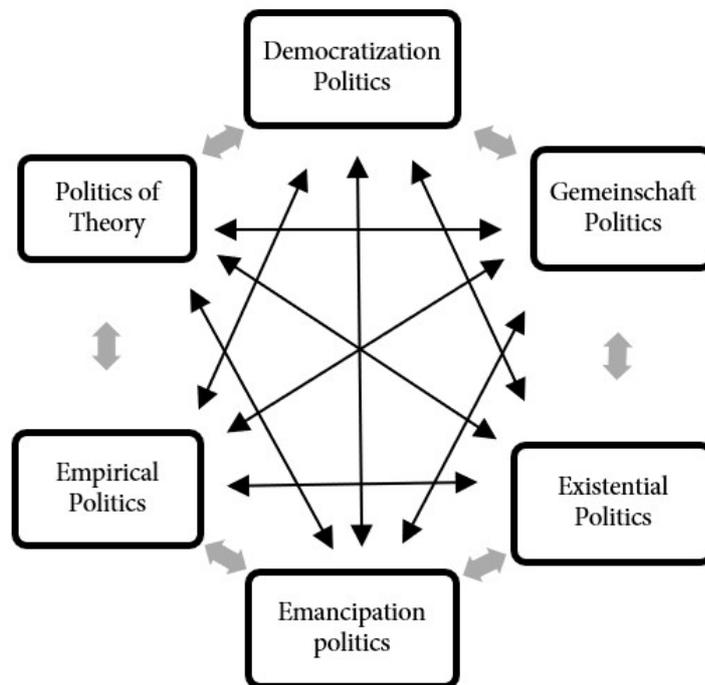


Figure: The six new forms of politics, all part of one emergent, “intra-relational” balance: None of the six forms are fully possible without the others, and the very meaning of each new kind of politics changes depending on how the others develop.

At the same time, Hanzi hopes that this metamodern version of checks and balances will provide a governance design that is more responsive also to the ever faster changing needs and challenges coming out of society itself. In our times, “we need to find the politics that resonates with the life conditions” in a general way and, more specifically, with those “of the internet age” (i.e. the current “game”, ibid.).

Note that different from Montesquieu’s initial model, which was based on an extensive study of the Roman Empire, Hanzi’s concept of *Montesquieu 2.0* is primarily a theoretical model. It is not derived from empirical observation, even though *Nordic Ideology* does contain references to a number of pioneering initiatives in the field (see below). Therefore, the practical workings of both the model itself and the implementation of the six forms in real-life are still subject to empirical testing.

Different also from Laloux’ description of the TEAL model and best proven strategies for implementing it in organizations (see chapter 6), there are **no actual examples of metamodern governance on societal or state level**, which could serve as illustrations or blueprints for what works and what doesn’t.

⁸ The term „dividual“ instead of “individual” is a deliberate linguistic construction by which Hanzi Freinacht points at the fact that we are all interconnected with each other and with the world surrounding us, and that hence, the concept of an “individual” self is a fiction.

So how can we possibly get into the land of metamodern *protopia*? How to implement the Master Pattern and where would we have to start?

According to Hanzi, there is a **logical sequence** to the practical implementation of the six forms, namely the order in which he presents them (see sections above). He recommends to start by the first one, *Democratization Politics*. Focusing on the Lower Right quadrant, it arguably has the most accessible agenda for most readers, including items that progressive forces in our current societies are already promoting today. In contrast, *Gemeinschaft* and *Existential Politics* imply a more consequent shift towards a holistic anthropology and narrative. Therefore, he suspects that for implementing these, let alone all of the six forms at once, “the world and our current society may not be ready” (ibid.: 338ff.).

Consequently, Hanzi calls for an **agile approach**: start somewhere, learn from feedback and mistakes and adjust as you go. As to *Democratization Politics*, this could mean to start by a series of “micro-movements guided by the overall master plan as a north star. Pioneers are currently doing this, for instance, by setting up sortition based citizens assemblies and trying to anchor them in the respective political systems. Hanzi himself is less specific about possible micro-steps. For example, we could “take over some of the core principles of party politics, (...) hijack representative democracy and its parties”, insert metamodern narrative on top of it and challenge the current form of democracy by slowly “gravitat(ing it) towards (...) an organic, (more) holistic system of governance” (ibid.: 392).

For a more concrete illustration of how this might look in practice, see Hanzi’s chapter on the [Alternative Denmark](#), which roughly followed this agenda several years before the Hanzi books were even written (Freinacht, 2017: 109ff.). Other examples include the [Alternative UK](#), the Pirate Parties in Iceland and Germany, the Swiss party “[Integrale Politik](#)” and the Swedish party “[The Initiative](#)”, all of which are portrayed in our [LiFT Pioneers of Politics Youtube channel](#). In any case, we are dealing with non-linear emergence out of the field of potential that presents itself differently in every context (Freinacht, 2019: 353). Therefore, there is no single “right way” to go metamodern.

And in fact, beyond these examples, this is about all we get from Hanzi in practical terms.

As to the **strategies and agents** for implementing metamodern politics, he essentially envisions the two entities that have been mentioned before: the “metamodern aristocracy” and a “process oriented party”⁹. Both of them have the task to “**infect the whole political spectrum with the metamodern virus**” (ibid.: 344). So let’s stay with this for a moment.

Judging from the contents of the *Nordic Ideology* book, Hanzi seems to believe that the virus of metamodernism can and needs to land first and foremost in people’s minds by virtue of its immanent cognitive power. For a large part of his reasoning about why metamodernism is a better alternative to *politics as usual* consists of arguments that are aiming to convince the reader by sheer logic. Let’s take a look:

- “Political metamodernism has the **shortest average distance to all other positions**. It is closer to socialism than the conservatives, closer to conservatism than the ecologists, closer to ecologism than the libertarians, closer to liberalism than the social democrats, and even closer to

⁹ For a more thorough discussion of the concept of a “transformative party” and how to set it up, see Hanno Burmester and Christoph Holtman’s Book (2021, in German). Book review here: <https://www.ifis-freiburg.de/2021-03/auf-dem-weg-zu-einer-integralen-transformativen-partei-rezension>.

the political fringes than the center and vice versa. It is not the most popular of positions, but it's the least hated" (ibid.: 346, see also box 8 below).

- It can not only deal with all of these positions on the level of deliberation, but it can actually beat each of the existing ideologies "on its own terms" (ibid.: 368). In other words, it can "**out-compete them**" and prove to be a better alternative to all of them (ibid.: 349).
- Due to its developmental meta-perspective, metamodernism understands where the other positions are coming from. Its own **aperspectivism** helps it to see their strengths and weaknesses, and to have "solidarity with the perspectives of others" without taking sides (**transpar-tisanism**). Rather, it will take a both-and-view that takes up others' contributions while trying to transcend their limitations (ibid.: 386f.). Through this mediation work, it also helps to improve the climate of dialogue and debate in the given society.
- It introduces its own positions as "**'stealable' ideas**", available for others to take over and spread in their own name. Moreover, it might even seduce other positions "by showing them ways to defeat their loathed enemies" (ibid.: 388). In fact, this is the whole point of what Hanzi calls political metamodernism's "benevolent hostile take-over plan" that, by the way, is promoted fully transparently: to force "all other parties to deepen their discussions about what they really believe and why" which, he thinks, will ultimately lead them to grow and to open up towards metamodern positions (ibid.: 348, 350).

So much for the cognitive persuasion task ahead. Beyond these – sometimes slightly provocative – claims appealing to the audience's cognition, Hanzi also points at the deeper challenges that are connected with implementing metamodern politics, not without warning us that it is going to be an adventurous ride. This is essentially the case, because making any transformational shift requires us to face our own **shadows**.

Box 8 (adapted from Freinacht, 2019: 368-385):

Metamodernism is smarter than ...	and can outcompete it because...
anarchism	it is more idealistic and more radically rebellious, yet avoids anarchism's game denial (you cannot get rid of power in human relations)
communism	it has a more accurate map, covering not just the external, but also internal dimensions of development
socialism	it is more egalitarian in the sense of deep solidarity beyond just the material dimension and includes the emancipation of the human soul
liberalism	it maximizes freedom by defining it in transpersonal terms
ecologism	it proposes more sustainable systems by including all quadrants of development
conservatism	it is more prudent, considerate and differentiated in view of acknowledging the givens of our current games, while putting them into a developmental perspective
fascism	it openly strives for power, but has included or is willing to include its shadows and own its weaknesses.

On our way into unknown territory, we might have to take risks, face dangers and conquer evils of different kinds, if we don't want to give up our endeavors. For this, it needs a healthy dose of heroism, i.e. a will to power and creation that Clare Graves has described as the defining energy of the CP level (and that Beck/Cowan call RED in their Spiral Dynamics model). However, in contrast to CP/RED heroism, metamodern heroism would be "shadow-aware" in that it has integrated its own negative dominator impulses (ibid.: 399). In Hanzi's words, "the political metamodernist must learn to travel these dark tunnels without becoming a creature of the night" (ibid.: 400), and maybe, we must "travel to hell and come back wiser and stronger" (ibid.: 395). Hence, it needs a strong will and the persistence to stay with our goals, even in the face of adversary, resentment or hostilities by the currently dominant modern and postmodern worldviews (ibid.: 407). But since competition is an element of the game – and even "an irremovable element of social reality itself" (ibid.: 406), metamodernists will happily pick up the ball and enter this competition.

The work on shadows is also important, if we want to avoid falling into the trap of repeating the patterns of those structures that we aim to go beyond, given that they are always present in us as well. Otherwise, these patterns could have us "by the balls", as Hanzi might express it, and we would end up establishing a new cult, some exclusive circle at best, or a totalitarian movement at worst (ibid.: 422). For "failed holism" can take both of these forms. Yet, Hanzi stresses, "we need successful holism", allowing for greater depth and responding to the widespread longing for wholeness by trans-rationality instead of non-rationality (ibid.: 415).

Quite possibly, this challenge of walking the talk of including serious shadow work into the political agenda could be one of the reasons why so far, no metamodern/integral political movement has as yet emerged on a larger scale. In fact, many existing initiatives continue to struggle precisely with this dimension.

At least, however, with metamodernism, we now have a much more precise compass, if not a map, the overall patterns of which can inspire and help to better navigate the unknown territory of new politics. Of course, this map must be fine-tuned, adjusted and modified via practical experience and as a result of the feedback we receive from our joint dance with actuality.

Maybe it needs metamodern *Sanghas* to take over from there? Maybe simply more of those pioneers that we have portrayed in the LiFT *Politics* materials and many of whom are already working actively into integral/metamodern directions? Many others are exploring specific areas of new politics without having or using the "Master Pattern" suggested by Hanzi as their guiding principle. Inversely, there might be metamodern-ites (similar to the distinction of "integralists" and "integralites", see above), who are simply "doing it" on the ground without needing any metamodern framing?

All things considered, if Hanzi's overall claim and diagnosis is correct, metamodern politics is a powerful attractor that will eventually spur development in all quadrants, and supporting it globally is therefore a worthwhile project. The growing number of adherents to the metamodern discussion forums, as well as an increasing number of activities emerging in the metamodern field (such as public speeches, events, courses, and a recent Metamodern Masterclass) confirm the rising interest in and growing impact of this new narrative.

My own reading is that metamodern politics as outlined in “The Listening Society” and fleshed out in more detail in “Nordic Ideology” is one possible interpretation, translation and application of integral thinking in the area of politics – even though the Hanzi authors might not fully subscribe to this claim. Yet, ultimately, what counts is not the label, but the qualities it brings and the traction it gains as a more complex and more adequate response to our global challenges. Given that metamodern politics has a lot to offer, we happily close with another quote by Hanzi Freinacht, hoping that reality will prove him right: “The bottom-line is: (...) at the end of the day, you can’t stop us” (ibid.: 389).

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