



Redefining symbolic authority in contemporary societies: a group-analytic perspective on the transformation of the social bond

Redefiniendo la autoridad simbólica en las sociedades contemporáneas: una perspectiva de la grupoanálisis sobre la transformación del vínculo social.

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ABSTRACT

Contemporary societies are undergoing a profound transformation in the symbolic organization of authority, dependency, and belonging. This paper proposes that the current crisis of authority should be interpreted not merely as political or institutional instability, but as a breakdown of symbolic containment at the level of the social unconscious. Drawing on group-analytic theory, key psychoanalytic perspectives, sociological analyses of civilizing processes, and the concept of the social imaginary, the paper explores how the erosion of symbolic authority destabilizes psychic organization and relational structures, giving rise to disturbances that reverberate through personal, dynamic, and foundational submatrices. Attention is given to the weakening of the paternal function, the “dead father effect,” and the emergence of regressive collective formations such as aggregation and massification. The analysis further examines how digital acceleration and artificial intelligence intensify these dynamics by compressing symbolic delay and technologizing dependency. By integrating Byung-Chul Han’s reflections on the disappearance of ritual, the paper shows how the loss of shared forms diminishes containment and fuels messianic longings and permissive forms of authority. It concludes that the crisis of symbolic authority may represent both peril and potential: while it fosters polarization and authoritarian regression, it also opens conditions for reconstituting containment through dialogical, group-based, and reflective forms of authority beyond domination.

Keywords: symbolic authority; paternal function; group analysis; dependency; anxiety; artificial intelligence.

RESUMEN

Las sociedades contemporáneas atraviesan una profunda transformación en la organización simbólica de la autoridad, la dependencia y la pertenencia. Este trabajo propone que la actual crisis de autoridad no debe interpretarse meramente como una inestabilidad política o institucional, sino como una ruptura de la contención simbólica a nivel del inconsciente social. A partir de la teoría del análisis de grupos, perspectivas psicoanalíticas clave, análisis sociológicos de los procesos de civilización y el concepto de imaginario social, el artículo explora cómo la erosión de la autoridad simbólica desestabiliza la organización psíquica y las estructuras relacionales, dando lugar a perturbaciones que repercuten en las submatrices personal, dinámica y fundacional. Se presta atención al debilitamiento de la función paterna, al “efecto del padre muerto” y a la aparición de formaciones colectivas regresivas, tales como la agregación y la masificación. El análisis examina además cómo la aceleración digital y la inteligencia artificial intensifican estas dinámicas al comprimir la demora simbólica y tecnologizar la dependencia. Al integrar las reflexiones de Byung-Chul Han sobre la desaparición del ritual, el trabajo muestra cómo la pérdida de formas compartidas disminuye la contención y alimenta anhelos mesiánicos y formas permisivas de autoridad. Se concluye que la crisis de la autoridad simbólica puede representar tanto un peligro como una oportunidad: si bien fomenta la polarización y la regresión autoritaria, también crea condiciones para reconstituir la contención mediante formas de autoridad dialógicas, grupales y reflexivas, más allá de la dominación.

Palabras clave: autoridad simbólica; función paterna; análisis de grupos; dependencia; ansiedad; inteligencia artificial.

Introduction: a civilizational threshold

Contemporary societies are undergoing a transformation that exceeds institutional reform or political realignment. What is at stake is a civilizational transition in how authority, dependency, and belonging are symbolically organized. The visible symptoms—polarization, institutional distrust, and fragmented public discourse—point to a major erosion of the frameworks that historically sustained the social bond.

Symbolic authority, throughout modern history, has been maintained by hierarchical institutions such as families, religions, political and educational systems. They did not merely manage power; they provided shared coordinates that organized vulnerability and conflict. They defined who could speak, who could decide, and how boundaries could be justified. Despite their frequently oppressive character, such arrangements offered predictable patterns of recognition and responsibility.

Their contemporary decline has not led to a linear move toward emancipation. Instead, many individuals, groups, and societies can be found suspended between a discredited past and a yet unsymbolized future. This suspension manifests in heightened anxiety, pervasive ambivalence toward authority, and the oscillation between radical skepticism and longing for strong leaders. Under the conditions of the electronic era—immediacy, exposure, constant connectivity etc.—, these tensions are amplified. Symbolic mediation is compressed or bypassed, and the distance that once allowed for reflection and delay is reduced.

This paper suggests that the present crisis should be understood not primarily as a political or moral failure, but as a renegotiation of containment issues at the level of social unconscious. Drawing on group-analytic theory (Foulkes, 1984; Hopper, 2003b), sociological analyses (Elias, 2000) and social-philosophical work (Castoriadis, 1987a), the discussion puts emphasis on how the erosion of symbolic authority reshapes and rearranges collective life. Psychoanalytic insights (Green, 1986f; Lacan, 2006n) illuminate the psychic dimensions of this transformation, while references (Žižek, 2001; Han, 2015, 2017) help clarify the affective and ideological forms it takes in digitally mediated societies. The guiding question is not whether traditional authority has received a well-deserved critique, but what happens when those structures collapse without adequate symbolic transformation. How are anxiety and dependency redistributed? Why do societies oscillate between aggregation and massification? What forms of containment might emerge that do not simply reinstate domination under new guises?

Symbolic authority and social containment

Symbolic authority signifies more than the capacity to command. It refers to a collectively recognized principle that legitimizes boundaries, mediates conflict, and sustains continuity across generations. It represents the *place* from which rules, judgments, and decisions are understood to emanate—not only in formal institutions, but in families, communities, and cultural narratives as well.

From a group-analytic perspective, symbolic authority has a containing function (Foulkes, 1975). It absorbs anxiety, channels aggression, and offers interpretive frameworks for psychical suffering. It structures dependency by assigning roles and responsibilities, thereby transforming vulnerability into patterned, comprehensible forms of reliance. Even where authority imposed hierarchy and exclusion, it provided symbolic grammar within which individuals could locate themselves and others.

Psychoanalytic theories of the paternal function offer one way of conceptualizing this dimension of authority. The paternal function is not reducible to the empirical father; it describes the inscription of law and limit in the symbolic order (Lacan, 2006). It introduces differentiation, prohibiting fusion and organizing desire. When such a function operates at a cultural level, it supports the experience that constraints are not purely arbitrary but embedded in a larger, intelligible order.

Yet group analysis reminds us that such symbolic functions are never purely intrapsychic (Foulkes, 1975), they are transmitted and reworked in the complex matrices of social relations. The internalization of authority presupposes stable institutional structures, reliable adult figures, and shared narratives. Over time, these contribute to the development of the social unconscious in any given society (Hopper, 2003a): a network of taken-for-granted assumptions about legitimacy, protection, and obligation.

Thus, the contemporary decline of symbolic authority represents not only a shift in formal power but a reconfiguration of containment. Authority can no longer be considered as self-evident; it needs to be justified, negotiated, resisted, or strategically performed. Even though this change promises space for critique and autonomy, it also exposes individuals

and groups to anxieties that were previously sustained and processed by external structures. In a digital environment, in which feedback is immediate and identities can become fluid, especially due to their being overexposed to public scrutiny, the pressure on fragile forms of authority may be particularly acute.

The disintegration of the name-of-the-father and the “dead father effect”

The threats to the consistency of the symbolic order arising when the Name-of-the-Father is foreclosed have been discussed (Lacan, 2006). At the clinical level, in psychosis the subject is flooded by unprocessed signifiers due to symbolic mediation collapse. While societies are not clinical subjects, the analogy indicates the risk of societal disorganization when symbolic anchors of authority lose credibility.

In late modernity, the emphasis on horizontality, self-expression, and critique has weakened inherited hierarchies. The paternal function has not been simply abolished, but its position has become unstable. Law appears inconsistent or arbitrary; authority is considered as either overbearing or vacuous. Instead of a shared symbolic reference, individuals confront a proliferation of competing norms and narratives.

The distinction between the symbolic and the imaginary father figures becomes crucial. While symbolic authority erodes, imaginary paternal figures—idealized leaders, humiliating rivals, omnipotent scapegoats—tend to prevail. Authority is personified and dramatized rather than symbolically stabilized. The paternal dynamic can no longer be eliminated but displaced into cycles of fascination and resentment. The result is not straightforward liberation, but a new configuration of dependency: one in which subjects are ostensibly free while being continuously summoned to perform and optimize.

The concept of the “dead father” (and “dead mother”) complex provides a complementary perspective on the erosion of symbolic vitality and affective investment in authority (Green, 1986). Here, the central problem is not overt prohibition, but affective and symbolic emptiness. The father is formally present yet emotionally absent; the function is structurally in place but devoid of vitality.

Transposed to the social field, the dead father effect captures institutions that persist in form but lack symbolic credibility. Laws remain on the books, parliaments sit, rituals are performed, but they no longer inspire trust or identification. In such conditions, authority becomes an object of contempt, sarcasm, or cynical distance. Individuals oscillate between fantasies of omnipotent self-sufficiency and depressive collapse, between radical disinvestment in institutions and fervent attachment to charismatic figures who promise to reanimate symbolic vitality. When symbolic structures are experienced as dead, the desire for a “living” authority—affectively present, decisive, unquestioned—grows bigger. This desire can attach to political leaders, religious movements, national myths, or even technological imaginaries.

Historical processes and the reshaping of social imaginary

The erosion of symbolic authority cannot be considered as a sudden event but the result of long-term historical processes. Critiques of domination, transformations in family and labor structures, the pluralization of identities, globalization and technological acceleration have progressively resulted in the weakening of traditional vertical hierarchies. Yet while external authority has declined, the psychological demands placed upon individuals have intensified.

The gradual introjection and internalization of external forms of constraint and violence resulted in increasingly subtle modes of self-restraint over centuries (Elias, 2000). Emotional regulation increasingly depended on the incorporation of social norms into the individual psyche. Shame, guilt, and self-monitoring gradually replaced overt discipline as dominant mechanisms of control. However, this civilizing process presupposed relatively stable symbolic frameworks. Religious, patriarchal, and national narratives—despite their exclusions and violences—offered shared coordinates for behavior and identity. They situated individuals within a continuous moral horizon and a broader historical order.

The concept of the social imaginary supports the perspective that societies are sustained not only by institutions but by collectively created meanings that render those institutions legitimate and intelligible (Castoriadis, 1987). The social imaginary gives meaning to expectations about authority, work, gender, citizenship, temporality, and future possibilities. It shapes what is considered as success or failure, autonomy or dependence, responsibility or transgression. When dominant imaginaries fragment, new forms of freedom emerge, but so does symbolic disorientation. Individuals are left with greater latitude to interpret their lives, yet fewer shared references through which to stabilize those interpretations.

The social imaginary also offers a minimum structure to affective life. It creates narratives that can transform anxiety into purpose, conflict into sacrifice, and uncertainty into destiny. When such narratives become weakened, emotions circulate without durable symbolic containers. The burden of meaning-making shifts onto individuals, who must continuously maintain coherence in conditions of rapid change. Consequently, emotional regulation becomes less a matter of conforming to stable norms and more a matter of improvising identity within fluctuating horizons of recognition.

Contemporary globalization and neoliberal ideals of self-entrepreneurship make these dynamics escalated. External authority appears increasingly unstable, while demands for adaptability, and self-optimization increase (Han, 2015). Emotional capacities do not automatically keep pace with this acceleration. A widening gap emerges between structural complexity and available forms of psychic containment.

Digital technologies and artificial intelligence further exacerbate this gap. They multiply contacts, compress time, and expand exposure to comparison and evaluation. At the same time, they introduce opaque forms of algorithmic power—selection, ranking, prediction—whose authority feels abstract yet intrusive (Zuboff, 2019). The social field becomes more interconnected yet less symbolically integrated, more visible yet less containable, leaving the social imaginary in a state of ongoing reconfiguration and destabilization.

Anxiety and failed dependency

From a group-analytic perspective, dependency is a basic condition of human life rather than a sign of immaturity. Infancy, education, illness, and aging all require structured reliance on others. No one becomes autonomous without having first been held by reliable others and by stable symbolic orders. The problem arises when dependency cannot be acknowledged, negotiated, or symbolized.

When symbolic structures weaken, dependency does not simply lessen; it becomes unstable and less reliable. Individuals are still in need of guidance, recognition, care and belonging, yet the frameworks that once supported these needs are less coherent. Authority is subject to contestation, rituals gradually lose their grip, and generational transmission becomes precarious. Vulnerability is increasingly personalized.

Failed dependency is the situation in which individuals are required to manage vulnerability by themselves, without dependable containment (Hopper, 2009). Under such conditions, anxiety intensifies and cannot be metabolized through reflection or shared narrative. It seeks discharge through projection, idealization, aggression, or withdrawal. At the collective level, failed dependency manifests in polarized discourses in which disagreement is experienced as annihilating. Symbolic differences become threats to existence or identity; the social bond becomes brittle.

The introduction of artificial intelligence (AI) complicates these dynamics by rerouting dependency through technological systems. People turn to AI for information, orientation, and even emotional contact. While such systems can offer clarity or support, they cannot substitute for the reciprocal, embodied processes through which dependency is recognized and symbolized—no resonance is possible. AI may give the impression that vulnerability can be managed without human mediation, yet it cannot *hold* anxiety in the group-analytic sense. Dependency risks becoming both intensified—through constant recourse to external answers—and disavowed, as individuals imagine themselves self-sufficient because they are technically assisted (Zuboff, 2019).

Moreover, opaque algorithmic systems become ideal objects for projection. In times of uncertainty, they are idealized as neutral problem-solvers or demonized as manipulative powers that erode autonomy. In either case, the relational core of dependency is obscured, and anxiety is displaced rather than processed.

Aggregation and massification in conditions of uncontained anxiety: expanding Earl Hopper

Under conditions of uncontained anxiety and failed dependency, collective life tends to organize itself defensively. Drawing on group-analytic framework, two intertwined formations become especially visible in contemporary societies: aggregation and massification (Hopper, 2003b). These are not merely political phenomena but psychosocial configurations emerging within a strained and rapidly expanding social matrix.

Aggregation refers to loosely connected collectivities formed around shared affect rather than shared symbolic structure. Individuals get together around grievance, nostalgia, outrage, humiliation, or resentment. The connecting threads are horizontal but shallow, sustained less by dialogue than by repetitive emotional resonance. What holds the aggregate together is not a negotiated project or articulated common good, but a circulating intensity. Hopper's (2003b) concept of the social unconscious is instructive here: unprocessed historical trauma, collective shame, and disavowed dependency move through these formations without being symbolically metabolized. The result is a sense of sameness rooted in shared injury rather than shared responsibility. The aggregation sociocultural state oscillates in dialectics without synthesis (Penna, 2023).

Digital infrastructures significantly reinforce this process. Platform algorithms privilege emotionally charged and polarizing content, because it sustains attention. As a result, they pave the way for homophily and echo chambers, enabling aggregates to form and dissolve with remarkable speed. Various authority manifestations are often rejected rhetorically—formal institutions are distrusted, expertise dismissed—, yet authority reappears in displaced form through informal influencers whose power is both unacknowledged and unaccountable.

From a group-analytic perspective, globalization dramatically expanded the social matrix. Individuals are now inter-connected across borders, cultures, and languages in unprecedented ways throughout the centuries, yet this expansion has remained only partially integrated. The early optimism that proximity would naturally generate equality and mutual recognition functioned as a fragile foundational myth. It created the fantasy that increased contact would dissolve prejudice and asymmetry. Instead, economic inequalities, cultural anxieties, migration pressures, and uneven access to technological and educational resources have exposed structural disparities. When the promise of seamless inclusion faltered, regression deepened.

Without reliable structures of authority and shared meaning, horizontal networks became saturated with rivalry and envy rather than solidarity. Aggregates proliferated, each organized around its own affective center. The emphasis on individual autonomy within many Western societies further complicated this landscape. The language of rights—while indispensable for protecting individuals—can, when detached from reciprocal obligation, weaken the group's capacity for cohesion. In group-analytic terms, the individual is over-foregrounded while the group is disavowed. Conflicts and disagreements are experienced as crashes of entitlements rather than negotiations within a shared matrix. People are formally empowered yet experientially isolated, carrying the burden of managing systemic instability as if it was a personal deficiency.

Massification represents a more regressive response to the same anxieties. Where aggregation is diffuse and fluid, massification is rigid and totalizing. Here, differentiation is submerged within a large-group identity that promises certainty, protection, and restored boundaries. Anxiety overwhelms symbolic complexity; ambiguities are reduced to binaries; enemies are identified; leaders are idealized. Hopper's (2009) analysis of large-group regression and incohesion illuminates this oscillation between fusion and fragmentation. The mass appears unified, yet its cohesion depends on the constant maintenance of simplified narratives. When contradictions surface, disintegration can be rapid and volatile.

The resurgence of religious, political, and ideological prejudices in many contexts can be understood through this lens. These usually happening and quite unavoidable consequences are not simply irrational returns to a superseded past, but defensive efforts to restore lost containment. The prevalence of scientific rationality and technological progress have offered individuals liberation from certain dogmatic perspectives, but, nevertheless, they have also destabilized symbolic frameworks that once anchored collective identity. Since shared narratives capable of integrating diversity and complexity are absent, rigid belief systems tend to reassert themselves. They provide clarity, moral hierarchy, and an external adversary—classic mechanism through which groups manage overwhelming anxiety.

Democratic institutions are also affected by these dynamics. The incohesion of the wider social field is increasingly mirrored by the oscillation between technocratic managerialism and populist reaction. Affective contagion seems to dominate public discourse instead of deliberative engagement. The social matrix swings between loosely bonded aggregates and tightly fused masses, with limited space for reflective mediation (Hopper, 2003a).

Considering the above mentioned, the following sequence of psychological states can be identified: fragmentation and failed dependency create anxiety, anxiety fuels aggregation, aggregation fails to contain complexity, and massification offers temporary refuge. However, none of the above-mentioned configurations corresponds with the differentiated interdependence, which is a basic requirement for democratic life. Therefore, the central challenge is not merely political but psychosocial as well; how to cultivate forms of authority, symbolic integration, and shared responsibility capable of containing anxiety without collapsing into coercion or regression.

Messianic longings, the permissive father, and the loss of ritual

In the vacuum created by the erosion of symbolic authority and the spread of aggregation and massification, societies become susceptible to messianic solutions. Charismatic leaders, ideological projects, and technological fantasies are invested with hopes of rescue and total clarification. From a group-analytic standpoint, these phenomena express unprocessed dependency: the yearning for an external agent that will restore boundaries, coherence, and meaning.

The figure of the permissive totalitarian father helps explain why such leaders can present themselves as anti-authoritarian while consolidating power (Žižek, 2001). They promise liberation from “old” constraining systems—bureaucracies, experts, traditional elites—yet demand loyalty and participation in new forms of enjoyment, productivity, and identity. Their authority is maintained not primarily through explicit prohibition, but through affective identification and internalized injunctions.

Perspectives upon the disappearance of rituals can expand our understanding on this topic (Han, 2017). Rituals historically played a pivotal role in psycho-social containment. Through repeated, formalized practices, ritual created stable temporal structures and shared spaces in which experiences of loss, conflict, and transition could be symbolized. Rituals did not merely express beliefs; they shaped perception, and allowed for the transformation of anxiety into shared, meaningful forms.

Nowadays, when global dynamics are permeated and characterized by speed, novelty, and constant stimulation, rituals lose ground. Life tends to be organized around events, updates, and performances rather than cyclical, patterned practices. Time is, usually, experienced as a series of episodes rather than as a rhythm. Recognition becomes quantified, for example likes, views, rankings, etc., while belonging is enacted through fleeting displays of visibility. The elimination of ritualized forms, the symbolic pause that once allowed distance between impulse and expression erodes.

The absence of ritual amplifies messianic and permissive dynamics. Without shared, repetitive forms that stabilize transitions and losses, individuals are more exposed to raw anxiety and more dependent on extraordinary figures or events to mark meaning. The leader’s appearance, the viral moment, or the technological breakthrough becomes a substitute for the slow work of symbolic integration. The permissive father’s injunctions—enjoy, express, optimize—fill the space once occupied by structured forms of communal recognition.

Consequently, the quasi-ritual functions of AI and digital technologies need further consideration. Daily check-ins with platforms, repetitive gestures of scrolling and posting, or algorithmically curated feeds resemble the form of ritual without its symbolic depth. They synchronize attention but not meaning; they coordinate behavior without offering shared narratives for suffering or finitude.

It is at this point that the question of reconfiguring containment becomes imminent. If traditional authority and ritual have lost their symbolic efficacy, and if their absence fuels regressive formations, how might new forms of containment be forged that neither deny dependency nor reinforce domination?

Reconstituting containment: a group-analytic perspective

The above-mentioned crisis of symbolic authority highlights the importance of reconsidering the limits of sustaining social order through external domination and unchallenged hierarchies. Additionally, it reveals that containment is a critical factor, determining to a great extent future possibilities. The challenge is not either to choose between authoritarian order or chaotic freedom, but to cultivate forms of authority and belonging capable of holding vulnerability, conflict, and difference without collapsing into regression.

Group analysis offers a concrete micro-social model of such a project (Foulkes & Anthony, 1957). In analytic groups, authority is neither denied nor imposed as an unquestionable given. Instead, it is exercised as a function of maintaining the setting, supporting dialogue, and containing anxiety. The conductor’s authority is explicit but limited; it is accountable to the group process rather than grounded in charisma or coercion.

In this framework, dependency is not pathologized. Members are encouraged to recognize their needs for support, recognition, and understanding, while also confronting their aggressive impulses, rivalries, and fears of abandonment. The group becomes a space where failed dependency can be revisited and symbolized. Difference and conflict are not eliminated but worked with slowly and often painfully, as material for shared reflection.

These processes cultivate capacities that traditional authority and ritual often supported externally without necessarily fostering internally: frustration tolerance, mutual recognition, the ability to hold ambivalence, and a sense of shared responsibility

(Foulkes, 1984). The group has the potential to function as a laboratory for post-authoritarian forms of belonging, in which authority is understood as a relational function of containment rather than as a fixed position of domination.

Translated into the wider social field, a group-analytic perspective suggests that contemporary societies need to develop institutional and cultural practices that approximate such conditions. For example, the creation of dialogical spaces in which conflicting groups can interact with each other under conditions of protection against immediate escalation and allow, through the slow building of trust, for diversity to be explored. Another idea may be the re-invention of contemporary rituals which no longer depend on rigid hierarchies but can offer meaning to various forms of transitions, losses, and common commitments; thereby restoring symbolic pauses in an over-accelerated culture. We can also consider the embedment of digital and AI technologies in frameworks of accountability and shared reflection, so that they reinforce rather than replace human forms of containment. Lastly, the rebalance of rights and obligations, so that individual autonomy is preserved and expanded within a renewed sense of mutual interdependence and responsibility for the collective matrix.

In effect, the reconfiguration of containment does not mean a return to idealized past forms of authority. Rather, it calls for the creation of forms of symbolic mediation that acknowledge the legitimacy of critique and difference while recognizing the inescapability of dependency and the necessity of limits.

From a group-analytic perspective, contemporary global dynamics can be interpreted as a vast, unstable matrix in which old vertical authorities have eroded without being replaced by sustainable horizontal forms of cohesion. In the late twentieth century, one of the prominent fantasies was that horizontality alone—through global markets, networks, and liberal individualism—would pave the way for equality and integration; but it turned out to be too optimistic. When this fantasy is disillusioned, regression becomes apparent through revived prejudices, rigid identities, and renewed authoritarian longings.

The emergence of AI necessitates a redefinition of roles, temporalities, and imagined futures. Even though AI is apparently horizontal in its accessibility, nevertheless, it is vertical in its opaque power and concentration of control. It provides a new dynamic field, in which hope and fear can be explored, a symbolic object around which fantasies of integration and disintegration coalesce. Without robust, reflective forms of containment, such fantasies can drive policy and collective action in ways that deepen rather than resolve anxiety.

Therefore, it is of great importance to understand the challenge of integrating technological development within group-based and dialogical forms of social organization and interaction, instead of rejecting or abandoning this opportunity. This involves developing spaces in which the meanings of technological change, anxieties provoked, and dependencies created can be openly articulated and further elaborated. The forthcoming task is not a return to rigid hierarchies nor a continued denial of structure, but the development of mature group forms, capable of holding inequality, uncertainty, and conflict without resorting to denial or repression.

Conclusion: peril and potential

The crisis of symbolic authority marks a decisive turning point in contemporary social life, in which the erosion of traditional frameworks—intensified by the disappearance of ritual, the acceleration of digital communication, and the rise of AI—has exposed them to heightened anxiety, fragmented belonging, and regressive forms of dependency. Aggregation, massification, messianic longings, and permissive yet totalizing forms of authority are symptomatic responses to a deeper failure of containment at the level of the social unconscious.

Yet, this crisis also opens historical possibilities. The collapse of external authority creates space for the internalization and transformation of functions it once performed symbolically. From a group-analytic perspective, the future of the social bond depends on the capacity to contain collective anxiety, to sustain dialogue in the face of conflict, and to reimagine authority as a shared, reflective function rather than a fixed hierarchical position; conductor's stance which introduces and cultivates the group-analytic culture can set and promote this example.

The weakening of paternal mediation and the gradual disappearance of rituals do not necessarily lead to permanent disorientation. They can instead be understood as signals that new forms of symbolic mediation are required—forms that recognize dependency without infantilizing, that affirm autonomy without denying interdependence, and that integrate technological innovation into ethical and dialogical projects.

The crisis of symbolic authority is therefore not simply the end of an old order. It is an invitation—demanding, unsettling, but unavoidable—to recreate the social bond on reflective, dialogical, and ethical foundations capable of holding the freedoms that modern societies have generated, without succumbing to the regressions those same freedoms have unleashed.

Conflicts of interest

Nothing to declare.

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