# Metamorphosis of patriarchy in the electronic era: social unconscious manifestations and group-analytic perspectives

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## Abstract

The gradual yet unmistakable subsidence of patriarchal metastructures has emerged as a defining characteristic of contemporary global society. This collapse is not confined to institutional or political arrangements but extends into the symbolic, psychological, and relational foundations of social life. The present article investigates the causes, consequences, and transformations associated with the decline of patriarchal authority, integrating theories of the social unconscious, symbolic mediation, mythological and psychoanalytic concepts, group-analytic processes, and the impact of the electronic era.

The erosion of patriarchy destabilizes traditional social bonds, generating fragmentation, aggregation and massification, polarized subgroup formations, and a crisis of symbolic authority. These processes are significantly intensified by digital technologies, which weaken vertical transmission, accelerate affective contagion, and reorganize authority into performative, algorithmically mediated forms. While overt patriarchal structures decline, their residues persist within the social unconscious through defensive processes, symbolic displacements, and transgenerational transmission.

In therapeutic groups, these transformations emerge as challenges to leadership, boundary confusion, intensified splitting, and the unconscious search for compensatory authority figures. Group-analytic psychotherapy is presented as a privileged space for observing, symbolizing, and working through the psychosocial consequences of patriarchal collapse and electronic mediation. The article argues that contemporary society stands at a crossroads: between regression toward authoritarian substitutes and the emergence of dialogical, ethically grounded, post-patriarchal forms of social bonding capable of containing complexity without domination.

**Keywords:** patriarchal transformation; social unconscious; group analytic processes; symbolic authority crisis; post-patriarchal subject.

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## Introduction

Across many contemporary societies, long-standing patriarchal structures are undergoing profound transformation. For centuries, patriarchy functioned not only as a political and economic system but also as a symbolic framework organizing authority, gendered roles, kinship relations, and the formation of subjectivity. Its erosion therefore affects not only institutional arrangements but also the deeper symbolic coordinates through which social order, legitimacy, and identity have historically been structured.

Simone de Beauvoir's foundational insight — that gender hierarchy is socially constructed rather than naturally given — highlighted the historical contingency of patriarchal arrangements [1]. Anthropological analyses similarly demonstrated that patriarchal authority has been embedded within systems of kinship, alliance, and symbolic exchange that regulate social organization [2]. These structures, however, are increasingly destabilized in contemporary societies. From the perspective of Cornelius Castoriadis, patriarchy can be understood as part of the dominant social imaginary through which societies institute meaning and legitimacy [3]. As this imaginary loses coherence, the organizing principles that once structured authority, belonging, and generational continuity become less stable, exposing societies to new forms of uncertainty and institutional fluidity.

This transformation unfolds alongside another major historical shift: the expansion of the electronic era. Digital communication technologies

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reshape the conditions of social interaction by weakening hierarchical modes of transmission and replacing them with horizontal, instantaneous, and algorithmically mediated exchanges. Authority increasingly appears diffuse, performative, and unstable, while symbolic mediation and temporal delay — traditionally central to the regulation of desire and authority — are challenged by immediacy, visibility, and affective intensification [4, 5]. These technological conditions do not simply accompany broader cultural transformations; they also accelerate processes that destabilize inherited symbolic structures.

Within this context, contemporary societies display increasing signs of symbolic disorganization. These processes include forms of social aggregation and massification, the proliferation of antagonistic subgroups, and recurrent polarization between opposing identities. Mediating institutions often weaken, while leadership figures appear either fragile and self-referential or invested with exaggerated expectations of restoration and salvation. At the symbolic level, the mediating function historically associated with paternal authority — containing conflict, structuring boundaries, and introducing delay between impulse and action — appears increasingly unstable. Yet no broadly shared alternative framework of authority has fully consolidated in its place.

This article offers a narrative-theoretical exploration of these developments. Drawing on psychoanalytic anthropology, mythology, group analytic theory, and contemporary social thought, it examines how transformations in patriarchal symbolic structures — within the conditions of the electronic era — reshape authority, identity, and social bonds. In doing so, the article proposes that group analytic practice provides a particularly valuable observational and interpretive framework for understanding the psychic consequences of these historical shifts. By tracing how broader cultural transformations become enacted within group processes, it seeks to illuminate both the destabilizing effects of the current transition and the potential emergence of post-patriarchal forms of authority grounded in dialogue, shared responsibility, and ethical relationality.

## Patriarchy as a symbolic metastructure

Understanding the consequences of patriarchy's contemporary transformation requires clarifying what patriarchy has historically represented within social life. In common usage, patriarchy refers to a form of social organization in which authority is concentrated in male leadership, particularly within family or societal structures dominated by men [6]. While descriptively accurate, such definitions capture only the institutional surface of a much deeper phenomenon.

More fundamentally, patriarchy can be understood as **a symbolic metastructure:** a supra-individual framework embedded in cultural meanings that organizes authority, gender roles, and relational expectations [3]. It operates through language, myth, law, and social practices, shaping not only the distribution of power but also the ways individuals imagine identity, morality, belonging, and the boundaries of social life [7, 2]. In this sense, patriarchy has historically functioned as both a political arrangement and a symbolic order structuring subjectivity itself [8].

Beyond its visible institutional form, patriarchy has served important symbolic functions within social organization. It provided hierarchical structures of authority that stabilized responsibility and decision-making across generations [9]. Through culturally codified divisions of labor and relational expectations, it structured roles within families and communities, producing relatively stable patterns of protection, provision, caregiving, and affiliation [1, 2].

Patriarchal systems also regulated social boundaries by defining permissible roles, behaviors, and spaces. These boundaries were reinforced through cultural narratives and mythological representations that linked authority, sacrifice, protection, and submission to broader systems of meaning [10, 11]. At the societal level, the distinction between public and private spheres further institutionalized these symbolic arrangements, assigning political authority and economic activity to the public domain while relegating emotional labor and caregiving largely to the domestic sphere [12].

From a psychoanalytic perspective, these social structures resonate with what Lacanian theory describes as the paternal metaphor. Lacan's concept of the *Name-of-the-Father* refers to the symbolic function that introduces law, prohibition, and mediation into the field of desire [13]. Although this concept cannot be equated directly with social patriarchy, historical patriarchal systems often embodied analogous mediating functions by organizing authority, boundary formation, and generational continuity. Consequently, transformations in patriarchal structures may also destabilize the symbolic frameworks through which societies regulate authority, identity, and relational cohesion.

## The social unconscious: internalizing and transmitting patriarchy

To understand why patriarchy continues to influence social life even as its formal institutions weaken, it is necessary to examine the workings of the social unconscious — the shared, unspoken arrangements that shape perception, emotion, and behavior within a society. Hopper conceptualizes the social unconscious as the hidden matrix of norms, narratives, anxieties, and embodied practices through which societies reproduce themselves across generations [14]. Because patriarchy historically structured many of these arrangements, its assumptions remain deeply embedded within this matrix, persisting even when explicit ideological support diminishes.

Rather than operating solely as a set of explicit beliefs or institutional policies, patriarchy survives through implicit relational patterns, affective expectations, and habitual interpretations of social reality [15, 16]. These unconscious patterns shape how authority is experienced, how gendered identities are imagined, and how power relations are enacted in everyday life, often without conscious reflection.

Building on group-analytic understandings of the social unconscious, Carla Penna's work highlights how collective psychic life is shaped not only by visible social structures but also by unmentalized emotional climates circulating transpersonally within groups and institutions. From this perspective, the weakening of patriarchal authority can be understood as a disturbance in the group's containing functions, generating heightened anxiety, fragmentation, and defensive reorganization. As traditional symbolic coordinates of authority erode, unconscious group dynamics may oscillate between longing for omnipotent leadership and repudiating authority altogether. These tensions frequently manifest in polarized subgroup formations and primitive dependency dynamics. Penna emphasizes that such processes are not reducible to individual pathology but arise within the shared social field in which subjects are embedded. Group-analytic spaces therefore become important sites where these unconscious dynamics can be symbolized, allowing groups to metabolize the loss of familiar authority structures and tentatively explore new forms of relational responsibility grounded in mutual recognition rather than domination [17].

### Patriarchy in the social unconscious

Patriarchy becomes embedded through long-standing cultural mechanisms that operate largely beneath conscious awareness. Child-rearing practices often emphasize obedience, gender differentiation, and submission to authority, creating early templates for how power and dependency are experienced [18]. Linguistic structures encode gender hierarchies through grammar, metaphors, and idioms that privilege masculine perspectives and universalize male experience [7].

Religious traditions frequently center paternal figures, framing authority, order, and creation through masculine symbolism [11]. Mythological narratives valorize masculine heroism and feminine passivity, embedding gendered symbolic roles into the collective imagination [10]. Educational canons historically elevate male achievements as foundational, reinforcing assumptions about who is central and who is peripheral in cultural memory [8]. Even everyday rituals — who speaks first, who occupies public space, who serves and who is served — quietly naturalize male leadership.

Through these processes, patriarchy operates not only as a political system but as a deep psychological environment. As psychoanalytic theory emphasizes, one does not escape such structures simply by rejecting them intellectually; unconscious residues continue to shape desire, anxiety, and expectation [14, 19–22].

### Mechanisms of transgenerational transmission

Patriarchal norms persist across generations through subtle processes linking personal experience with collective continuity. Identification plays a central role, as children internalize patterns of authority, gender roles, and relational expectations modeled by caregivers [20–22]. At the same time, emotional residues — including unresolved conflicts, silences, and historical traumas — remain embedded within family systems, shaping attachment patterns and relational boundaries across generations [23].

Family narratives and cultural myths further reinforce these patterns by transmitting implicit lessons about authority, gender, and belonging [14]. Individuals may also experience unconscious loyalties to inherited roles, maintaining outdated relational arrangements in order to preserve continuity with family or cultural identity [24]. Through these intertwined processes, patriarchal assumptions often persist even when legal frameworks and explicit social norms begin to change.

### Defensive mechanisms protecting patriarchy

The social unconscious also protects patriarchal arrangements through collective defensive processes. Denial may present patriarchal authority as natural or inevitable, while disavowal allows individuals to acknowledge inequality abstractly without recognizing its concrete implications [14]. Splitting reinforces binary gender categories, idealizing one pole while devaluing the other [25].

Idealization of protective leaders or paternal authority can further mask coercive structures beneath narratives of stability, care, or tradition [26]. At the same time, repression may silence conflict or trauma associated with patriarchal arrangements, limiting opportunities for critical reflection. These defenses help stabilize inherited structures even within contexts that consciously aspire toward greater equality.

Together, these dynamics illustrate how patriarchy persists as a psychic and cultural force even as its institutional forms weaken. The social unconscious transmits normative expectations, emotional residues, and defensive strategies that stabilize patriarchal patterns at deep levels of social life — making their transformation both psychologically unsettling and historically significant.

## Mythic and psychoanalytic foundations of patriarchal order

Patriarchal authority has historically been sustained not only through institutions but also through symbolic narratives embedded in myth, religion, and the collective imagination. Long before modern political structures emerged, cultural stories and archetypal figures organized expectations concerning masculinity, authority, and social hierarchy [10, 11]. These symbolic forms continue to shape collective fantasies of leadership, morality, and relational order even in societies that explicitly challenge patriarchal norms [27]. As patriarchal structures weaken, these mythic frameworks do not simply vanish; rather, they destabilize and reconfigure, contributing to the emotional and symbolic turbulence accompanying contemporary social change [3, 18].

### The Zeus archetype

Among the most enduring mythic figures is Zeus, whose image encapsulates the essence of patriarchal dominion. In Greek mythology, Zeus commands absolute power, governing through a combination of order, fear, and selective benevolence [28]. His unrestrained sexual entitlement — expressed through numerous conquests and transformations — embodies fantasies of masculine privilege exempt from accountability. Zeus protects favored offspring and allies while punishing challengers, reinforcing a hierarchical logic that rewards loyalty and crushes dissent. He tolerates no challenge to his supremacy, positioning himself simultaneously as sovereign and arbiter of justice [29].

This archetype saturates Western cultural and political imagination, shaping fantasies of strong leaders, charismatic authority, and masculine dominance [8, 30]. Even within secular and democratic contexts, attenuated versions of the Zeus figure persist in political rhetoric, corporate leadership ideals, and cultural representations of powerful men [9]. The persistence of this archetype demonstrates how mythic imagery continues to organize expectations of authority long after its mythological origins have receded from conscious awareness.

### Freud's primal father

Freud's account of the primal father in Totem and Taboo offers a psychoanalytic model of the ambivalent foundations of patriarchal authority. In this mythic reconstruction, the primal father monopolizes power and provokes resentment among the sons, whose eventual rebellion results in his murder and subsequent symbolic idealization [19]. The internalization of the slain father establishes the moral prohibitions and symbolic law that regulate social life. Freud's narrative highlights a fundamental tension within patriarchal authority: it is simultaneously feared, resisted, and idealized. During periods when traditional authority structures weaken, these ambivalences may resurface at the collective level, producing oscillations between the rejection of authoritarian leadership and renewed longing for protective paternal figures [26, 31].

Taken together, these mythic and psychoanalytic perspectives suggest that the transformation of patriarchal authority represents not merely an institutional shift but a deeper disturbance within symbolic and unconscious structures that have long organized social life.

## Systemic manifestations of patriarchy in social institutions

As patriarchal authority weakens in contemporary societies, its transformation unfolds unevenly across social systems. Institutional arrangements rarely disappear at the same pace as cultural ideals; instead, they reveal layers of inertia and symbolic residue that continue to shape everyday life [7, 8]. Consequently, the decline of patriarchy produces a transitional landscape marked not only by expanding egalitarian aspirations but also by persistent structural asymmetries and ambivalent forms of authority.

### Gender roles and structural inequality

Despite significant social progress, gendered hierarchies remain embedded within many institutional environments. Economic and

organizational structures continue to reflect historical assumptions about the relative value of different forms of labor, contributing to persistent disparities in leadership representation and economic recognition [32, 33]. At the same time, the distribution of caregiving and domestic responsibilities still reflects longstanding gendered expectations, shaping professional trajectories and emotional burdens within families [34].

These patterns illustrate how patriarchal arrangements often persist not through explicit ideology but through institutional routines and cultural expectations that remain partially unchanged even as formal commitments to equality expand.

### Institutional and cultural biases

Similar dynamics appear across education, politics, and healthcare systems. Educational traditions and cultural canons have historically privileged male perspectives and achievements, subtly reinforcing assumptions about authority and cultural centrality [8]. Political institutions in many societies continue to display uneven gender representation, while policy frameworks sometimes retain paternalistic assumptions regarding governance and social order [35].

Healthcare systems likewise reveal inherited biases, including research traditions that historically treated male bodies as normative and underrecognized gender-specific medical needs [36]. These institutional patterns illustrate how symbolic hierarchies may persist even where formal structures of authority have begun to shift.

### Symbolic residues in social systems

Beyond institutional structures, patriarchal assumptions continue to circulate through legal frameworks, family organization, religious traditions, and linguistic practices. Concepts of lineage and inheritance, long associated with patrilineal models of social continuity, still shape cultural understandings of belonging and authority [2]. Religious narratives and ritual traditions frequently preserve symbolic representations of male leadership, while everyday linguistic expressions reproduce gendered hierarchies embedded within cultural memory [7, 11].

Such residues demonstrate that patriarchy persists not only as a political arrangement but also as a symbolic framework embedded within social institutions and cultural practices. Its transformation therefore generates a complex and uneven process in which inherited structures coexist with emerging forms of relational and institutional organization.

## Failures of patriarchy: fragmentation and regression

The decline of patriarchy does not unfold as a linear transition from hierarchical domination to egalitarian freedom. Rather, the weakening of a long-standing symbolic metastructure generates instability and cultural turbulence. Patriarchy historically provided — however problematically — a framework of roles, boundaries, and legitimizing narratives that structured authority and relational expectations [3, 8]. As these organizing coordinates erode, societies often struggle to establish alternative symbolic frameworks capable of mediating desire, power, and collective responsibility.

Periods of such transformation frequently give rise to regression, polarization, and renewed appeals to paternal authority. Instead of producing immediate emancipation, patriarchal decline exposes unresolved cultural anxieties, generating a social landscape characterized by ambivalence: movements toward equality coexist with defensive reactions seeking stability, certainty, and restored hierarchy [4, 18, 26].

### The crisis of symbolic authority

One manifestation of this transformation is the crisis of symbolic authority, evident in the emergence of what has been described as "weak, self-referential and visionless leaders" [37]. Such figures may hold formal power but often lack the symbolic legitimacy required to mediate between individual interests and collective order. Historically, patriarchal systems provided a paternal metaphor anchoring law, continuity, and accountability within the social order [9, 13]. As this symbolic anchor weakens, societies frequently oscillate between distrust of authority and renewed longing for its stabilizing return.

In the absence of a coherent symbolic framework, leaders are simultaneously distrusted as impostors and idealized as potential saviors. This ambivalence reflects deeper anxieties about boundary dissolution and uncertainty regarding how power should be exercised once traditional paternal norms lose legitimacy [3]. As symbolic authority erodes, political and cultural spheres become increasingly vulnerable to populism, charismatic manipulation, and the proliferation of "empty signifiers" that promise order without substance [38].

### Backlash movements

Within the vacuum created by patriarchal decline, backlash movements emerge with particular force and urgency. Far-right populism, authoritarian nationalism, misogynistic digital subcultures, anti-gender ideologies, and hypermasculine revivalist

narratives all promise a return to stable hierarchies and clearly demarcated social roles [8, 30]. These movements present themselves as sources of protection, moral clarity, and identity in a world experienced as fragmented and unmoored.

Their appeal is not grounded solely in ideology or policy but in affective resonance: they mobilize fear of displacement, perceived loss of privilege, and anxiety over the erosion of familiar symbolic anchors [31, 34]. Misogynistic online communities, for example, function as affective refuges in which patriarchal fantasies of entitlement and dominance are reasserted. Digital anonymity amplifies aggression and grievance, allowing resentment to circulate without relational consequence or ethical containment [5, 39].

Similarly, anti-gender movements frame themselves as defenders of nature, tradition, and moral order, positioning equality, plurality, and fluidity as existential threats [40]. These formations are not historical anomalies but predictable defensive responses to the destabilization of patriarchal authority. They reveal how deeply patriarchy is embedded in the emotional and symbolic life of societies, and how its erosion often provokes consolidation and regression rather than immediate transformation [14].

## Aggregation as a transitional defensive formation

Situated between collapse into massification and the possibility of genuinely relational group life is the phenomenon of aggregation. Aggregation refers to a form of social organization in which individuals cluster around shared affects, identities, or grievances without achieving symbolic integration or sustained relational cohesion. Unlike massification, which dissolves individuality into a fused collective identity, aggregation preserves the appearance of individuality while lacking the symbolic mediation necessary for mutual recognition and responsibility.

Aggregated groups are sustained less by shared meaning than by circulating affects — such as anger, fear, or nostalgia — that remain largely uncontained and untransformed. In the context of patriarchal destabilization, aggregation functions as a defensive response to symbolic uncertainty. Individuals gather in loose constellations that alleviate isolation without requiring engagement with difference or complexity [14].

Contemporary digital platforms intensify these dynamics by enabling rapid forms of affiliation organized around slogans, hashtags, or identitarian signals rather than sustained relational commitment [4]. Aggregation thus produces connection without responsibility and belonging without dialogue. While it may appear to gesture toward collective life, it frequently suspends the conditions necessary for genuine transformation. Without symbolic structures capable of metabolizing conflict, aggregated formations remain vulnerable to polarization and regression into massified or authoritarian dynamics [14].

Aggregation therefore represents a fragile transitional state: a holding formation that may either solidify into defensive collectivities or, under sufficiently reflective and containing conditions, evolve toward more relational forms of social organization.

## Collapse into massification

When symbolic authority further weakens or fails altogether, aggregation may collapse into massification. In massified formations, individuality is increasingly relinquished as personal agency dissolves into large, impersonal collectives that promise certainty, coherence, and belonging. Lacking symbolic mediation, individuals become especially susceptible to reductive narratives, conspiracy theories, and propagandistic discourses that replace ambiguity with certainty and complexity with moral absolutism [41].

Mass movements — political, religious, or cultural — thus offer psychological refuge from the anxieties generated by the collapse of paternal and symbolic authority. Yet this refuge is purchased at a high cost. Identification with the mass often requires the suspension of critical thought, foreclosure of relational complexity, and rigidification of loyalty. The collective becomes an object of identification that substitutes for nuanced interpersonal bonds, producing polarized belief systems and heightened antagonism toward perceived outsiders [31].

Massification is therefore both a symptom of symbolic breakdown and a driver of further fragmentation, intensifying the instability it seeks to resolve.

## Splitting of the social body

The erosion of mediating symbolic structures also gives rise to pervasive splitting of the social body into mutually hostile factions. Moral camps, political tribes, cultural echo chambers, and conspiracy-based communities proliferate, each sustained by simplified narratives dividing the social world into binaries of good and evil, pure and corrupt, self and other.

Such dynamics mirror primitive forms of group psychology in which difference is experienced not as plurality but as threat [19, 20]. In the absence of symbolic frameworks capable of containing conflict and integrating complexity, societies may regress into defensive formations — variously described as

social encapsulations [42], psychic retreats [43] or group bastions [44]—as solutions to their desperate needs for protection from experiences of failed dependency and relational insecurity.

Taken together, backlash movements, aggregation, massification, and social splitting illustrate how the transformation of patriarchal authority often produces fragmentation before new symbolic forms can emerge. The challenge is therefore not merely the dismantling of patriarchal structures, but the development of alternative frameworks capable of sustaining authority, complexity, and relational responsibility within a genuinely post-patriarchal social order.

## The emergent post-patriarchal subject

The subject emerging in the aftermath of patriarchy is a hybrid figure, shaped simultaneously by residues of hierarchical tradition and by new relational and symbolic possibilities [8, 18]. No longer confined by rigid gender binaries, this subject encounters an expanded range of identity positions and emotional expressions. Yet the loosening of inherited structures also generates heightened anxiety, as historically stable roles and expectations no longer provide reliable orientation [45].

Freed from many traditional prescriptions, individuals gain greater autonomy in shaping their lives, but this autonomy is accompanied by uncertainty regarding belonging, continuity, and coherence [46]. Global connectivity expands cultural exchange while exposing individuals to multiple and often conflicting symbolic frameworks, intensifying experiences of fragmentation [47]. Consequently, the post-patriarchal subject approaches authority with skepticism, informed by historical abuses, yet continues to long for containment, guidance, and symbolic coherence.

These tensions reveal a transitional historical moment in which the psychological scaffolding once provided by patriarchal structures has weakened without being fully replaced. The post-patriarchal subject therefore requires new forms of symbolic support — frameworks capable of holding ambiguity, fostering mutual recognition, and sustaining belonging within the complexity of contemporary life [48].

### The electronic era and the post-patriarchal subject

The electronic era accelerates the emergence of the post-patriarchal subject by transforming the conditions under which identity, authority, and relationality are constituted. Digitally mediated environments loosen traditional role constraints, enabling individuals to explore fluid and multiple self-positions across social and virtual platforms [49]. At the same time, this expansion of possibility introduces new vulnerabilities: subjects become increasingly exposed to surveillance, instantaneous judgment, and algorithmically intensified comparison [5].

Online environments amplify fragmentation as competing identities and symbolic demands collide with limited opportunities for mediation or reflective integration [4]. Authority within these spaces is often transient and performative, detached from responsibility or institutional grounding. Yet digital networks also facilitate new forms of solidarity, symbolic experimentation, and collective imagination that support emerging post-patriarchal modes of belonging [47]. The digital subject is thus both liberated and unsettled, navigating unprecedented freedom alongside intensified psychic and relational pressures.

### The electronic era: digital mediation and the reconfiguration of the social bond

The electronic era represents a decisive structural condition shaping the contemporary aftermath of patriarchy. Digital technologies do not merely reflect social change; they reorganize the modalities through which authority, subjectivity, and social bonds are produced [5]. Whereas patriarchal systems relied on vertical transmission, temporal delay, and embodied authority, electronic mediation privileges horizontality, immediacy, and continuous circulation. This shift weakens traditional mechanisms of symbolic mediation and intensifies the crisis of authority accompanying patriarchal decline [4].

From a group-analytic perspective, digitally mediated environments can amplify primitive group dynamics. Bion's basic assumptions — dependency, fight–flight, and messianic pairing — appear with particular intensity in online collective formations where symbolic containment is limited [14, 50]. Algorithmic architectures reward emotional intensity, polarization, and rapid identification, often undermining reflective thought and sustained dialogue [4]. Authority becomes increasingly performative and unstable, producing visibility without durable responsibility.

Clinically, these dynamics intensify narcissistic vulnerability. As Turkle notes, digitally mediated interactions often provide the appearance of connection without the demands of reciprocity, ambivalence, or frustration tolerance [49]. Subjectivity becomes increasingly dependent on external validation — metrics of visibility, attention, and algorithmic affirmation — producing oscillations between grandiosity and emptiness [51]. In this environment, the paternal function of symbolic

delay and limit-setting is replaced by immediacy and saturation, contributing to heightened anxiety and difficulties in affecting regulation [13].

At the same time, the electronic era enables new forms of power that operate without overt hierarchy. Zuboff's concept of surveillance capitalism illustrates how authority shifts from visible paternal figures to opaque technological systems that shape behavior and desire through data extraction and predictive algorithms [5]. The resulting condition is paradoxical: apparent liberation from patriarchal authority coincides with increasingly subtle forms of control that remain largely invisible and difficult to contest.

Nevertheless, digital environments also contain post-patriarchal potential. Horizontal networks, plural identifications, and emergent forms of collective agency can challenge vertical domination and fixed identity structures [47]. The critical task is therefore not technological rejection but symbolic reintegration: developing cultural, institutional, and therapeutic frameworks capable of restoring mediation, responsibility, and ethical limits within electronically mediated social life.

## Group-analytic processes in the aftermath of patriarchy

Group analysis is a field in which the individual, the interpersonal, and the social are understood as inseparably intertwined. This integrative perspective is articulated in Earl Hopper's elaboration of the tripartite matrix, distinguishing the foundation, dynamic, and personal matrices [52]. Together, these matrices provide a framework for understanding how historical, cultural, and institutional forces intersect with group processes and individual subjectivity. In the context of patriarchal decline, this model offers a particularly powerful lens for tracing how transformations in authority and symbolic order are registered simultaneously at societal, group, and personal levels.

Because the analytic group functions as a microcosm of its contextual society and its institutions, the erosion of patriarchal authority becomes visible across all three matrices. Within the foundation matrix, patriarchy persists as a historically sedimented symbolic structure organizing authority, gender roles, and relational expectations. Within the dynamic matrix, these inherited patterns are activated, contested, and transformed through ongoing group interactions. Within the personal matrix, individual members bring their own internalizations of patriarchal experience — shaped by family history, gender positioning, and cultural context — into the group [16].

The analytic group thus becomes a living laboratory in which the residues and reconfigurations of patriarchy can be observed with particular clarity. As the gravitational pull of patriarchal structures weakens within contemporary societies, groups struggle to establish new forms of symbolic organization. Authority no longer operates as a stable, taken-for-granted organizing principle, yet its absence generates anxiety and disorientation across all three matrices. The analytic group makes these tensions visible, rendering them available for reflection rather than leaving them diffused within the social unconscious.

### Authority and leadership in the group

Ambivalence toward authority, characteristic of the post-patriarchal condition, often finds direct expression within the group's dynamic matrix. Members may challenge the conductor's legitimacy, questioning their authority, intentions, or competence. Although such challenges appear interpersonal, they frequently reflect deeper instability in the symbolic structures of authority embedded in the foundation matrix [16]. As the paternal metaphor weakens culturally, expectations that leaders should provide clarity, containment, and direction persist, while trust in the legitimacy of such authority simultaneously erodes [53].

Within the group, this tension often produces oscillations between idealization and attack. The conductor may be experienced alternately as a stabilizing paternal figure or as inadequate, intrusive, or illegitimate. Confusion about rules and boundaries may emerge, mirroring broader disruptions in social structures once anchored by patriarchal authority. At the level of the personal matrix, members respond according to their own histories of authority — some seeking strong containment, others reacting defensively against perceived domination. These layered responses enact a contemporary dilemma: the desire for leadership without domination, structure without hierarchy, and authority without authoritarianism. In this sense, the conductor becomes a nodal point where conflicts between foundation, dynamic, and personal matrices converge.

A brief vignette illustrates how these dynamics may unfold in practice. In one analytic group, members began to express frustration that the conductor did not intervene more decisively during emotionally charged exchanges. Some participants demanded clearer direction, insisting that the group needed stronger leadership. Others appreciated the conductor's reluctance to exercise covert authority, which resulted in withholding intervention. The discussion quickly polarized the group into opposing

camps — those seeking firm containment and those resisting perceived domination. Viewed through the lens of the tripartite matrix, this episode reflected not only intrapsychic conflicts or interpersonal tensions within the group, but broader anxieties concerning the legitimacy of authority in a post-patriarchal context.

Such tensions rarely remain confined to the conductor–member relationship. As uncertainty about authority circulates through the group, it often reorganizes the relational field itself, giving rise to subgroup formations and polarized alignments.

### Subgroup formation and polarization

Fragmentation into subgroups can be understood as a dynamic-matrix response to instability within the foundation matrix. In the absence of shared symbolic anchors, the group seeks provisional forms of coherence through alignment and opposition. Outspoken members may align with one another, while quieter participants form coalitions of withdrawal. Gendered alliances may emerge, sometimes reproducing traditional patriarchal roles and at other times challenging or reversing them. Progressive and conservative positions may polarize, reflecting unresolved tensions circulating within the wider social matrix [14].

These subgroup formations are not merely defensive maneuvers but expressions of conflicts linking the foundation and personal matrices. Members gravitate toward positions that resonate with their personal histories of power, belonging, and marginalization, while simultaneously participating in collective enactments shaped by broader social constellations. Patriarchal logic may reassert itself through these dynamics, casting certain subgroups as dominant and others as subordinate — even within groups consciously committed to egalitarian values. In many cases the conductor becomes a contested symbolic figure, embodying unresolved struggles over authority embedded within the foundation matrix.

As subgroup tensions intensify, underlying gendered expectations regarding authority, care, and aggression frequently surface within the group matrix.

### Gendered transferences

Gendered transferences emerge at the intersection of all three matrices. Within the foundation matrix, patriarchal cultures establish enduring symbolic associations between gender, authority, care, and aggression. Within the personal matrix, individuals internalize these associations in idiosyncratic ways shaped by family, culture, and lived experience. Within the dynamic matrix, these internalizations become enacted through patterns of speaking, silencing, caretaking, and confrontation.

Women may be implicitly positioned — or position themselves — as emotional containers or mediators responsible for stabilizing the group's affective climate. Men may be unconsciously cast as carriers of aggression, authority, or challenge. Members perceived as feminine, regardless of gender identity, often become containers for vulnerability or dependency, while those perceived as masculine may be positioned as bearers of strength or confrontation. These enactments persist even in groups explicitly committed to equality, revealing the depth at which patriarchal structures remain embedded within the foundation matrix and continue to shape relational expectations at unconscious levels [54].

These gendered dynamics frequently converge around another recurring phenomenon: the unconscious search for a stabilizing paternal figure.

### The search for a new father

The recurrent search for a "new father" within analytic groups can be understood as a response to the destabilization of patriarchal authority in the foundation matrix. As traditional paternal structures lose legitimacy, groups may unconsciously seek alternative figures capable of providing symbolic containment and moral orientation [55]. This longing may crystallize around the conductor or be displaced onto a charismatic group member tacitly assigned a leadership role.

At the level of the personal matrix, individuals bring their own unresolved paternal histories into this search, intensifying processes of competition, idealization, and resentment. The group's ambivalence — simultaneously desiring, resisting, and fearing paternal authority — reflects the difficulty of relinquishing patriarchal containment without yet possessing stable alternative symbolic forms. These enactments should not be understood simply as regressions but as expressions of a transitional psychic and social state in which inherited structures are loosening while new relational frameworks have not yet consolidated [54].

### Group analysis as a site of transformation

Despite these tensions, group analysis offers exceptional potential for transformation precisely because it operates across the foundation, dynamic, and personal matrices simultaneously. Within the dynamic matrix, the group provides a structured environment in which conflicts can be symbolized rather than enacted destructively. Within the personal matrix, members may recognize and work through authority-related traumas rooted in experiences of domination, neglect, or abandonment. Within the

foundation matrix, new symbolic configurations can gradually emerge through shared reflection and relational experimentation [52].

Earl Hopper's ongoing development of the tripartite matrix, in collaboration with international colleagues, has been central to articulating this transformative potential. By emphasizing that all groups are microcosms of their contextual society and its institutions, Hopper situates analytic work firmly within broader social constellations. His framework allows analysts to trace how anxieties originating in the social matrix, particularly those related to legitimacy, authority, and belonging, become metabolized within group processes rather than remaining unmentalized or enacted destructively.

In this sense, the analytic group may function as a prototype for post-patriarchal relationality. Leadership can become distributed rather than centralized, authority negotiated rather than imposed, and differences held rather than split. Symbolic meaning emerges through dialogue within the group matrix rather than being dictated by inherited hierarchies.

Through this work, group analysis contributes not only to individual and group transformation but also to the gradual elaboration of new social constellations capable of sustaining psychic life beyond patriarchy. Within the interplay between Eros and Thanatos, the group resists both manic denial and despair-driven paralysis, maintaining contact with the world as it is. In this way, the analytic group supports an ongoing personal and collective evolutionary process in which growth emerges through shared reflection and relational engagement.

## Conclusion

The transformation of patriarchy represents one of the most significant symbolic shifts shaping contemporary social life. For centuries, patriarchal systems functioned not only as institutional arrangements but as organizing metastructures through which societies structured authority, gender relations, belonging, and moral order. As these structures weaken, their influence continues to reverberate across multiple levels of the social field — within symbolic frameworks of meaning, within the social unconscious that transmits relational patterns across generations, and within the institutions and cultural narratives that shape everyday life.

At the same time, the loosening of patriarchal authority creates new possibilities for relational and symbolic reorganization. Expanded understandings of gender, identity, and belonging open space for forms of social life that are less constrained by rigid hierarchies. Yet this transition also raises important questions concerning how authority, responsibility, and collective coherence can be sustained when traditional symbolic anchors lose their taken-for-granted legitimacy.

Within this evolving landscape, group analysis offers a particularly valuable perspective. By conceptualizing the group as a microcosm of the wider social matrix, group analytic theory enables clinicians to observe how broader cultural transformations become enacted within interpersonal dynamics. Earl Hopper's elaboration of the tripartite matrix — distinguishing the foundation, dynamic, and personal matrices — provides a framework through which these processes can be traced across societal, group, and individual levels simultaneously.

Within analytic groups, the transformation of patriarchal authority becomes visible in challenges to leadership, subgroup formations, gendered transferences, and the search for new forms of symbolic containment. Rather than viewing these dynamics simply as disruptions, group analysis understands them as expressions of a broader social transition. The analytic group provides a structured setting in which these tensions can be explored, symbolized, and gradually integrated.

In this sense, analytic groups function not only as therapeutic environments but also as spaces of social learning. Within the group matrix, authority can be explored as a relational process rather than a fixed hierarchy. Leadership may become distributed rather than centralized, and differences can be engaged without requiring rigid polarization. Through dialogue and shared reflection, members experiment with new ways of negotiating power, responsibility, and belonging.

This capacity to hold complexity is one of the distinctive contributions of group analysis. By working simultaneously across the foundation, dynamic, and personal matrices, analytic groups enable participants to recognize how inherited structures continue to shape expectations of authority and relationality. At the same time, they create opportunities for developing alternative forms of symbolic organization grounded in mutual recognition and shared responsibility.

The work of the group therefore extends beyond the resolution of individual conflicts. It contributes to the gradual emergence of relational frameworks capable of supporting psychic life in changing social conditions. Within the analytic group, members can reflect on experiences of authority, dependency, and responsibility in ways that foster both personal insight and collective understanding.

Through this process, group analysis helps cultivate what Earl Hopper describes as **mature hope** — a form of hope grounded not in the restoration of past structures but in the ongoing capacity of groups to think, relate, and create meaning together. In this way, the analytic group becomes a setting in which the possibilities of post-patriarchal authority can be explored: authority that is negotiated rather than imposed, relational rather than hierarchical, and sustained through dialogue, responsibility, and shared symbolic work.

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