

Neo-Nomads in the Digital Space: Mobile Identity in the Age of Informational Rhizome

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Contemporary reality, marked by dynamism, rhizomatic structures, and digital technologies, gives rise to a new model of human existence – digital nomadism. Combining poststructuralist analysis, a philosophical-cultural approach, and a hermeneutic interpretation of digital culture, the authors argue that the digital nomad is not merely a new lifestyle, but a profound anthropological and cultural shift that transforms conceptions of identity, community and reality itself. The conclusions emphasise the processual, fragmented and technologically dependent nature of digital identity, which manifests within an antinomic, mosaic and ‘elusive’ cultural space.

Keywords: digital nomadism, network society, rhizome, identity, digital space, philosophy of culture, virtual reality

INTRODUCTION

The contemporary world is characterised by exceptional dynamism and innovativeness. Human existence increasingly acquires the traits of mobility, while the individual emerges as a kind of nomad who continuously traverses the rhizomatic space of the social sphere. The conditions of constant movement, self-improvement, and flexible adaptation transform mobility into an intrinsic value of modern humanity, and nomadism into a relevant mode of being.

Digital nomadism has become a salient topic within contemporary humanities. It is explored, in particular, in the context of labour ethics (Fahmi et al. 2024), the structure of social citizenship (Webb 2024), and the individual as well as societal implications of the nomadic way of life (Henkens 2025). Scholars also approach it as an ambivalent phenomenon, simultaneously manifesting as a form of emancipation and as a mechanism of subjugation (Wang et al. 2025).

Against the backdrop of a growing number of empirical and applied studies on digital nomadism, there arises a pressing need for theoretical reflection on neo-nomadism as a multifaceted cultural phenomenon of the information age. A philosophical analysis of digital nomadism as a new form of identity, in our view, is impossible without recourse to postmodernist conceptions of social space – a focus developed in the first part of this article. The second part is devoted to examining the features of digital nomad identity, which emerges under conditions of mobility and digital interaction.

In our inquiry, we rely on commonly accepted terms – digital nomad, electronic nomad or neo-nomad – to denote individuals who, by virtue of advanced digital technologies, are not tied to a specific location in their professional activities, education, creativity, or leisure. The methodology of our research combines a philosophical and cultural analysis, the post-structuralist theory of the rhizome, and a critical approach to the study of digital identity and network society.

THE RHIZOMATIC SPACE AS A SOURCE OF IDENTITY FORMATION FOR THE CONTEMPORARY NOMAD

Identity is a multi-layered system shaped by a constellation of social relationships and roles, along with patterns of social behaviour and self-perception. While cultural identity seeks to preserve its coherence and stability by linking the past with the present, it inevitably undergoes the influence of discursive shifts. These shifts, in turn, stimulate transformations in individual worldviews, behavioural patterns, and modes of activity (Danilyan et al. 2019).

For the nomad, constant movement is primarily appealing because it offers freedom of mobility, action, self-realisation and communication. The ideal structure that enables the nomad to move freely and fulfill their needs in a convenient format is the rhizomatic network.

The concept of the rhizome describes a world in which, following the 'loss of the center', only fragments of systems and meanings remain. Much like the shattered remnants of classical statues, these fragments resist reassembly in pursuit of a lost wholeness. A rhizome has no axis; it is open-ended, allowing for dismantling and modification, rupture and inversion. Any point in a rhizome can be connected to any other, regardless of the way those points are encoded. Yet, the rhizome is not a chaotic or disorganised entity. Its structure is based on a different kind of unity: each rhizome 'contains lines of segmentarity according to which it is stratified, territorialized, organized, signified, attributed', and at the same time 'lines of de-territorialization down which it constantly flees' (Deleuze, Guattari 1987: 30). Fixed and normalised identities are formed through rigid segmentary lines and binary oppositions within certain social institutions. In contrast, lines of flight, through multiplicity, transform identities into processes of becoming. Only the lines of flight are strictly rhizomatic, along with the diffuse multiplicities/identities that are processually isomorphic to them.

In the nomadic space, multi-layered identity is replaced by a multiplicity of selves who engage in the tactic of constant mobility. Lacking history and possessing only geography (Deleuze, Guattari 1987: 393), the contemporary nomad is capable of thinking beyond the discourse imposed by the state or locality, thereby transcending limitations and ideological boundaries. As a result, their personal space resists standard mechanisms of state control, which are typically based on the fixation of ethnic, territorial, or other forms of belonging.

A contemporary social manifestation of the rhizomatic space can be found in modern megacities – spaces of mobility, rapid shifts in roles, statuses, and places of residence and employment. According to Zygmunt Bauman, the city, as the locus of residence for modern nomads, embodies three realisations of the rhizome: 'places that consume' (sites of consumption), 'places that eject' ('non-places') and 'empty spaces' (Bauman 2000: 95). The city, as a site of encounter between strangers, resembles a spider 'whose entire world is enclosed in the web it spins out of its own abdomen, and the sole support which strangers-in-meeting may count on must be woven from the thin and loose yarn of their looks, words and gestures. At the time of the meeting, there is no room for trial and error, no learning from mistakes and no hope of

another go' (Bauman 2000: 95). These encounters are events of a single intersection, offering no guarantees of repetition.

'Devouring places' are constructed to facilitate the least painful experience of encounter. In these spaces, action – rather than interaction – is encouraged, as interpersonal communication disrupts not only the individual's act of consumption but also the subjective experience of time itself. Today, identity formation through consumption has become a cultural imperative for the urban citizen.

In turn, Michel Foucault likens the temples of consumption to a boat – 'a floating piece of space, a place without a place, that exists by itself, that is closed in on itself and at the same time is given over to the infinity of the sea' (Foucault 1986: 26). The rhizomatic topos of 'devouring places' is stripped of the dangers of the everyday; its smooth navigation across surfaces – without a fixed starting or ending point – is accompanied by a dazzling variety of sensory stimuli. These sites are, therefore, 'tamed, sanitized and are guaranteed to come free of dangerous ingredients... and offer what no "real reality" outside may deliver: the near-perfect balance between freedom and security' (Bauman 2000: 99).

By contrast, 'non-places' represent another form of rhizomatic urban space, into which 'strangers' are admitted, yet their socio-individual features are reduced to a minimum. One can exist in such spaces only by adhering to prescribed behavioural patterns. A 'non-place' is devoid of symbolic expressions of identity or historical belonging. It encompasses spaces such as metro stations, highways and airports (Bauman 2000: 112). In these spaces, one is permitted to feel 'at home', but forbidden to behave 'as at home'.

'Empty spaces' are invisible; they represent sites devoid of assigned meaning. These are unclaimed, unappropriated places – omitted from the human mental map due to their unpleasant or offensive appearance. Nevertheless, 'empty spaces' constitute an essential component of urban cartography, as their exclusion from conscious perception allows other spaces to appear imbued with meaning.

In this context, the postmodern understanding of social space embodies a new topology aimed at the movement of nomads, whose worldview is shaped by a smooth, rhizomatic space. Through non-linear and non-hierarchical rhizomatic connections, nomads – having equal access to spatial trajectories – begin to think and act in similar ways. Their interaction eliminates vertical hierarchies, thereby realising a timeless human ideal of free self-expression and justice.

DIGITAL IDENTITY: SPECIFICITIES AND LINES OF REALISATION

Today, digital space is integrated into nearly all aspects of the traditional real-life environment, making it less and less distinguishable from an auxiliary or virtual reality. As a result, the real cultural space – as the initial source of diverse cultural identities – appears increasingly limited compared to the expansive possibilities of virtual space.

The latest technologies and the world of new media are embodied in the World Wide Web, a network with a complex modular architecture composed of threads/lines and nodes/web servers. The Web enables seamless navigation across its surface in any direction, functioning without interruption. It is constantly evolving through ongoing enhancements, thereby compelling users to adapt and respond to its dynamic transformations.

Individuals immersed in the digital realm – understood as a rhizomatic structure – function as digital nomads: they navigate through this space by means of non-contact interaction, transitioning fluidly from one digital resource to another, from hyperlink to hyperlink. In

doing so, these nomads continuously find themselves in new ruptures or folds within the rhizomorphic reality – a reality of slippage, whose essence lies in gliding across surfaces, within a space of images that enables one to reinvent the self. This process can be interrupted or terminated at any moment, and the subject can easily switch to an alternative path.

The unique identity of the digital nomad is inconceivable without the notion of personal freedom and mobility, a consciously expressed desire to construct an individualised lifestyle, and the accessibility of technological devices. The identity formation of the digital nomad is shaped by a number of factors, chief among them being continuous travel, a distinctive blend of professional and social activity, and the ongoing reconfiguration of one's personal digital infrastructure.

Moreover, the identity of the digital nomad is conditioned by the volatility and instability of the digital environment itself, which is essentially a flow of lines (Ahuja at al. 2020). The identity of the digital nomad manifests in a similar fashion – as a fluid amalgam of identities, a continuous process. These identity lines reveal the mutability, fragmentation and instability of identity – qualities that sharply contrast with the traditional view of identity as a coherent and stable construct. These lines are indistinguishable from one another; they interconnect and form the constitutive processes through which the identity of digital nomads is realised.

In our view, travel is one of the primary lines of identity realisation for the digital nomad. It is more than a mere movement from one location to another; it is a continuous motion that expresses identity itself. Access to the Internet empowers individuals to utilise digital resources regardless of geographic or socio-cultural affiliation. Within the digital space, neo-nomads become active users of temporary autonomous digital zones, navigating countless websites and social networks. In doing so, they contribute to the emergence of a new digital culture – one characterised by temporary autonomous zones formed by sites of information, commerce, and social interaction.

Another important line in the formation of digital nomads' identity involves the blurring of boundaries between their professional and social activities. For example, coworking spaces (and more broadly, coliving environments) create hybrid spaces that combine traditional office functions with areas for communication, sports, dining, leisure, and more. Although digital nomads often share similar worldviews, they tend to prefer fragmented integration and selective solidarity. While such a model might seem contradictory in the offline world, in the non-spatial environment of the digital network, it allows for the maintenance of personal distance and autonomy in social interactions.

The digital identity of contemporary nomads mirrors their spatial experience – localised yet unbounded. Digital culture offers nomads multiple identity configurations, enabling smooth transitions across localised digital spaces and the creation of interactive relationships. Within their digital territories, nomads are granted the right to express personal opinions without the risk of being accused of violating rigid state-imposed ideologies. The virtual freedoms enabled by digital zones attract individuals from all segments of real-world societies. The emergence of a new electronic infrastructure enhances the significance of digital media and transforms not only the process of knowledge discovery but also the re-discovery of the unknown dimensions of human identity.

In the digital realm, individual identity is increasingly shaped by what users write and publish online. Influential figures on digital platforms function as coaches, instructing diverse user groups in platform-specific principles and behavioural norms. In this way, the digital

social environment becomes self-organising, facilitated by creative approaches to learning, the transmission of skills, and the sharing of experience. A shift in user orientation – from the passive consumption to the active production of creative content – alongside the nature of knowledge disseminated online, is becoming especially appealing. However, this shift also results in a tendency among newer generations to disregard the values, knowledge, and ethical frameworks associated with their cultural heritage.

The Internet, as a temporary autonomous zone, functions as a compensatory refuge for those who reject prevailing sociopolitical and cultural norms. With its vast potential, digital media can transcend traditional markers of identity – such as social class, education, profession, language, race and religion – and instead promote new paradigms of digital cultural identity.*

Digital cultural identity may label any vital element within normative cultural paradigms as inappropriate or marginal. Each time such an element is accentuated as non-conforming, it tends to provoke social crises, exemplified by public movements such as Black Lives Matter or Me Too. Open digital forums possess the potential to challenge existing structures of power and hierarchy. Due to the mass scale of dissemination and the volume of content published, these platforms can readily alter deeply rooted cultural phenomena. Moreover, within each new community, the neo-nomad can easily reconfigure their identity, adopting a new persona aligned with the goals and norms of a specific website or forum.

A third line in the expression of digital nomad identity lies in the continuous experimentation with a personal digital infrastructure, which is essential for maintaining a nomadic lifestyle. In order to work from virtually anywhere, often without a stable Wi-Fi connectivity, digital nomads constantly adjust and reconfigure their personal setups of mobile technologies, cloud-based applications, and digital platforms. As a result, this flexible technological infrastructure becomes an integral part of their identity: the computer, once merely a work tool, transforms into a tool for life itself. Thus, digital nomads organise their worlds as inseparable from digital processes. It is important to emphasise that digital reconfiguration goes beyond the mere use of digital tools, infrastructures, or media; it is as much a social as a technological process – intricately intertwined with their trajectories of travel and the merging of work and life.

Even a brief overview of the lines through which digital nomads construct identity demonstrates that identity is enacted through processes. In essence, the identity of a digital nomad is not a fixed state, but a dynamic process shaped by ongoing participation in activities that constitute their sense of self. Crucially, it is the processes themselves – not the individuals, workplaces, or technologies – that take precedence in guiding action.

THE ANTINOMIC NATURE OF EXISTENCE IN DIGITAL SPACE

Digital cultural spaces attract individuals with their mobility and openness to anyone wishing to enter at any moment and construct a digital identity. However, both the natural and artificial webs offer not only benefits but also inherent dangers.

The most common function of a web – whether organic or technological – is the entrapment of prey. The Internet user, in a constant state of online presence, becomes prey to technological devices, unknowingly falling into electronic dependency. Yet this dependency

* For instance, the TikTok application is designed as an open forum that gives a voice to those who lack the opportunity to express themselves in real-life settings.

remains largely invisible due to the hyperreal capabilities of the digital environment, which offers a multiplicity of sensory experiences. Simulation becomes more appealing than reality and its observable scales. Virtuality, while engulfing the nomad, offers a wide range of services – education, employment, communication, entertainment, and more. In this process, the nomad often fails to notice their own mechanistic behaviour, which becomes governed by automated routines. Instead, they experience satisfaction in the ability to become other, to be a machine within the machine.

As the nomad glides through hypertexts and immerses themselves in virtual simulators that create the illusion of protection, they become alienated from reality – or deliberately retreat from it – constructing, like water spiders, virtual shelters in the form of multiple mask-like avatars. On the other hand, interaction with hypertexts may lead to a sense of cognitive exhaustion due to their inherent meaninglessness. Yet, in the contemporary context, meaninglessness itself evolves from a mere quantity into a distinct quality: we encounter a post-content reality, one characterised by confident and accelerated existence beyond meaning altogether. This phenomenon is explained by the rhizomatic structure of hypertext, which lacks a central axis or deep hierarchical structure. In such a system, there are no stable criteria by which to evaluate what unfolds – not through a coherent process, but through a chaotic dispersion. Ultimately, entry into virtuality becomes an entry into emptiness, unanchored by either society or nature. The ‘I-reality’ dissolves within the digital matrix, submitting to embedded algorithms and functioning as a machine.

As the individual loses meaning and is stripped of personal characteristics, they are transformed into an agent of information-computer networks, while their body becomes a tool for data collection. The digital nomad begins to be measured in bits, indicating a state of other-being. The personality is reduced to a human factor within the Technosphere, emphasising the dominance of technology, which reshapes the human according to its ever-expanding capacities. The digital environment dictates the vector of development, fabricates events and governs them – programming not only virtual spaces but also the digital nomads themselves. In the lives of neo-nomads, we observe a peculiar degradation into the new: a state in which the constant emergence of innovations negates earlier, unsettled ones, and alienated techno-relations prevail over meaning.

The absence of any measure within digital flows cancels out goal-oriented development and disrupts the foundations of existential meaning-making, revealing the absurdity inherent in the existence of the digital nomad. Under the illusion of scarcity fabricated by the system, foresight technologies continuously invent new needs, generating a meta-desire – the need for needs. These artificially constructed desires often exhaust the nomad in a senseless, endless cycle of consumerism.

Within the nomad’s experience, a new mode of communication is also taking shape – one centred on voyeurism without engagement, copying, visual fixation, and replication. This condition transforms the digital nomad into both the participant and spectator of a global theatre. Social relations acquire a theatrical dimension: what was once lived directly is now distanced in representation (Debord 1967). In today’s networked society, a continuous performance unfolds in which viewers/nomads do not observe a collection of images, but a social relationship between people, mediated by those very images. The energy of the stage has been neutralised by the theatricality of life itself and by the nomad’s desire to watch the Other. This, in turn, gives rise to an anti-theatrical effect – a hollow theatrical form mirrored by the empty form of reality (Baudrillard 2008).

The nomad puts life on display, often distorting the boundary between the private and the public. The primary aim becomes the demonstration of secrecy – even if it is fabricated or morally questionable. The repugnant, having acquired a peculiar attractiveness in the contemporary context, becomes a trigger for reflection or repetition. The theatricalisation of the self in the World Wide Web, as well as the mimetic following of others, no longer serves as a path for personal exploration but rather as a process of alienation from the self. The visualisation of one's life through photographs, selfies, and video clips no longer serves as an archive of memory but primarily as images of absence rather than presence (Baudrillard 2008). Cyberspace constructs an illusion – particularly one of unveiling desires, fears and flaws – which leads to apathy and, consequently, to an internal conflict of the self in the face of unresolved life situations. The nomad develops an excessive need to theatricalise information and to project the self beyond its own boundaries. The body becomes a stage where the unchecked multiplication of the body without image unfolds. Ultimately, the global theatre emerges as an alienated form of communication, oversaturated with the simulacral and senseless content, while the nomad's energy is consumed by emptiness. The paradox lies in the fact that, despite the simulations and lack of meaning, the web itself continues to function flawlessly.

Freedom in the rhizomatic structure of the Internet is equally ambiguous. Its manifestations reveal both positive and negative potentials, each influencing the metaphysical dimensions of the digital nomad in divergent ways. While freedom is considered a supreme life value that enables self-assertion, freeing the nomad from stereotypes and encouraging creative algorithms, it simultaneously becomes a source of the erosion of social, cultural and ethical boundaries. This erosion renders the nomad irresponsible, negligent, self-indulgent, and dismissive of others. Anonymity serves as a foundation for a sense of impunity, allowing the nomad to evade accountability for their actions within the digital world.

Moreover, freedom within the rhizomatic structure decentrates the digital nomad. The individual loses their personal core, becoming disoriented amidst the vast array of options presented by the network. Within the logic of their thinking and actions, the nomad gradually becomes rhizomorphic. The absence of a centralising principle – a 'genetic axis' or 'central root' – throws them from one space to another, from one line to the next. In their existence, heterogeneous elements emerge and intertwine, often lacking any clear beginning or end. The nomad's life becomes chaotic; they move in disparate directions, losing both purpose and meaning. Constantly immersed in a fragmented space and working with disjointed pieces of information, the nomad begins to fragment the self, dissecting it into separate, autonomous components, each of which is subject to further fragmentation and 'dividuation'.

The freedom experienced by the digital or electronic nomad proves to be illusory, as their choices are not genuinely personal but rather programmatically imposed. The Internet and its hypertexts subtly shape the nomad's needs and desires, guiding their preferences without their explicit awareness. Contemporary value orientations increasingly depend less on traditional knowledge systems and more on the content of media messages. As a result, what appears to be freedom for the nomad often turns into a form of captivity – marked by the absence of existential grounding, a loss of orientation in time, space, circumstances, and even in one's own life. Anxiety becomes a constant companion, gradually intensifying and pushing the individual toward a dead end and states of crisis.

The above observations suggest that, on the one hand, the World Wide Web opens up a space for the realisation of personal potential. On the other hand, it conceals profound risks associated with dependency, alienation, deception, and a sense of impunity in one's

actions. Under the influence of technology, the nomad becomes disoriented within the fabric of the world, mistaking the artificial for the natural, simulacra for the original, and external opinions for their own. Nevertheless, the simulacral appearance of the rhizomatic web proves more seductive than reality itself, successfully substituting it and manipulating its users.

CONCLUSIONS

The identity of the digital nomad emerges as a relational and processual construct, shaped within the context of mobility, a globalised labour market, and translocal interactions. It does not represent a stable essence but rather aligns with the poststructuralist conception of the subject as multiple and fragmented. Within this framework, identity acquires the qualities of heterogeneity and flexibility, resembling a fluid stream in which diverse social, cultural and professional narratives intersect, continually configuring a new and temporary sense of wholeness.

The nomad navigates digital cultural spaces that are inherently accidental, open, and composed of a multitude of intersecting fragments. Such a system merges objective and subjective elements, layers of contradictions, perpetual transition, factors of uncertainty, and self-complication.

The rhizomatic field of nomadic life renders the nomad's existence in an elusive reality. The existential space of the digital nomad appears antinomic, giving rise to disconnection and crisis through multiple identities and the fragmentation of real life in a manner similar to the structure of virtual space.

The foregoing allows us to conclude that a new, fluid digital identity is actively evolving – one shaped predominantly within a virtual world that increasingly resembles an authentic and ultimate reality. Meanwhile, actual cultural identity, which emerges and develops within real life, appears to be relegated to a subordinate status. In light of these observations, researchers should continue to explore and conceptualise emerging forms of digital identity, linking online activities with broader socio-cultural and political contexts.

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Neonomadai skaitmeninėje erdvėje: mobilioji tapatybė informacinio rizomo amžiuje

Santrauka

Šiuolaikinė realybė, pasižyminti dinamizmu, rizominėmis struktūromis ir skaitmeninėmis technologijomis, formuoja naują žmogaus egzistencijos modelį – skaitmeninį nomadizmą. Sujungdamos poststruktūralistinę analizę, filosofinį-kultūrinį požiūrį ir hermeneutinę skaitmeninės kultūros interpretaciją, autorės teigia, kad skaitmeninis nomadizmas yra ne tik naujas gyvenimo būdas, bet ir gilus antropologinis bei kultūrinis poslinkis, transformuojantis tapatybės, bendruomenės ir pačios realybės sampratas. Pabrėžiamas procesinis, fragmentiškas ir technologiškai priklausomas skaitmeninės tapatybės pobūdis, pasireiškiantis antinominėje, mozaikinėje ir „nepagaunamoje“ kultūrinėje erdvėje.

Reikšminiai žodžiai: skaitmeninis nomadizmas, tinklo visuomenė, rizoma, tapatybė, skaitmeninė erdvė, kultūros filosofija, virtuali realybė