

# Nicholas Steindorf

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## Zach\_Version.1.0

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Text by Levi Easterbrooks

Virtual skins stretch and shrink onto non-bodily body frames with a natural tightness, but occasional awkward charring or technical hiccups break the new flesh, letting a digital puss seep out. In appropriating the image and form of a living being to make a new digital body, where does the exterior existence of one end and the performance of the other begin in tandem?

Like a golem composed of pixelated corpse fragments that share a kinship with a self beyond the virtual, Nicholas Steindorf uses his Zach to build out tension between bodies existing in two kinds of space. There is a systemic mapping of the fleshy body in the video Scan that is transferred onto a more calculated digital topography; a space with coordinates more easily navigable, but less natural to our typical patterns of physical movement. This flux of space occurs doubly as the corpse-less body of a user navigates the screen space of his rendered solo museum installation. Though many of Steindorf's videos already exist accessibly online, they are tethered to something more easily read by the familiar « neutrality » of the halls of an art institution, although it is only the rendered architectural conjuring of one. This distillation

speaks not only to a credibility of physical display biased against digitally dispersed work, but also to an exclusionary economics of the museum-style exhibition. It is this exclusion that necessitates the « dream » in *Virtual Dream Center*.

Though wrapped in a dream, Zach performs a dark speculation or hyperbolized present tangled up in issues of big data collection and manipulation, market targeted online selves, and unknowingly complicit or helpless bodies caught in a web of perpetual surveillance. The exploitation of this second body, typically glossed over by technical language or conditions of access, is made explicit and uncomfortable on more familiar ethical terms in the body of Zach. His manipulation is brought close to the pornographic in his staged and recorded nudity, carried out by the execution of code rather than the willing participation of a cognizant being. Though the potential for metaphors of abuse might be heavy-handed or indelicate, the expected discomfort intends to pull out a sort of informative disgust or repulsion.

Our tracked behavior online forms another self to be pandered to with ads and click-bait news, but the exposure and manipulation of these selves as embodied by Zach makes explicit the insidious ethics of these practices that get lost in the press or in the celebrity of whistle blowers. Zach is ambiguously young in the same way that the data markers that form the outlines of our other selves are also only adolescent in their development. These technologies aren't old, but patterns of usage and bodily forms will leave a more distinct imprint with time.

As movement occurs between digital nodes, bodies are built up as constellations of data points and broken down as entities likely to operate within predictable channels of consumption whose digressions are to be monitored. Zach's

rendered skin receives these acts as traumas enacted in perpetuity, matching the composition of the affected body to the medium of transmission or the site of displaced violence. He is a bodily metaphor, easily possessed and exploited, that serves as a cypher for a digital politics experienced by most fleshy bodies with uncertainty, lacking tangible linkages between cause and effect.