

"The Tumbling Man: An Experiment in Cooperation for Two Participants"

The Tumbling Man is a humanoid pneumatic robot that not only tumbles but, with the aid and cooperation of two participants, can attain contorted poses, sit up, and play his body as a percussion instrument. The uncertain struggles of the robot possess a convincing anthropomorphic quality, creating empathy within the participant and viewer, as if the robot were a new-born primitive.

The computer in the Tumbling Man chooses a certain set of limbs from each participant by which he will be controlled. In a given experience, he may, for example, be controlled by the legs of one participant, and the arms and neck of the other. This choice of which participant controls which limb of the Tumbling Man changes over time, requiring the participants to redefine their cooperation. When there is no motion from the participants, as when they are donning the telemetry suits, the Tumbling Man creates his own unique actions, based on the patterns of previous participants.

With this piece, we hope to eliminate the barrier between performer and audience. Audience members become performers, forced to cooperate with other, formerly passive, viewers. These new performers will interact with each other and the Tumbling Man on both a physical and emotional level. The uncertainty of who controls what creates the need for cooperation in order to produce control.