



The Dancing Image in India, England, and the Caribbean 1770-1870

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Supervised by Tim Barringer, Joseph Roach, and Robert Farris Thompson
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The Caribbean



Fig. 3 Detail of fig. 2.25 Jules Bouvier, John Cooper in partial costume of Indian dancer Benares (Varanasi). A tawaif of Benares holding a thau touching her dhoti, gouache on mica (before 1825), Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

This document presents a visual synthesis of the doctoral dissertation Imperial Balls: the Arts of Sex, War, and Dancing in India, England, and the Caribbean, 1770-1870 by John Cooper in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy at Yale University, conferred in 2015. On the two sides of this document are distilled the visual and textual arguments of Imperial Balls. This verso presents a printed stream of 56 "dancing images", a new category of image in the history of art which Imperial Balls set out to document and define. Each one of the figures in motion among many in a landscape cut out from larger images. In some cases they are one figure in motion among many in a landscape or interior; more often they form the single major motif in an image made by a colonial artist to arrest the metamorphosis of a figure in a single pose, step, or attitude. Complete images, pencil sketches on this sheet show the contexts in which such metamorphic arrest takes place: Anglo-Indian domestic interiors, the scenographic decorations of the princely courts of India, or the no-places, or lithographic prints that describe a geography of marks surrounding the moving figure.

Because these dancing images constitute a class of historical agents whose affiliation with one another - or even existence - has either gone unrecognized or has been purposefully suppressed before, these acts of excision and recomposition are offered as a way to see something that has not been fully seen before. The cut makes the contour scintillate; seen collectively and divested of surrounding context the figure in motion will, when put back within the ecology of colonial images, vibrate. Forces converging on the limits of their extremity.

This dissertation is a study of figures dancing or in attitudes of extraordinary physical metamorphosis who by means of their translation into flat images, create a new typology in the history of art: the "dancing image." Chiaroscuro by highly decorative and expressive gestures, poses, and steps, the figures in these "dancing images" bear the hallmarks of many different choreographic traditions from across the globe. These expressive movements are then translated by the "dancing image" onto the flat surfaces of lithographs, mice paintings, thinnest prints, oil paintings, photographs, theatrical cut-outs, and other visual media of empire.

Staged by the establishment of what historian C. A. Bayly calls the "imperial meridian" of British commerce and colonization linking India, England, and the Caribbean, the "dancing image" emerged simultaneously across the oceanic spaces of empire in the period of the 1770s. By the 1870s film had begun to take over from prints and paintings as the dominant means by which to produce "dancing images"; it also became the source of their most progressive ontology.

The evolution of idea of movement in the history of art is the theoretical background against which this dissertation is set. The "dancing image" rises out of the intellectual genealogy of Heinrich Wölfflin, Aby Warburg, Henri Focillon, Georges Kubler, and Robert Fairman Thompson as an extra-European phenomenon of art with roots in the early baroque - a period coincident with the global expansion of European colonial powers. It reaches forward also into the present era of international dance and performance art.

This dissertation argues that, because they are sensitized to depict physical metamorphosis, in the overall history of art "dancing images" show with high syncretic explicitness the way things moved in specific places at specific times in the history of colonialism. And also, for the same reason, that they exhibit collectively the movements and changes of art and history diachronically across the imperial meridian of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Furthermore, this dissertation argues that the art histories of "dancing images" in India, England, and the Caribbean can only be fully understood in light of one another. Thus the dissertation takes a double shape: India, England, the Caribbean. Chapter 1 argues that the colonial phenomenon of "nauch" dancing in India created an entirely new strata of shared formal language in colonial visual culture which critiqued the destiny of empire through the art and movement

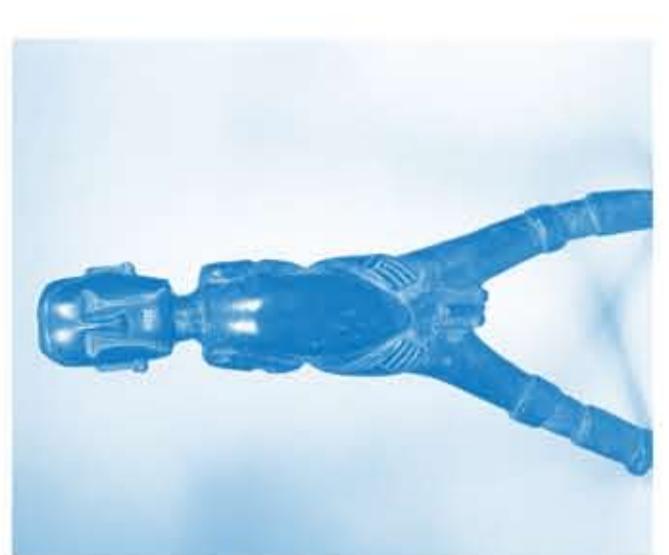


Fig. 1 1.4 Gouache on mica (before 1825), Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

"Dancing images" are all fragments of stillness severed from phrases of movement. Their contours scintillate with the expressive "cut" where this disjunction took place. Like the eighteenth century French paper doll of a ballerina in fig. 2.1, "dancing images" are collections of fragments of limbs and gestures, expressions, attitudes, steps, and ornaments, whose translation into the flatness of an image sometimes causes a certain comic disarray of their parts. This disarray stands in contrast to the grace and ease of the ballerina associated with the classic ballet.

Reflecting on the image in motion, Philippe-Alain Michaud saw that in Aby Warburg's vision of the art of Botticelli, in particular his *Spring and Birth of Venus*, the figure did not appear as a static entity, but rather seemed "to be born from a play of contradictory forces converging at the limit of the body's exterior: 'The nymph with flowing hair and wind-blown veil' was not in motion, like a dancer introducing disorder into its symmetry, shattering the measured equilibrium of the static apparition." This chapter is a study of such "shattering."

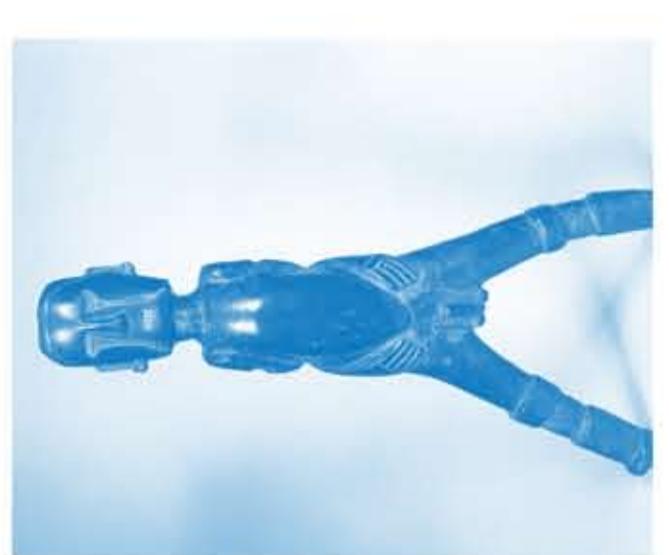


Fig. 2 8 Now unknown English artist (before 1825), Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

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"Intermediat" scenarios of the colonial eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the Indian raucuses, battles of dice, and the self-manifestation of [an] immobile presence" - it was instead in motion, like the plastic arts of the Taino. The zoomorphism of other Taino ritual sculpture impounds the association of vital energy within objective form that runs through the plastic arts of pre-Columbian Jamaica. The refiguration of the population of the Caribbean islands resulting from the transatlantic slave trade brought other, strongly kinetic sculptural impulses. Dance traditions of prodigious antiquity from the Congo, Yorubaland, and the kingdoms of Benin and Asante, among other classical West African cultures, were brought by enslaved African men and women to the Islands between the sixteenth and the nineteenth centuries and introduced aesthetic principles of polyrhythmic structure, multiple meters, off-beat phrasings, and a full repertoire of classic affect and ecological effect. The zoomorphism of other Taino ritual sculpture impounds the association of vital energy within underclasses. Caribbean dancing images between 1770 and 1870 thereby stand on two chthonic axes-in-motion of cultural tradition. Syncopation of cultural traditions is a form of movement, and movement itself is syncopation. This chapter will argue that the syntaxes of movement and the movement of syncopation produced new kinds of images; and that those images (which were first worked out beginning in the 1770s) but have been produced continually up to and beyond the decolonization of the Caribbean in the mid twentieth century disclosed new, potentially anti-colonial, forms of society.

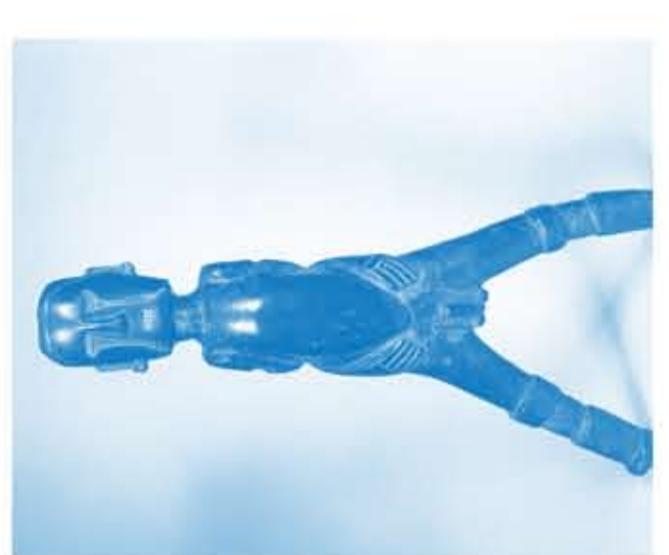


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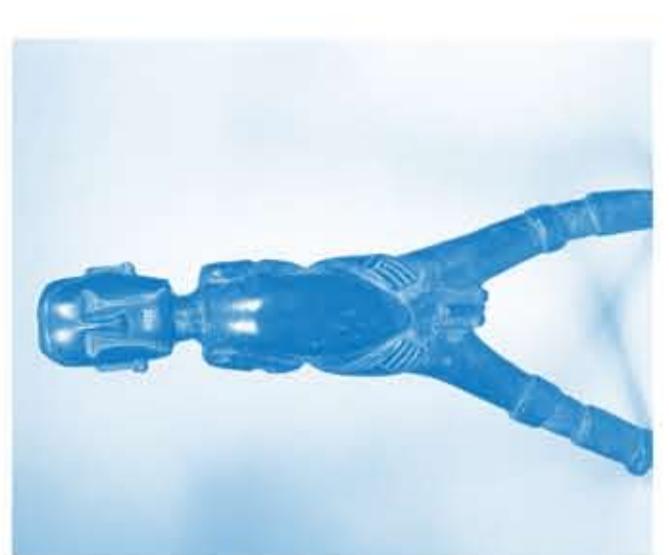


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On the image in motion, the figure in Botticelli's *Spring and Birth of Venus* was a performance scenario in which non-dancing Europeans witnessed the birth of a living, performative entity in British India - defines the term thus: as could be seen from a large number of Anglo-Indian colloquial words - first completed in 1866 when

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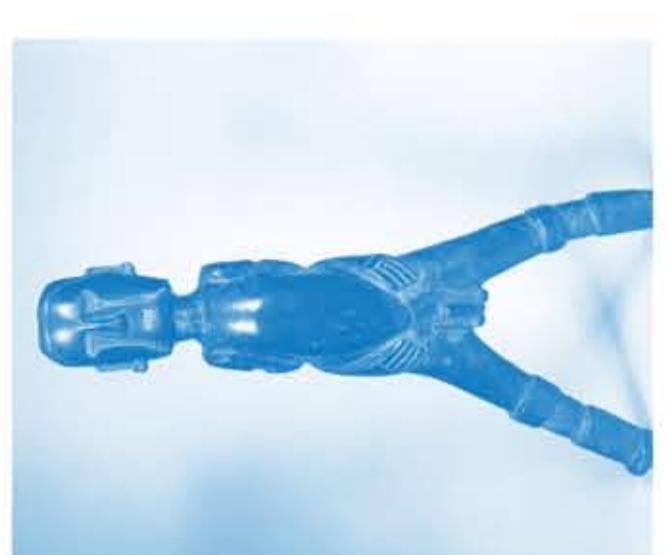


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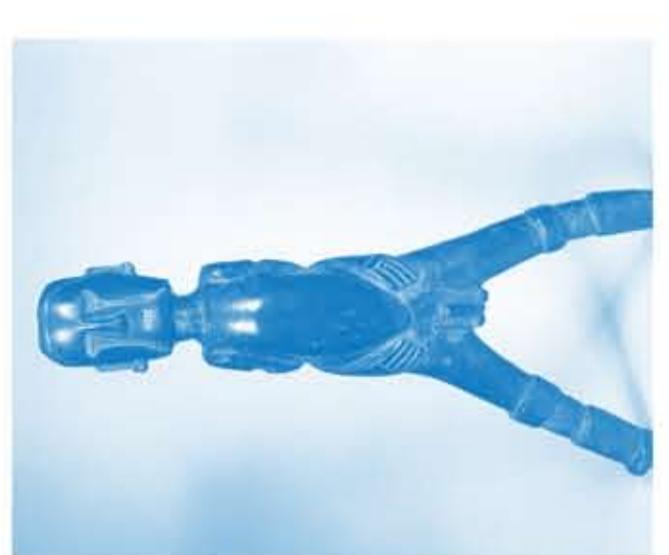


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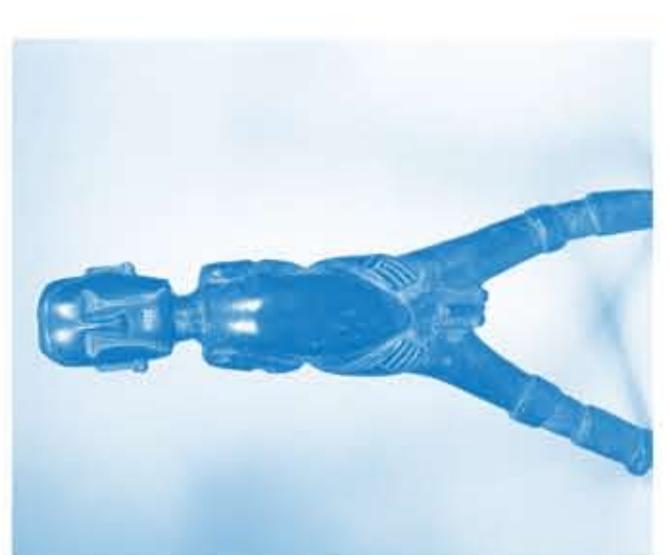


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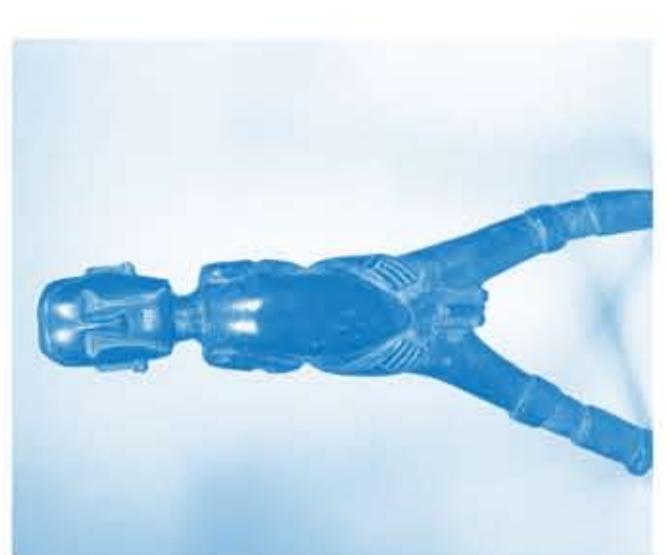


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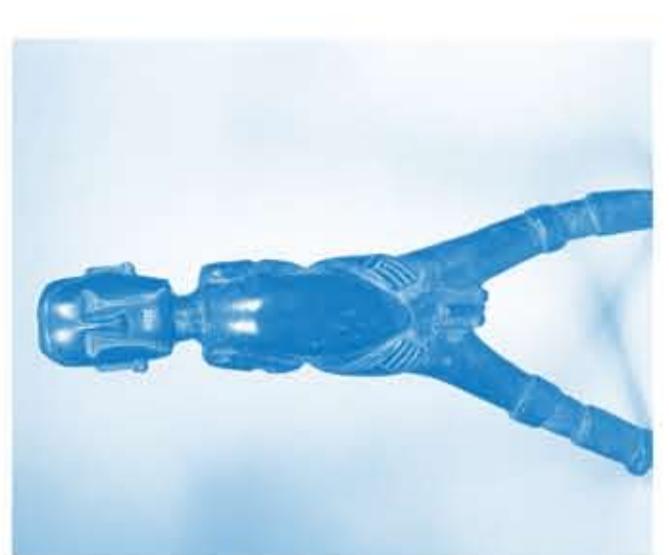


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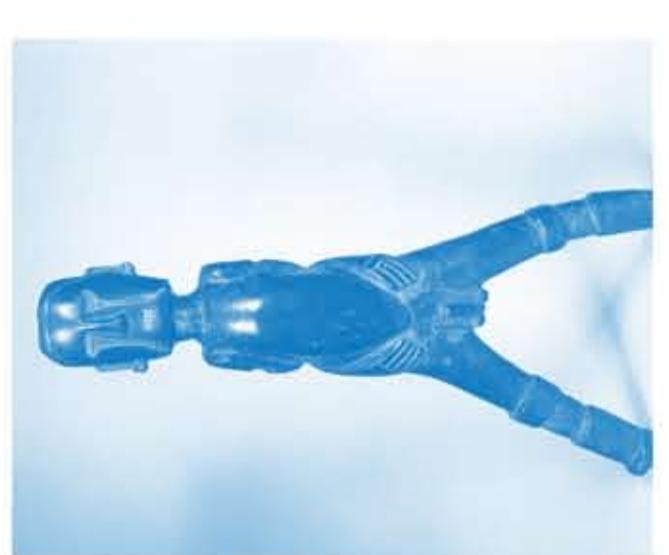


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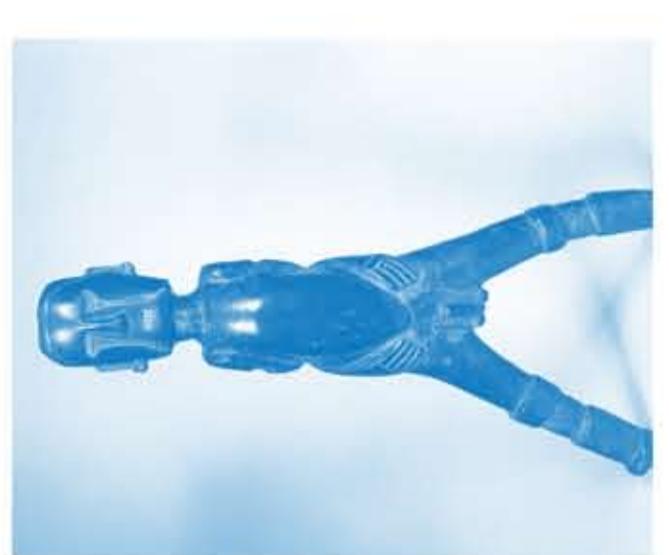


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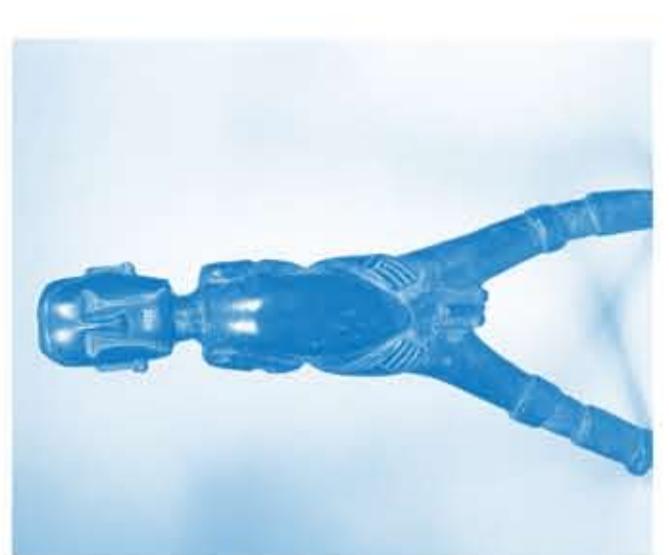


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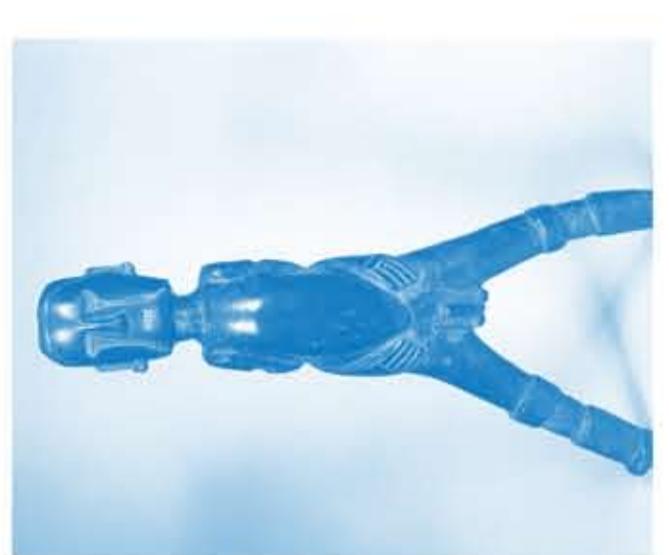


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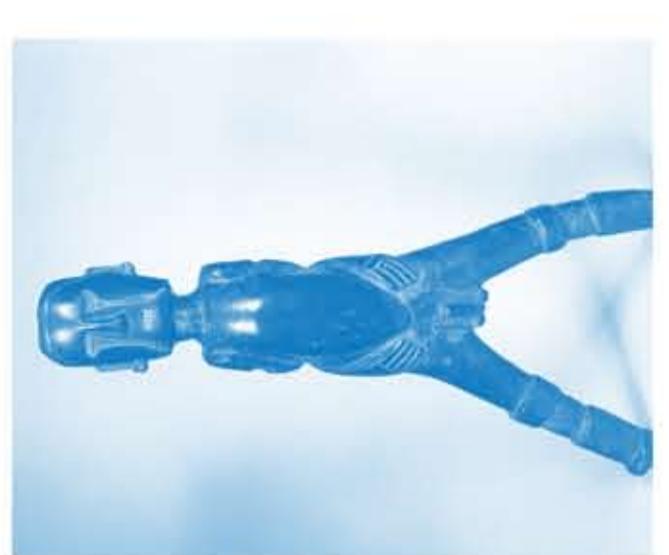


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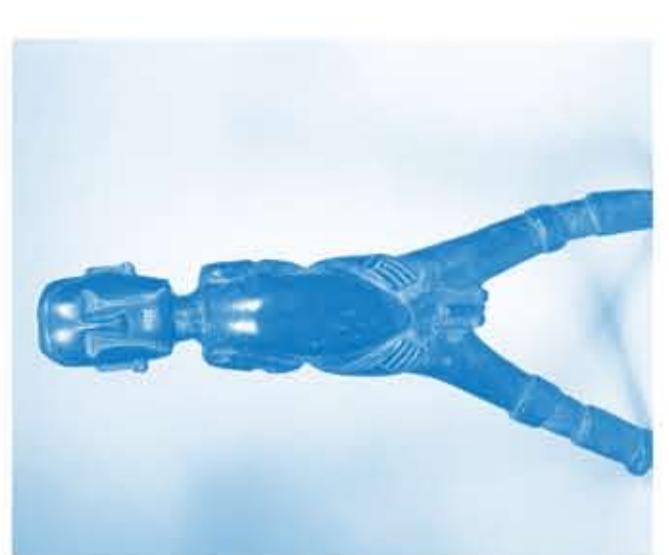


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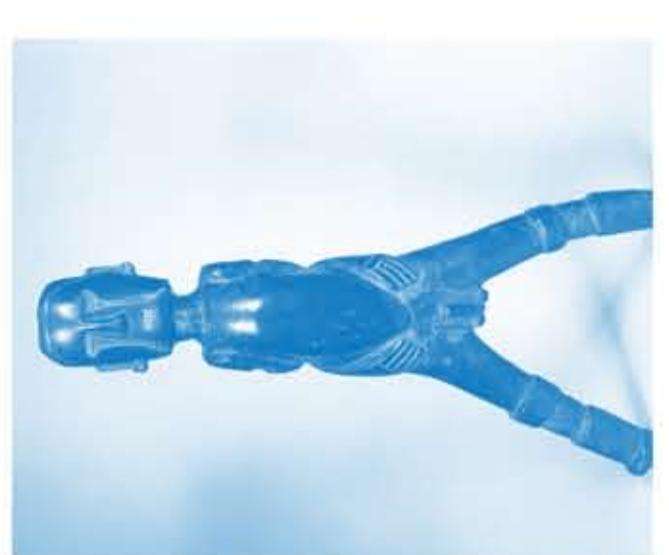


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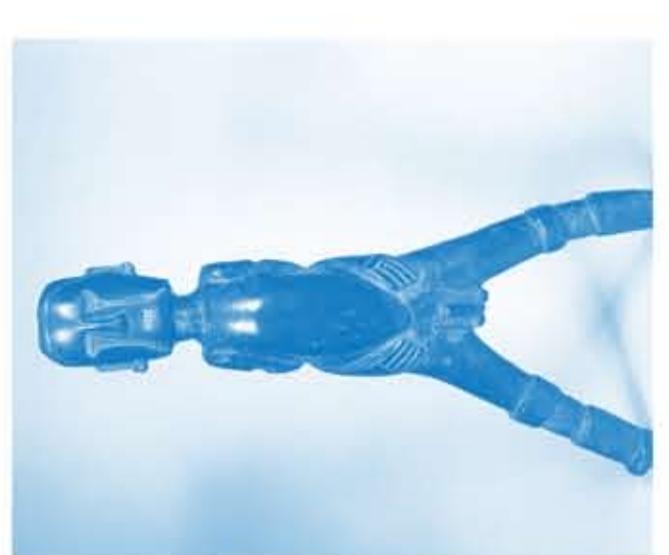


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