



High fashion, High Concept and... High Tech? Wearable Technology Takes the Stage

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Microsoft and fashion aren't often used in the same sentence, but last week we stole the show at the 15th annual International Symposium on Wearable Computers in San Francisco. Our Printing Dress, a carefully crafted piece meant to explore the intersection of high tech and high fashion, proudly took home Best of Show and Best Concept awards.

The fascinating world of wearable tech is starting to hit the mainstream as the race for better, faster, cheaper and stronger technology intensifies. But what is it, exactly? Wearable tech is portable, functional and lightweight clothing or accessories incorporating advanced computer technologies. Think old school spy movie gizmos (Bond girl lipstick cameras, Inspector Gadget-like watch phones) meet today's complex electrical capabilities. Throw in a little imagination and you've got a wearable technology wonderland. Spanning a variety of industries, we've already seen products like GPS t-shirts, body tattoos that enable fetal monitoring for pregnant women, glasses that let you surf the web and pills that auto-send text messages to doctors.

I wanted to explore a new medium for instant, constant communication. The way we consume technology today concerns me, to say the least. Social media is great, but it has caused us to be anything but social, allowing individuals to hide behind laptop and tablet screens instead of interacting face-to-face. People walk down the street every day eyes down, head down, completely oblivious to the living, breathing world surrounding their precious smartphone. They can't even see that they're about to walk into a post. And you know what the current solution for that is? To make an augmented reality app to tell you you're going to walk into a post. That's a fail!

The Printing Dress was inspired by traditional typography and — you guessed it — the printing press. Laser-cut buttons resemble old-fashioned typewriter keys, and it's made almost entirely of black and white rice paper. It comes equipped with a projector, four circuit boards and a laptop, and everything, from the buttons to the hem, is functional. We're entering a realm where everything we do and say is up for public display. I wanted to take this to a literal level: A message typed on the dress using the keyboard embedded in the bodice would instantly be reflected on the skirt, and the words begin swirling on the surface of the dress. Simultaneously the message is posted to your desired social media platform. You literally become what you tweet — it's communication *outside* of the virtual world.



As a creative thinker at Microsoft Research, it's my job to share with others my vision for the future of tech. So what if I told you I imagine a future where technology becomes invisible, a layer of intelligence and connectivity that lies on top of and around us, no longer isolated in objects and places. No more phones glued to hands or eyes glued to laptops, technology would instead become embedded into everyday items. Think about it.

So often I see films and books depict a cold and dark future, where people become information automatons and robot uprisings happen on the regular. But it doesn't have to be that way; I envision a warm future where technology becomes human, not the other way around. Sometimes you just need the courage to put something out there that's unconventional. It's all about being fearless as we plunge

forward.

Keep an eye out for wearable tech. To see what other quirky projects we're up to at Microsoft Research, visit <http://research.microsoft.com/en-us/>.