

Tin Boy

by Silvia Bombardini



Cottweiler, SS16

“And this reality of our century is technology”, writes Hungarian constructivist László Moholy-Nagy in 1922 “to be a user of machines is to be of the spirit of this century”. Now that the 20th is but a faraway memory, who will be the spirit of our own? The generation born on the cusp of the Millennium bug already has been labelled post-human: no longer suspicious of dystopian outcomes, they’re not just users of machines but live alongside them in fearless symbiosis. Donned up in wearables, the earthly body itself resembles a rudimentary operating system, and fashion revels in this newfangled efficiency. Doing away with some extravagance, menswear pursues an enhancement of its function. It may seem insipid at first glance, but quite the opposite can also be true – unrestrained by the limits of flesh and milieu, singularity swells on virtual ground. If the infinite sum of one’s online personas stands as the complexity of their true self, their wardrobe instead is gradually more subtle, cleansed, and clever.

Designers like Matt Dainty and Ben Cottrell at Cottweiler have channelled the aseptic, performance-driven aesthetic of androids with stark white monochromes, laser-cut perforations, quilting and coating and ergonomic fits. Whereas the ashen complexion and unnatural stillness of models in the Balenciaga FW15 lookbook, with their somewhat synthetic backdrop of iron and grass, gives similar context to a series of

refined but austere garments in shades of concrete greys, pressed so flat you wonder if they stand on their own. Machinery prints feature for summer at Komakino, and the clean slit at the knee of long trousers that's popped up here and there recalls the joints of treasured fictional bots like the Maschinenmensch, or C-3PO. It's found again at the shoulder in Rory Parnell Mooney fall collection, while the round chest panel with button closure on Ann Demeulemeester's long coats almost looks like it could give access to a control board, there where we picture robots would have it. The opening look at Hood by Air's spring 2016 show in Paris also builds around a snowy, streamlined and flipping front with a rectangular cutout at the navel, adjustable and bracketed by silver zips. Whereas in Walter Van Beirendonck's collection, suitably titled *Electric Eye*, slits and cuts by the hips and lapels turn blazers themselves into mechanical smiles. When paired with Stephen Jones' wide-brimmed hats that cast a shadow over the wearer's features, the superimposition is almost complete.



Loewe, SS16

Technology on its side grows increasingly humanlike, and humanlikeable. Robots compose, dance in Louboutin pumps for choreographer Blanca Li, take selfies on Mars. When not AI per se, they're christened and pampered as if they were by the humans around them. It won't come as a surprise if in the near future signature iPhone covers will give way to full-blown robotwear lines. Progeny of the twee tech originally designed to ingratiate a still cautious older audience, the sentimental videogame-y charm some of it still shares appeals today to the young millennial not yet fully at ease into an adult lifestyle. Hence for the FW15 and SS16 season respectively, Loewe and MSGM both forgo the more obvious, sterile android look to tap instead into the nostalgic lure of toy-robots, ranging from prints of humanoid machines the likes of a Optimus Prime or EVA Unit, to beaded embroideries of Nam June Paik-esque old-style cuties. That this type

of robotic influence suits menswear at its best comes naturally, as these brands' younger customers belong to what is perhaps the last generation to have watched markedly gendered cartoons, whose heroes were no longer the likes of, say, Hercules or Tarzan, but mecha characters from Japan, reflective of contemporary evolutions in cybernetics. A notable exception is the Fyodor Golan spring 2016 collection for women, in actual collaboration with Transformers: we are, indeed, bound to see more of them in the future, as mass entertainment developed almost exclusively in this direction ever since. In a vicious modern world where we're pressured to excel but still look up to the superheroes of our childhood, robots have the potential to become more and more youth's superlative role models. Robots are selfless, painless, stainless. They're unyielding, incorruptible, capable if not outstanding, and content where we're dissatisfied.

Real-life cyborg activists like Neil Harbisson, who *listens* to colours, may be only a handful yet – but the idea of implantables or wetware sounds now more start-up than sci-fi. And though we're still waiting for the Apple Watch to convincingly lure major fashion companies into the realm of wearable tech, a number of courageous rookies already has ventured there, if admittedly with more gimmicky than truly revolutionary results. Google's *Project Jacquard* in partnership with Levi's vows to change that, and introduce to a public as wide as denim wearers a gesture-sensitive interactive pair, as early as 2016. With the punch cards of the old jacquard loom being the recognized precursors to the development of computer programming, they might just be destined to succeed. Sure enough, some will wonder if we truly do need this, what with smartphones within reach in our back pockets anyway. There is, without doubts, a bit of cynicism, a general sort of antipathy for tech that wearables still have to face in the fashion industry. A style.com *reviewer*, for one, is bothered by a belt that contains a phone-charger in the Casely-Hayford fall 2015 collection. He argues it undermines the runaway theme: *"how can a runaway convince if he wears a belt that allows him to stay in contact at all times?"*. Out of context it reads a little petty, but in a nutshell, it's a call for the reinstatement of fashionable priorities. Not everyone shares constructivist ideals. Wearable tech so far has often looked geeky, easily naff, no matter the wonders it performs. But high fashion is a game of rhetoric, and if robots indeed are the end goal, there are more palatable ways, such as the ones mentioned above, driven by concept and in tune with a label's own signature, to scratch the itch while the self-proclaimed game changers set to work to deliver on their promises.