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Never Offline

By Lev Grossman and Matt Vella – TIME Sept. 11, 2014

The Apple Watch is just the start. How wearable tech will change your life—like it or not.

Apple isn't in the business of inventing things, or at least not primarily. It practices a grislier trade: resurrection. The company's modus operandi is to browse for dead product categories, looking for freshly dug graves that might contain carrion ripe for reanimation—digital music players, tablet computers. Sometimes it comes across the walking dead, like the smartphone business, which had died though nobody noticed.

When it finds a likely candidate, Apple dissects it and studies the various causes of death. Then it builds something so completely thought through, so seductively designed, so snugly embedded in webs of content and services and communications, that it not only lives again, it thrives to the point of annihilating memories of anything that came before. Apple creates demand for things that there previously was no demand for. It takes products we never wanted and convinces us we can't live without them. It does this better than any company in the world.

This time Apple has dug up a truly grim specimen, the smart watch. Lots of bodies buried here, whole cemeteries' worth. This operation is vintage Apple, the classic Lazarus maneuver. It's the first time the company has attempted it since the death of its legendary cofounder and presiding genius, Steve Jobs, but happily the product it has created is convincingly Jobsian: a startlingly beautiful and full-featured device called the Apple Watch. Note the absent i.

It has to be good, because Apple isn't just reviving an old category, it's moving a boundary. It's attempting to put technology somewhere where it's never been particularly welcome before: on our bodies. When CEO Tim Cook and his colleagues talk about the Apple Watch the words they use over and over again are "personal" and "intimate," and it's true in the most literal way possible: they're asking you to let them strap a computer to your arm. Like a pushy date, the Apple Watch wants to get intimate with us in a way we're not entirely used to and may not be prepared for. This isn't just a new product; this is technology attempting to colonize our bodies.

Technological progress tends to feel incremental, but this is a watershed. There was a time when the Internet was something you dialed up; then it was replaced in the late 1990s by broadband, the always-on Internet, a formula that already sounds quaint. Apple Watch signals the advent of an always-there Internet, an Internet that can't be put away. **STOP** We're used to dabbling just our fingertips in the Internet, but the Apple Watch doesn't stop there. It tracks your movements. It listens to your heartbeat. It puts your whole body online. Exactly how personal do we want to get?