Fasten Your Seatbelts For The Biggest Car Innovation Of The Year
by Jacob Wren

It began with a practical question, a practical need. In a cabin in the woods (for example, in the woods near St-Médard, Témiscouata), living off the grid, how does one edit video? It doesn't require much electricity, just enough to run a laptop and video camera.

What you have is an old Nissan Sentra, still drivable but not quite up to legal standards. You can of course continue to drive it, as long as you don't get caught. But driving it isn't the only possibility. Using only a hammer, a nail, a wood chisel, a rivet gun, a saw and a big log you can pull the car apart. This is extremely satisfying, to tear it apart until there is nothing left but the motor and frame.

Using the metal ripped from the car, you realize it is possible to build a vertical axis windmill. You will find instructions for how to do so in the gallery. Anyone can do it and everyone should. The project is open source, virtually authorless: all it requires from you is the willingness to rip apart a car.

It is a somewhat simple notion, but we might think of the process as follows. If a car can receive energy and use this energy, in combination with its mechanics, to generate movement: what happens if you reverse the mechanics and their function? Through such a reversal, could we create another kind of movement, no longer speeding forward, but instead turning steadily around a vertical axis?

In the seventies there were a number of experiments with vertical axis windmills. These experiments were considered unproductive because the windmills spun too fast, could not easily be stopped, broke down. However, our vertical axis windmill made from a Nissan Sentra has solved this problem simply and efficiently. Instead of coming up from the ground on a central post, it hangs down from a rope. When the windmill spins too fast it simply swings off its central axis and in this way naturally slows down. At times artists find solutions where engineers cannot.

But there are other reasons why a vertical axis windmill is more practical now than in the seventies. A Macintosh laptop, for example, is designed to run seven hours off a small battery. Video cameras possess a similar energy efficiency. (Of course many other things can be run off our Nissan Sentra vertical axis windmill: domestic lights, televisions, radios, etc.) In general, considerably less electricity is needed today to run a wide variety of tools and machines. Things have changed but our thinking hasn't changed along with them. Many of the social and technical experiments of the sixties and seventies might now be revisited with a full knowledge of our current situation.

Tearing apart a car is not a gentle act: it is rough and violent. This roughness could also be seen as resonating with a future shift from a model of consumption to one of sustainability, a shift that

would represent such a violent break with our current perspective and lifestyle it is difficult to imagine how it will come about. However, though the process of generating such a break might not be particularly smooth or graceful, on some level each and every one of us knows it must soon take place.