

almost a century. On account of all of these elements, it was given its classification (Ternois, 2005).

The site feels as if it was abandoned just a short time ago (yesterday, or perhaps the day before) and one is struck by the absence of everything that should give it life and meaning: the presence and bustle of the workers, the noise and movement of machines, raw materials and processed material, flour particles suspended in the air, and the living network where the mill would participate in trade, social relationships and the life of the city, etc.

It is then, paradoxically, the concept of ‘ruin’, within Brandi’s sense of the term, that comes to mind. This heritage object, so recent, so well-preserved, protected by law, is valued for the information it contains—the unusual if not unique testimony that it represents for the history of technology. However, the first feeling it conveys to us is more about all that has disappeared rather than about what still remains. How to treat this site? Locking it into a policy to preserve it in its actual state (i.e. the preservation of the site as a ruin) seems problematic. For historians of technology and sociologists and specialists in regional history, this could constitute a particularly well-documented object for study, but this would be insufficient to highlight its value.

Without a public, how will it survive with a new private owner who may have little or no motivation to preserve this site? Should we then provide it with a new function? Open it up to visitors (with all the changes that this would involve)? Reactivate all or some of the machines for museum demonstrations? Why not develop a new production of bread rolls to take away after the visit, with the cooperation of some nearby bakeries? Or as a tool to demonstrate the performance of clean energy, as the mill would impressively use a local water source, the Bresle River, to operate all its machinery on three floors? The development project would thus deliberately superimpose a new meaning onto the old one, which is radically alien to conventional approaches to conservation, but probably essential to that of the mill.

The brownfield redevelopment of the fluvial Île de Nantes,² which comprises 337 hectares, is of course on a completely different scale. The industrial development of the island began in the nineteenth century with sugar refineries, spinning mills, canvas factories, breweries, tanneries, foundries, and shipbuilding activities, which reached a peak in the mid-twentieth century and then declined from 1970 onwards. Activities ceased completely in 1987. This left behind a traumatized city and a vast totally abandoned urban landscape. It took almost ten years (1989 to 1997) to develop a comprehensive restructuring plan including housing, offices, shops, public facilities and services, light transport, green spaces, etc. However, only one facet is of interest to the discussion here: how to accept this heritage and conserve, through some strong, symbolic acts, some kind of ‘spirit of place’?