



remember work?



Remember work?

Work is at the heart of politics, and restoration. Looking at a structure we ask how many man hours went into building it, whose labor informed its use and finally how much work we want to sink into maintaining it.

Work is a lynchpin for restoration – and as Pyramiden illustrates – a problematic one.

Pyramiden was a village constructed for hard labor. The name brings to mind hard work and the sublime.

In Soviet propaganda, increasingly efficient work was portrayed as the means of deliverance – the bringer of international communism. And it was a faith with many saints. A coal miner – Alexey Stakhanov – was said to have completed 14 times his quota on a work shift, and became a primary symbol for Soviet spirit.

The Stakhanovite movement was significant, and sceptics were – in a stroke of dark irony – sent to labor camps.

Work has always been complicated and resonant. We care about it, and we fight about it.

When a lot of work is put into something we feel it should be remembered – whether the work was evil, banal or altruistic.

One way to memorialize work spatially is to put in additional work to preserve it.

This creates a potentially endless, recursive loop, one which can give a positive sentimental experience – but one we feel Pyramiden perhaps doesn't need.

Another way to commemorate work spatially is to reenact it.

In Japan, the practice takes beautiful expression in the wholesale, cyclic reconstruction of temples, and the designation living national treasure – given to people working with traditional construction methods.

There is something interesting about embodied traditions, but does the work always need to be performed by a human?

In Nepal, wind-driven prayer wheels are used to

tumble the written prayers of Buddhist worshippers as a proxy for saying them out loud.

And throughout the world, the borderlands of work and leisure are continually redefined by machine development. This is of course nothing new – a central part of the Stakhanov symbolism was how fluidly the miner fused with his powerful jackhammer.

We feel strongly about work. In fact, we feel strongly even about insentient objects that seem to work, or lack work. It is easy to forget that machines have no concept of work as we understand it.

Work – as a carrier of meaning and conflict – would be a natural way to interact – and play – with, Pyramiden.

Pyramiden is given a lone inhabitant – a worker. And the newcomer is the quintessential worker – a robot – its very name derives from the Russian word for work. So we have a former coal mining colony, occupied by a repurposed industrial robot.

Neither of the two have any practical purpose at this remote location. The robot is as easy to program as the coal mining colony is difficult, but the meandering and arbitrary track it follows makes it impossible for it to work in any traditional sense.

Like a true inhabitant of modernity, the robot might be reprogrammed to work in hospitality, curation, or to maintain a video feed. Whether it is doing work is unclear.

If robots are videotaping polar bears – or looking for arctic foxes with searchlights – and nobody watches the live feed, are they really working?