

The Politics of Performance in Architecture – Calling all actors in a building system to play their part

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Taking the definition of performance beyond metaphor and into workable methodology, this paper investigates the interactions of human and non-human occupants of a building in the negotiation of thermal control. Drawing on theories of performativity, theatrical practice, and high-performance business management paradigms, the paper discusses what is at stake in the resolution of thermal performance through purely technical means.

The context is specific: 'smart' architecture, where agency is given to autonomous environmental systems to 'do the right thing'; and work environments embedded in a performative-linguistic culture. In other words – where machines do things with fans and boilers, and humans do things with emails, meetings and performance reviews.

Calling attention to the language of management performance permeating the discourse of thermal control in architecture; efficiency, productivity and well-being, the paper suggests that the 'performance gap' is also a rhetorical performance gap that permits another agenda to pass through unchallenged.

Biography :

Claudia Dutson is a PhD candidate at the Royal College of Art. She holds a BSc and MA in Architecture, and has written a book on artificial light (2010). With a background in digital media and telecommunications, her current work investigates the convergence of computing and architecture.