Architecture’s efforts to respond to the digital paradigm have focused primarily on the exploitation of new tools to produce new forms. However, work based on static, immutable form has become increasingly irrelevant to an evolving digital age culture. Instead, architecture needs to observe the ways that digital technology has changed cultural practices and values to produce a new approach to architecture that is more culturally relevant than one whose value depends upon its formal novelty. The DRAPE Artist Residence and Gallery offers an example of just such an architecture based on the model of an editable wiki.

1. Interior view of the DRAPE Artist Residence and Gallery, showing the operable membrane.
Integral power, data, light, and air are distributed to characterize the interior volume of the structure. The membrane—allowing it to divide, combine, or otherwise manipulate the overall form of the membrane—has motorized hangers that can be moved back and forth in an editable and expressive space-dividing membrane. It includes inflatable residential furniture that can be easily stowed or deployed as needed.

- **Legend**
  - A. Operable space-dividing membrane
  - B. Integral service nodes (light, power, data, air)
  - C. Motorized rolling hangers
  - D. Conductor rail
  - E. Floor compartment
  - F. Integral service nodes (light, power, data, air)
  - G. Inflatable lounge chair
  - H. Inflatable bed
  - I. Inflatable furniture

Proposed for a site adjacent to the Sheldon Art Gallery (designed in 1963 by Philip Johnson) on the campus of the University of Nebraska–Lincoln, the DRAPE Artist Residence and Gallery consists of a single volume that provides a residence, studio, and gallery for a visiting artist. The name DRAPE serves as an acronym for these three programs (Dissertation, Residence, and Art Production Environment) and as an editable and expressive space-dividing membrane. It includes inflatable residential furniture that can be easily stowed or deployed as needed.

In so doing, the DRAPE responds to pragmatic reasons and as an act of authorship. Example they are conflated. The operable membrane acts as a flexible “frame” that allows the resident artist to continuously establish and modify relationships between activities that occur within the multi-purpose space.

Throughout the sheet in an array of control ports. These features, combined with an assortment of inflatable furniture elements that can be deployed from and returned to a number of floor compartments, allow the occupant a high degree of flexibility in how the space of the DRAPE is redefined (Figures 2-5).

In addition to the resulting flexibility, the DRAPE also allows the resident artist to act as a creative author of the architectural character or content of the work: the membrane serves not only to divide and frame the activities that it helps to support, but its relative thickness and malleability also embody the fluidity and temporality of the boundary between these aspects of the artist’s life. Consequently, its manipulation allows the artist to make relatively nuanced statements about the (inter-)relationship of these activities—and to employ architecture’s capacity to monumentalize these statements—while retaining the ability to revise them over time through the reformulation of this architectural element.

The **Open Content** Model

In this way, the membrane acts much like an editable wiki or any other open content construction, enabling the occupant to author and edit the architectural content of the space within an established framework. In so doing, the DRAPE responds to digital age culture not through the exploitation of new tools and techniques to produce new forms, but rather by using relatively commonplace technologies to engage contemporary culture’s increased capitulation with individual authorship and content manipulation—which is a more profound hallmark of the digital paradigm than any particular form. After all, to digitize something is to strip it of its form and to convert it to information, thereby allowing it to be reconstituted in multiple forms. As a consequence, contemporary culture, responding to evolving digital technologies, places a premium on the ability to disassemble, reconstitute, and frame the activities that occur within the multi-purpose space (both for pragmatic reasons and as an act of authorship).
seminate, update, and reformulate information content—all of which have been made possible by the proliferation of digital technologies within popular culture. The popularity of open content websites that allow or encourage authored content by their users (Facebook, MySpace, YouTube, Twitter, Flickr, and Blogger—to name just a few) is a barometer of the degree to which society values such participation.

Architecture, given its traditional investment in static and monumental form, cannot satisfy this burgeoning cultural interest in creative authorship through the perpetuation of its traditional production of monumental and immutable works created by a single author (the architect), and it therefore risks becoming an aloof backdrop to the more engrossing forms of participation made possible by digital technologies. Even the most lauded examples of "digital architecture" fail to address this issue.

In contrast, the DRAPE is distinguished by its ability to confer a relatively high degree of authorial control over the character of the architecture to the occupant through the manipulation of its operable membrane to produce varying programmatic, spatial, and social relationships (Figures 7-8, 18-19). This differs significantly from previous examples of kinetic or otherwise transformable architecture, in which the transformable elements were either too mixed in satisfying issues of flexibility or performance to serve as instruments of creative expression, or too insignificant within the overall architectural proposition to allow the architectural character of the work to be truly transformed. While the work of Archigram, Cedric Price, and others imagined frameworks that supported activities, programs, and experiences that could be manipulated over time, the plug-in or catalogue-like effects described in their work frame the users more as consumers or channel surfers than as true authors of the architecture.

Moreover, as the architectural character of these examples is primarily
ily characterized by the discrimination between the supporting framework and the elements responsible for producing effects, the manipulation of the latter does not affect the overall character of the architecture (Figure 6).

In contrast to the plug-in elements envisioned by Archigram and others whose degree of engagement with the occupant was relatively one-dimensional (on/off, open/closed, etc.), the DRAPE’s operable membrane can be tuned more finely, allowing for a greater degree of creative freedom on the part of the occupant. Furthermore, as it is a single architectural element that acts as a fluid boundary between the activities, people, and spaces within the DRAPE, its manipulation allows the occupant to continuously redefine these programmatic, social, and spatial relationships. For example, activities can be segregated or conflated through the manipulation of the folds of the membrane, the membrane can impart spatial and programmatic hierarchy or status through its ability to act as a frame, and the nature of the boundary condition between adjacent spaces or activities can be tuned in order to define the character and degree of relationship between them (Figures 7-8). As such, the operable membrane acts as a kind of architectural wiki, insofar as it allows the resident artist to edit the “content” of the DRAPE through the continual redefinition of the architectural conditions and relationships within its interior.

The open content model also differs fundamentally from current examples of “digital” architecture whose value, if any, lies in their formal and technical novelty—and is therefore subject to being quickly surpassed and made obsolete. Rather, it is transparent to the issues of form and technology insofar as it is an idea that can be manifested in many forms, both new and old, and through the agency of many different types of technology, both high and low. This decoupling of architectural value from formal
and technological novelty is advantageous to the discipline since it allows work to be produced that can assert its value across a wide range of formalisms (and moreover can sustain that value over a long duration even in the face of a loss of interest in a particular form) and can do so through the use of familiar and proven technologies that are congruent with the relatively low tech materials and techniques which have always constituted and continue to constitute the majority of the discipline’s built works. In the case of the DRAPE, for example, it is the empowerment of the individual to expressively manipulate form and space, rather than the technology by which this is achieved that makes this a model for a contemporary and culturally relevant architecture.

Contextual issues
Since the significance of the DRAPE lies in the interior membrane’s ability to serve as a reconfigurable medium of architectural expression, its exterior form is free to respond to issues related to the dynamics of the site and the character of the surrounding context without the need to ingratiate itself through formal exuberance or novelty. The material palette of the DRAPE relates it to the adjacent Sheldon Art Gallery (Figure 13), and establishes a definite lineage between these two structures. But whereas the Sheldon employs travertine marble to establish a sense of grandeur and monumentality—rendering it essentially a temple of art and monumentality— the DRAPE wears its travertine as a thin veneer of material. This is done for two primary reasons. In the first case, the treatment of the exterior membrane’s ability to serve as a reconfigurable medium of architectural expression, its exterior form is free to respond to issues related to the dynamics of the site and the character of the surrounding context without the need to ingratiate itself through formal exuberance or novelty. In the case of the DRAPE, for example, it is the empowerment of the individual to expressively manipulate form and space, rather than the technology by which this is achieved that makes this a model for a contemporary and culturally relevant architecture.

The form of the building, meanwhile, deviates from the rigid geometry and symmetrical composition of its predecessor. Instead it uses an irregular geometry to orient to the southeast, cantilevering dramatically over a sunken portion of the outdoor sculpture garden (Figures 15, 17). As a consequence, the DRAPE both energizes the sculpture garden and frames views of the Sheldon from the pedestrian approaches to the south and west. Its cantilevering eastern facade also enables the DRAPE to act as a highly visible “sign” for the presence of the Sheldon, which currently presents only its mute flank to the high volume of pedestrian and vehicular traffic approaching it along the adjacent streets. In addition, it creates a more intimate outdoor green space from the existing open area to the west of the Sheldon by providing visual closure at its southeast corner, which in its current state is overly exposed to the adjacent downtown area.

Conclusion
Contemporary “digital architecture,” while exploiting new tools and techniques to produce new forms for public consideration and consumption, has failed to recognize and capitalize on the fact that digital technologies have transformed contemporary individuals from mere consumers or audience members into creative authors in their own right, and that this has changed the arena of values within which architecture operates. In this context, the novel but otherwise immutable and uniformly authored form produced holds little value for contemporary culture, apart from the brief value of its novelty. In contrast, the open content model, as demonstrated by the example of the DRAPE Artist Residence and Gallery, offers a strategy that not only allows architecture to once again be culturally relevant, but that also enables it to preserve this relevance in the face of the rapid succession of aesthetic trends and across the long lifespan of its built works by decoupling architectural value from novel form. It both accommodates contemporary society’s increasing desire for content creation and control and gives architectural expression to this desire, celebrating its defining role within culture and thereby producing an architecture that is culturally engaging and meaningful. And it demonstrates the proper way for the discipline to address the digital paradigm—not through an obsession with new tools for digital fabrication and representation or through fetishized imagery and forms enabled by those tools—but rather through a fundamental rethinking of architecture and the character of its authorship based on the changes that digital technologies have imparted to society and culture.
1. Open content differs from open source in that open source indicates software wherein the scripting language is made available for editing and refinement by its users, whereas open content refers to software wherein only the content is made available for editing and refinement by its users. Although the first is more open and democratic, it is problematic in terms of its ability to serve as a useful model for architecture since the very characteristics that define the work in question as architecture would not necessarily be preserved over time. Open content creations, meanwhile, sacrifice a degree of openness in exchange for the ability to preserve their essential character. The open content model is therefore a preferable one for architecture, since it implies an object whose nature as a work of architecture is preserved over the course of its manipulation by others.

2. Wiki is the Hawai’ian word meaning “fast,” and has subsequently come to stand for a collection of open content web pages that can be quickly and easily edited by its users. It is perhaps somewhat ironic that this new technology and its attribute of speed would be referred to in a language that so uniquely preserves its Neolithic genesis and belongs to a culture so renowned for its unhurried pace of life. As applied to architecture, however, this irony is a useful reminder of the contrast between architecture’s typically slow and static character and the cultural context within which it currently exists, which is that of a fast-paced, information age society that places a high value on speed and interactivity. Wiki-tecture, then, is meant to evoke the idea of an architecture that is neither slow nor static—one that can be easily manipulated by its users to produce authored architectural experience.

3. A 2005 study showed that one half of all teens were internet content creators. This study further asserted that “teens and adults alike have embraced the ability to gather, chop, blend, and re-blend content to create new expressive materials,” and that “younger Americans have grown up in a world of media forms that allow them to participate in the production as well as consumption of content.” See Lenhart, Amanda and Mary Madden, “Teen Content Creators and Consumers,” Pew Internet & American Life Project (November 2, 2005).