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Chicana/o Artivism: Judy Baca's Digital Work with Youth of Color

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Introduction

Arnoldo's Brother (see Figure 1) watches us watching him from out of one of the most powerful digital media labs in the country, the César Chávez Digital Mural Lab, located in the Social and Public Art Resource Center (SPARC), a production facility devoted to creating large-scale digitally generated murals, educational DVDs, animations, community archives, and digital art. *Arnoldo's Brother*, a digital mural created by Chicana artist Judy Baca and UCLA students, is an avatar rising out of these technologies, a modern-day Chicano cyborg. Arnoldo is a fourteen-year-old boy, a figure created through the minds and souls of the young people who have come to the SPARC teaching facility, led by Baca, to testify and witness on behalf of their communities. Their offering to SPARC is a photo of one of these artists' younger brother, which they then Photoshopped into an artwork that tells one story of Chicana/o consciousness at the turn of the millennium. *Arnoldo's Brother* is here to speak actively back to history. His lips are closed. But warrior women noisily appear to the side of his forehead, their mouths open in revolutionary appeal. The boy's eyes are reflective. His overly large sunglasses mirror the city surroundings as well as our own bodies, the spectators as witnesses. In this image, street graffiti and matrix-like iconographies converge; youth and old age are syncretized; past, present, and future unite to suggest new social orders. The *shaded* vision of Arnoldo's brother vision is transformative.

Digital productions like this have emerged from the minds, souls, and digital art of the great public artist Judy Baca and the youth of color who have collaborated with her over the past ten years. Their workspace is SPARC, founded by Baca in 1996 and dedicated to the creation and support of community and public art in Southern California. But the digital art they produce is not only located in SPARC—it can be found in virtual installations globally, as well as on the walls of Los Angeles *barrio* housing projects and in the hybrid spaces of the Internet. We call their activity "digital artivism," a word that is, itself, a convergence between "activism" and digital "artistic" production. The digital artivism we find expressed through SPARC, we argue, is symptomatic of a Chicana/o twenty-first-century digital arts movement. Judy Baca as teacher, mentor, organizer, and as internationally renowned public artist, is at its heart. Her artivist sensibility, however, recognizes, as technoculture scholars Constance Penley and Andrew Ross do, that "cultural technologies are far from neutral, and that they are the result of social processes and power relations," while at the same time acknowledging, as Penley and Ross also insist, that "the kinds of liberatory fantasies that

Figure 1
Judy Baca and UCLA students, *Arnoldo's Brother* (1996), digital mural. c SPARC www.sparcmurals.org.

surround new technologies are a powerful and persuasive means of social agency, and that their source to some extent lies in real popular needs and desires."[1]

Thus the digital artivist movement advances the expression of a mode of liberatory consciousness that Chicana feminist philosopher Gloria Anzaldúa calls *la conciencia de la mestiza*, that is, the consciousness of the mixed-race woman. Like Alondra Nelson, who finds parallels between W.E.B. DuBois's concept of double consciousness and contemporary black digital activist sensibilities,[2] we also understand digital artivism as a manifestation of Anzaldúa's *mestiza* consciousness, which seeks to break down "the subject-object duality that keeps [the *mestiza*] prisoner and to show in the flesh and through the images in her work how duality is transcended."[3] Moreover, this consciousness is also not unlike what digital media scholar Anna Everett calls cyberwomanism, a sensibility in some women of color activists who articulate "new subjectivities and new knowledges for feminism in terms of race at that interface."[4] This chapter calls attention to this digital artivism that is enacted by Baca and the young people who are vested in the convergences between creative expression, social activism, and self-empowerment. In this text, we also present the contributions of SPARC to the development of youth populations, the contributions of youth to the development of SPARC, and their combined contributions to the global community art movements.

Chicana/o Artivism and *La Conciencia de la Mestiza*

Xican@ murals and digital murals are forms of tactical media entrenched in an historical and visionary politics of *barrio* consciousness that work in conjunction with other forms of oppositional politics.[5]
—John Jota Leaños, Chicano digital artivist and scholar, Arizona State University

The term *artivism* is a hybrid neologism that signifies work created by individuals who see an organic relationship between art and activism. As artivists, Baca and the young people we

examine here are committed to transforming themselves and the world. The terms *artivism* and *la conciencia de la mestiza* reflect the same human–technology convergences that allow for creative work through digital media. Because digital media are capable of permitting multidimensional meanings, they have become favored artistic media for Baca and her crew at SPARC. Multidimensional meaning systems, as Anzaldúa argues, create the foundation of Chicana/o social activism. Like our definition of artivism, *la conciencia de la mestiza*, she contends, must provide access to a myriad of cultures, languages, and understandings, thus requiring the ability to negotiate multiple worldviews. Chicana/o artivism, like *la conciencia de la mestiza*, expresses a consciousness aware of conflicting and meshing identities and uses these to create new angles of vision to challenge oppressive modes of thinking. Ultimately, digital artivism is a form of political activism that seeks egalitarian alliances and connections across difference. It requires a mode of consciousness that replicates the digital potentialities and egalitarianism of cyberspace.

Digital artivism, however, does not blithely ignore the inequalities and oppressions that are also replicated within virtually all forms of technoculture, as Michelle Lee White reminds us: "Electronic technology, especially digital, seems to have pierced the protective bubble of fixed racial and ethnic identity by making it easy for us to create physically detached screen personas that transcend social realities. Yet in spite of the current cultural climate, which we like to believe has released us from the constraints of identity, the mechanisms of exclusion still persist."[6] Conscious of digital media's liberatory potential as well as its persisting exclusions, Judy Baca's artivism provides real-world and on-the-ground strategies for youth of color to enact empowerment through digital technology. "In practice . . . the democratic promises of the digital revolution remain as unfulfilled as the rest of our civil rights dreams," explains *New York Magazine* staff writer Logan Hill, "but there is hope."[7] It is this space of hope that Baca mines to its fullest potential.

Judy Baca's Youth Works and Digital Media

> I've learned as much as I've taught from the youth I've had the good fortune to know by working alongside of them. They've taught me among other things how to laugh at myself, how to put play into hard work and how not be afraid not to believe in something. I am extremely grateful. —Judy Baca[8]

This chapter explores Chicana/o artivism through the analysis of SPARC and Baca's digital mural projects in Los Angeles. Baca has made a name for herself as an urban muralist who works closely with youth—many of whom are considered to be at risk. Their project over the past thirty years has been to create monumental public works of art, which have transformed the LA cityscape. These murals depict the histories of disenfranchised and aggrieved communities in the LA area and elsewhere. In part, Baca's intent has been to empower youth of color by having them assist her in the reconstruction of these histories. In this process, however, Baca also recognized that Chicana/o and Latina/o youth were insisting upon the production of artivist aesthetics, a recognition that contributed to Baca's own empowerment as a Chicana artist doing public art. The presence of young women and Baca herself in these public spaces also challenges the male domination of nearly every form of public art in Los Angeles, whether in practices of muralism or graffiti. By putting both boys and girls to work together in these public spaces, Baca challenges prescribed gender roles that too often relegate women to the private, domestic sphere.

Baca's work with youth took on renewed meaning in 1996 when she founded the digital mural lab within SPARC's premises. Officially called the UCLA/SPARC César Chávez Digital

Mural Lab, this facility introduced digital technology to the community mural movement as a new tool for the creation of public art. One mandate of this lab was to support and work "with youth, children and their families to produce public art expressing issues they identify through collaborative processes, which are then exhibited as public monuments, banners, murals, Web sites, prints, performances, video and DVDs."[9] These artistically rendered issues include immigration concerns, control over urban spaces, alliances between different ethnic groups, gender and sexuality matters, etc. This use of digital imaging technology has transformed both the aesthetics and praxis of mural-making. The Digital Mural Lab is equipped with high-speed computers, printers, and scanners and possesses its own server for the storage of images, which can be accessed remotely with a password. The murals are generally created with the latest version of Photoshop, which allows Baca and the young people who work with her to visually "scratch," synergistically combining preexisting imagery and original artwork seamlessly together in one composition.

The participation of youth is a critical component of this lab. Baca is well aware of the need for youth of color to overcome the discursive exclusions of the digital divide paradigm, a discourse that casts people of color "as casualties in the information revolution—a new permanent underclass in the information economy," as Anna Everett explains.[10] At the same time, Baca also recognizes how "digital culture" has increasingly been defined as the province of the "young." Participation in this lab provides Baca and her coterie of young people profound computer skills: Baca learns from and extends her own media-making abilities through the shared knowledge and expertise young people bring of other technologies, digital or otherwise, including ghetto blasters, turntables, lowriders, and—more recently—cell phones, MP3 players, iPods, and streaming digital video productions on YouTube.com and MySpace.com. Other Chicana/o artists have also recognized the recent proficiency of youth of color with technology, as was the case of performance artist Guillermo Gómez-Peña, who observed that his "hip generation-Mex nephews and my seven-year-old bicultural son, [were] completely immersed in and defined by personal computers, video games and virtual reality."[11] The combined use of digital media pushes SPARC, Baca, and all her apprentices to new levels of imaginative production. As such, Baca's working relationship with these young people can be regarded as a collaboration between intellectual and artistic equals, at the same time as it can be defined as a mentor–mentee type of association.

This chapter also focuses on Baca's role as a social enabler whose organization facilitates the development of a Chicana/o artivist consciousness. Baca's community work provides a powerful example of the ways in which youth creativity can be channeled, augmented, and empowered through the use of digital technology. The artist's innovative, resourceful, and proactive strategies to organize and forge community ties and coalitions reflect larger traditions of Chicana feminist activist praxis. Baca's work is treated here as a case study reflecting larger tendencies among those Chicana/o artivists who engage in similar forms of oppositional aesthetics. As such, digital technology is understood here as the means by which artivists like Baca deploy feminist understandings in the practice of public art. With her feminist interventions into the digital realm, Baca has disrupted what digital media scholar Jennifer Brayton calls "the patriarchal structuring of technology as a masculine space alienating to women."[12] Moreover, we also understand digital technology to function as a metaphorical and theoretical language that speaks to the nature of artivist praxis. The dynamic and fluid element in Chicana feminist consciousness, we argue, is not unlike the flickering and rhyzomatic forces that energize digital systems. This energy depends on the

simultaneous establishment of networks, and links that work dependently, feeding on each other's input.

Who Are Digital Youth?

We regard youth—as a category of analysis and intellectual query—to be an unstable signifier that points to decisively fluid social and cultural identities. Who falls under the category of youth? Much of the scholarship on youth cultures focuses on social groups whose members range in age from eleven to twelve years (prepubescent youth) to the early twenties, as represented by cultural critics Joe Austin and Michael Nevin Willard in the book *Generations of Youth* (1998), and Andy Bennett and Keith Kahn-Harris's *After Subculture: Critical Studies in Contemporary Youth Culture* (2004), among others. But youth has also emerged as a category defined by a particular consciousness characterized, in part, by its rejection of established mores imposed by older generations and by a persistent need or desire for innovation and renewal. For example, we generally regard Chicana/o gang and graffiti cultures as youth-identified, yet many of its most influential members and practitioners are older individuals or *veteranos* who often take on the role of mentors or even parent figures to the younger folks. Similarly, computer gaming culture, while generally defined as youth-oriented, is also largely composed of adult players.

Even the Web site MySpace.com, a cyber portal associated with youth socialization and creative expression, has been found to be increasingly utilized by an older-age demographic; nearly 50 percent of its users are now thirty-five years or older.[13] We have found, therefore, that youth-identified cultural production is not necessarily a terrain restricted to adolescents and young adults. Moreover, although we recognize the importance of empowering young people through research and admit that—with the exception of Baca herself—most of the cultural producers discussed in this study fall within the chronological parameters of youth, we question approaches to youth studies that limit their scopes to strictly age-specified parameters, thus not recognizing the more qualitative factors that also define life experience and its construction across and between generations.

While we focus in this project on Baca's work with youth, we also argue that she, herself, engages in youth cultural production even though she is not a teenager or young adult. When speaking of her work with youth, Baca comments that she has "this affinity with teenagers, looking in a certain way, and I was always kind of a teenager myself."[14] Our point here, however, is different; it is that digital technology can foster *transgenerational* thinking, thus undermining clear distinctions between "youth" and "parent" cultures. As such, digital technology can effectively "age" youth while simultaneously "youthifying" older generations, thus allowing for more meaningful dialogues across different age groups.

Nevertheless, we situate our study within the larger field of youth studies, which successfully demonstrates that youth cultures are indeed critical sites of scholarly and intellectual inquiry. For example, youth studies have actively sought to overturn—or at least complicate—the dichotomous discourse that has emerged around the lives and activities of young people. These studies analyze the pessimistic vision of youth often espoused by the public media and other outlets that describe young people as inherently dangerous and irresponsible, and thus in constant need of social and parental control. Quite to the point, Joe Austin and Michael Nevin Willard have convincingly argued that "the practices of young people [have] become occasions for moral panic."[15] This alarmist discourse has most vehemently turned against youth of color who are usually branded as "animalistic, alien Others,"

as Austin and Nevin Willard tell us. These same pundits, however, swing to the other extreme to speak of youth as the hope for the future, a beacon of light in the dark corridors of the postmodern condition. These scholars thus believe that adults can control and shape the future of their own worlds by controlling and manipulating young people's lives. In both of these contradictory yet mutually dependent discourses, young people are stripped of their individual agencies, their identities solely defined by the fears, anxieties, and desires of adults. This is why, we would argue, dominant culture through its policing and criminalization of youth of color, can more effectively relegate minority communities—both children and adults—to the social margins.

The advent of digital technology and its overwhelming public adoption since the late 1980s has intensified this rhetoric of fear and hope directed at youth. Cyberspace now represents yet another public arena where children can be damaged or corrupted, and "thrown off" their course toward responsible and productive adulthood. Media studies scholar Julian Sefton-Green observed and critiqued similar anxieties in the wake of the digital revolution:

> [Young people's access to digital technology] has led to as much anxiety as it has optimism. Are children going to have unrestricted access to pornography or be abused online? Can they participate in adult conversations and have equal access to information compared with their "adult peers"?[16]

Digital technology provides unprecedented means for young people to represent themselves outside of adult control; the fear here is that they are thus capable of further disrupting the "natural" evolution of social development. Ultimately, what seems most distressful to these analysts of youth culture is the idea that digital technology brings about a general destabilization of the categories of "youth" and "adult" themselves, categories that, in the past, maintained critical social hierarchies. In our analysis, we explore how Baca and her young apprentices critically and strategically undermine such categories to enact various forms of artivist aesthetics.

U.S. Latinas/os and Digital Technology

The digital work that Baca produces in collaboration with youth of color is directly and indirectly addressing a great social need among the Chicana/o and Latina/o community. Media study scholars and social scientists investigating issues of technology access and adoption among U.S. Latinas/os have observed that the levels of technology use among the Latina/o population fall well below the national average, marking one of the lowest rates among ethnic minorities in the United States. Josh Kun also reminds us that "the 'freedom' and paradigm shift discourse often tagged to digital media needs to be tempered by the reality of inequity. As globalization gathers steam as an economic and social force, so does the gap between those who participate in globalization and those who remain on the sidelines watching."[17] In 2002, the Tomás Rivera Institute, under the auspices of IBM, produced a report entitled *Latinos and Information Technology: The Promise and the Challenge*. Prepared by social scientists Louis G. Tornatzky, Elsa E. Macias, and Sara Jones, the report provided critical data on the status of the Latina/o population with regards to information technology.

According to their findings, only 40 percent of Latina/o households owned personal computers in 2001, 16 percent below the national average. Moreover, the report stressed the roles that institutions played in maintaining inequities with regards to information technology. Tornatzky, Macias, and Jones put particular emphasis on the educational system, observing that public schools with higher minority student enrollments were either ill-equipped or simply unequipped with computers and Internet access. Teachers in these schools also often

lacked the proper training to teach students computer skills, even at the most basic level. The report, however, also provided recommendations for institutions—both private and public—to improve the situation, arguing that the concern over access "is a quality-of-use issue, rather than counting numbers of computers per capita."[18] Among these recommendations, Tornatzky et al. underscored the importance of placing role models in positions of mentorship to young people. These writers emphasized the positive impact for Latina/o children when they are surrounded by technology-savvy Latina/o adults, whether these individuals are operating in schools or in other settings. Together with mentorship, the authors of this report also argued that community-based organizations are in the position to make a significant contribution to technology adoption among Latina/os:

> Community-based organizations [CBOs] tend to be very responsive to the needs of the community they serve, and they often support the more marginalized communities. Moreover, Latinos have demonstrated a willingness to turn to CBOs for technology skills and usage. As such, partnerships that include CBOs are likely to have a greater impact on Latinos and their families.[19]

By the mid-1990s when she founded SPARC's Digital Mural Lab, Baca had already fulfilled the recommendations that the Tomás Rivera Institute would propose some six years later. Her visibility and effectiveness as a mentor rested on the close relationship she cultivated with communities of color since the early 1970s, coupled with her national and international recognition as an artist. In other words, she had been respected and legitimized within two social spheres that were rarely in productive dialogue within one another: the mainstream art scene and the activist of color community. Moreover, SPARC—as a community-based organization—had become a focal point wherein minority youth from the Los Angeles area gained useful expertise in digital media, precisely the kind that would later be endorsed by the Tomás Rivera Institute. But Baca's work with SPARC, Chicana/o and Latina/o youth and digital media, went well beyond the Institute's assessments, data, and recommendations.

While the report called for initiatives that would make digital technology more "culturally relevant" to Latinas/os, it failed to engage in more qualitative types of cultural analyses. Instead, the report offered more quantitative assessments about technology use and adoption among Latinas/os. Perhaps Latina/os were not using digital technology in large numbers compared to other groups in the United States, but many activists were using it in innovative and subversive ways. From the onset of her work with digital media and youth, Baca always capitalized on this emergent use of digital technology among Chicana/o and Latina/o actvists, including youth, whose cultural productions were facilitated by the rise of these new technologies starting in the 1990s. Thus, Baca enhanced the quality of her work with youth and digital media by using and engaging this preexisting cultural capital already at work within Chicana/o and Latina/o communities. For example, by 1999, the influential media scholar Ray Santisteban observed that for many Chicana/o and Latina/o media makers, "no new medium offer[ed] as much potential . . . as the rapidly developing world of the Internet,"[20] further arguing that "media activists and cultural critics are increasingly using cyberspace as a way to present information, screen video and audio clips, and advertise alternative videos through Internet-based interactive Web sites."[21]

The Beginnings of Baca's Chicana/o Artivist Consciousness: Early Work with Youth

Pre-dating her adoption of digital technology by several decades, Judy Baca's work with youth goes back to 1970 when she began working in Boyle Heights, East Los Angeles, for the city's Department of Recreation and Parks. It was at this time that Baca came into direct

contact with local youth in the area, many of whom were members of rival gangs. While she regarded these young men as troubled youth in need of guidance, she also took notice of the innovative forms of cultural production they practiced, namely, graffiti writing. Gang graffiti commanded urban space unlike any other form of expression by youth of color. Muralism thus offered these young people an opportunity to use their skills as taggers by rechanneling their creativity toward peaceful and nonviolent ends. Baca explains: "Redirecting gang members' inclinations toward public expression via my own artistic training as a painter, we began painting murals as a way to create constructive cultural markers."[22]

Baca's origins as a muralist, public artist, and community activist were all deeply connected to youth cultures in the Los Angeles *barrios*. The friendships and partnerships she forged with rival gang members across neighborhood lines were defined by earned mutual respect and creative exchanges; she taught them various painting techniques and they, in turn, shared with her tattoo and graffiti designs.[23] In addition, the mostly male youths who worked with her at this time in the 1970s also served as lookouts for Baca's mural crew. While the crew was up on the scaffolding working on a mural, the lookouts protected the muralists. The lookout's job was to whistle in warning when either rival gang or police officers (both of whom routinely harassed the artist and her young assistants) were approaching.

During this early phase in her artistic development, Baca had not yet adopted digital media, but her community work with youth was already exhibiting elements of digital artivism, which permits functioning both within and beyond the demands of dominant ideology. The artist's work at this time required her to negotiate with the city authorities in Los Angeles while addressing the needs of youth of color in Los Angeles' east side. Baca's capacity to move across the different spheres of a highly segregated and divided city reflected a consciousness becoming increasingly mobile, a quality shared with other artivists. In this sense, Chicana/o digital artivism functions as a differential mode of consciousness; a differential consciousness functions like the clutch of a car, the mechanism of which permits the driver to select, engage, and disengage gears in a system for the transmission of power. Artivists like Baca understand that systems of power, no matter how pervasive, possess interstitial spaces where agency for youth of color can be claimed and deployed. Thus Chicana/o artivism insists upon shifting locations, which means that the site of the artivist's differential politics will change depending on the circumstances that are being confronted. In this sense, Chicana/o artivism is part and parcel of what critics such as Donna Haraway and Gloria Anzaldúa have called a "cyborg life" and *la conciencia de la mestiza*, respectively.[24] While Haraway insists that individuals possessing a cyborg consciousness are "not afraid of permanently partial identities and contradictory standpoints,"[25] Chela Sandoval maintains that "peoples of the Americas have already developed the cyborg skills required for survival under techno-human conditions as a requisite for survival under domination over the last three hundred years."[26] Likewise, Anzaldúa's *conciencia de la mestiza* "constantly has to shift out of habitual formations. . . . The new *mestiza* copes by developing a tolerance for contradictions, a tolerance for ambiguity."[27]

Baca found her work with youth transformative. Yet she soon realized that the public locales of their work were deeply gendered spaces. "I had a hard time getting girls on the projects," Baca lamented, "at that time, boys were the only ones parents would allow"[28] in the program. Baca's community artivism developed in conjunction with the mural renaissance that took place in many *barrios* throughout the U.S. Southwest, an initiative largely fueled by the budding Chicano Movement of the early 1970s. What Baca found was that most of the mural projects in Los Angeles' east side were organized by men, many of whom were

hostile to feminist ideas and to the presence of women in these public spaces.[29] As a result, Baca began to develop alliances and artistic connections with feminist artists and cultural producers, many of whom were working on the opposite side of Los Angeles, namely, the west side:

> I had this problem at this point in which I was sort of divided because I had this life in the east side, which began after three o'clock, and then I had a life in Venice [in the west side], which was associated with other feminists. . . . But I always felt like I was a visitor [among the feminists] because there were not that many Latin or Third World women at all. [But] in my other world—in the eastside and in the area of Latin culture and Chicano culture—I was really an oddity. I wasn't the girlfriend of one of the men; I was an artist in my own right. I was neither treated seriously by the men nor considered a peer.[30]

The uneasy relationship that the artist established with the predominantly white feminist movement in the west side and the male-centered Chicano nationalism of the east side echoed broader concerns raised by Chicana feminist scholars. While Anna Nieto Gómez denounced the sexism of the Chicano Movement, Patricia Zavella underscored Chicanas' problematic relationship to white feminism.[31] Thus Baca's artivist and *mestiza* consciousness became a composite of two overarching schools of thought that rarely, if ever, conversed with one another at the time—namely, the Chicano and feminist movements. One of the results of Baca's new *mestiza* and artivist subjectivity was her resolve to recruit young women actively into her future public art projects, for she understood that gender, as much as race and class, systematically marginalized youth of color.

The Great Wall of Los Angeles (1976–1983)

Baca's next project implemented her new thinking about how to bring together different ethnicities, gang clans, and—most important—genders. She developed a unique pedagogy, which focused on helping youth work together in egalitarian modes. She raised the funds to employ more than four hundred economically disadvantaged and at-risk youth not only from different neighborhoods but also from various ethnic and cultural backgrounds, including women and girls. *The Great Wall of Los Angeles* was perhaps the most ambitious mural project undertaken by a Chicana/o artist to date. *The Great Wall* narrated an oppositional history of Los Angeles from the perspective of ethnic, social, and gender minorities, accomplished through a rigorous process of research and discussion with historians, community members, and youth. This visual history put people of color at the center of the city's development and growth. The mural, half a mile long, was painted on one of the cement troughs that comprise the San Fernando Valley flood-control system. "The work became a monument to interracial harmony," Baca later explained, "as methods were developed to work across the differences of race and class."[32] Many of the young women who worked on the project recounted how the experience profoundly transformed their lives, and radically changed their political and social consciousness.

The Executive Director of SPARC, Debra Padilla, explained to us that one of the most touching and moving examples of the young women working on *The Great Wall* was that of Ernestine Jiménez, who worked in the project from 1978 to 1984: "Ernestine came to *The Wall* when she was fourteen years old, pregnant and on PCP [phencyclidine]. Nobody believed in her, but Judy did. She came from a family of ten brothers and six sisters. At the end of it all, she stayed on *The Wall* for six years. She became a crew leader and supervisor."[33] Ernestine's own testimonial, which Baca and her staff recently posted in the form of streaming video

on the SPARC Web site, reflects the various levels of social and political consciousness that awakened in the young girl's mind. Because of its complexity, it is worth quoting Ernestine's testimonial at length here:

> The way I grew up, you fight through life. . . . It was a fight in my house all the time, and that's the way I believed you were supposed to have grown up, to fight through life. You don't like nobody but your own race and even sometimes don't like your own race. . . . There was a lot of tension [among the young people working on *The Wall*]; I think everyone wanted to fight everybody. . . . But after time, you just got to know that person as an individual instead of knowing them as you're taught to. Everybody became very good friends. . . . I wouldn't have gone back to high school because I wouldn't have had a role model to push me to go there. Education was Judy's number one thing. "As long as you stay in school, you can come back and paint the mural." Even though I got in trouble in school and fought and everything, that was my number one goal; I wanted to come back, I had to come back. What really freaked me out though was when we painted the mural of the Holocaust and I met the people that had the tattoos on them; that kind of blew my mind, it actually made me cry because I knew there was another world that was harder than mine. . . . Even when I am down and out, I still walk by here and I thank God that I did accomplish something in life and it makes me feel good. I think if it wasn't for this mural, for me to have my name on it and to have accomplished something, I don't know where I'd be.[34]

For Ernestine, *The Wall* became a site of healing where she could establish counterhegemonic alliances with other young people of color with whom she might have a hostile or even violent relationship otherwise. *The Wall* provided for her an alternative learning experience, one that was not given to her in the public school system but that yet compelled her to stay in school nonetheless. Many of the counterhistories narrated in *The Wall* resonated with Ernestine's own history of struggle and hardship, such as that of the Holocaust victims she met as she researched and painted the section on Jewish Americans in the mural. But what seemed most empowering about the experience, as evidenced in her testimonial, was that she directly participated in the process of history making and became one of the critical architects of a public and monumental work of art. Like Baca herself, Ernestine, as a young Chicana, also began to develop an artivist consciousness through her work on *The Great Wall of Los Angeles*. As her consciousness became increasingly flexible, she saw how her own life was intertwined with that of other disenfranchised communities in the city of Los Angeles.

The model for community interaction and intervention that Baca developed in the 1970s would become the foundation for a learning curriculum that the artist would employ in subsequent projects. This curriculum included an active learning process whereby youth are charged with responsibilities often given to teachers, adults, or other authority figures—such as planning and executing a mural. Through this process, the artist and the young people themselves would arrive at the understanding that their own life stories were not unlike those of those individuals featured in the murals. This understanding would eventually lead Baca to transform these personal narratives into the actual subject matter of the future murals she would create in collaboration with youth, many of which were executed through the use of digital media.

The Founding of SPARC and the UCLA/SPARC César Chávez Digital Mural Lab

One of the ways Baca enabled the empowerment of youth in sustainable ways was through the founding of SPARC in 1976. Through this nonprofit organization, Baca and cofounders

Christina Schlessinger and Donna Deitch were able to provide an institutional framework that would support the artist's mural work as well as that of other muralists working in the Los Angeles area. After many mural projects throughout the city and other parts of the world, Judy Baca made a critical decision. Her decision would deeply affect the course of mural history in California, as well as the way she collaborated with young people. She moved forward to create a digital mural lab in SPARC.

In 1994 Baca became a founding faculty member at the California State University, Monterey Bay, an institution created under the Bill Clinton presidential administration, which would become a model for the twenty-first-century university, with an emphasis on interdisciplinary teaching and information technology. While there, Baca was recruited by UCLA to become part of the César E. Chávez Center for Interdisciplinary Instruction. This campus unit was born out of a hunger strike enacted by students on campus to pressure the university administration to create a Chicana/o studies department. Baca accepted the invitation, and two years later founded the UCLA/SPARC César Chávez Digital Mural Lab, where she has been teaching her class "Beyond the Mexican Mural" and carrying out various mural projects ever since. In addition to the instructional purposes of the lab, it also functions as "a research and a production facility," Debra Padilla explained to us.[35] SPARC's digital mural lab supports the emergence of what anthropologist of antiglobalization movements Jeffrey Juris called "informational utopics," which involve "experimentation with new technologies and the projection of utopian ideals regarding open participation and horizontal collaboration into emerging forms of networked space."[36]

Baca's choice to make this SPARC facility into a *digital* lab came out of a long process of reflection regarding the emergence of this new technology in the arts and elsewhere. On the one hand, Baca was concerned with the ways in which people could use this technology to distort, fragment, manipulate, and disseminate her imagery and that of other artists without consent. She was also worried that the sphere of the digital was being claimed largely by a predominantly white male population who seemed to revel in these newfound powers. But rather than reject and disavow the digital, Baca embraced it, taking cues from hip-hop musicians who were using digital technology to create compositions through the process of "sampling" the work of others, effectively "eliminating the musician," she explains.[37] With the advent of digital media technologies, Baca witnessed a radical shift in the ways in which visual imagery could be created, disseminated, and consumed. She thus realized, as most Chicana/o artivists did, that she wanted and needed to adapt to this new reality. The artivist praxis that fostered her work with youth and that fueled her capability to bridge social, cultural, and political divides since the early 1970s, served her well in making this shift. In this process, however, Baca made an important discovery: digital technology could enhance methods, ideas, and strategies she had been using throughout her career:

> I'm a technician kind of character. I draw hundreds and hundreds of sketches, look at things from thousands of different perspectives to make sure that I'm preparing a site well [for a mural or public monument]. With the computer I am able to see the work *in situ* and see it from a variety of perspectives and directions thus eliminating the need for hundreds of sketches. I could put things *in situ* without really being *in situ*. . . . I could also eliminate hours and hours of work doing compositional grids [for murals].[38]

This technology also provided a way for her to create longer-lasting murals by doing digital image-transfers onto tile, thus allowing her to produce murals more resistant to the elements. Rather than being marginalized by this new digital technology—as usual "digital

divide" discourses purport about people of color—Baca became a determined practitioner and producer of digital cultural work. In this fashion, she purposely adopted a tool and language that for decades had been the restricted property of institutional power brokers. By using tools that have been traditionally denied to marginalized communities, Baca turned the tables on the world order ushered in by globalization. She used the strategies of the oppressor, so to speak, to empower the oppressed. A similar tactic had been used by indigenous Mexican groups like the Zapatistas in Chiapas, whose first communiqués and political manifestoes were transmitted via the Internet much before their activities were known to the mainstream press. Likewise, antiglobalization actvists who, according to Jeffrey Juris, enact various forms of "hacktivism" and "electronic civil disobedience," were also inspired by "the pioneering use of the Internet by the Zapatistas."[39] Baca tapped into a relatively recent—yet powerful—tradition of radical activists utilizing technology to further their political causes.

Digital technology also presented an opportunity for the artist to continue fortifying her alliances and collaborations with youth, whether these were at-risk adolescents or college-age students. As cyber studies scholars—such as Julian Sefton-Green, David Buckingham, and Joseph Tobin, to name a few—maintain, digital media have been increasingly associated with youth cultures, so for Baca—an artist with deep roots in the Civil Rights Movement era—adopting this technology meant renewing her praxis or work as a cultural producer. Most Chicana/o artists from her generation did not make the leap to the digital realm and, as such, their work has not been connected to innovation in the same way as have Baca's practices. Like the African American women activists discussed in the work by Anna Everett, Baca too "transformed low-tech, sixties-era mimeograph activism into high-tech, new-millennial digital news and information flows."[40] On the one hand, her adoption of digital technology was facilitated through her contact with young people who were avid digital users and, at times, even producers. On the other hand, learning the digital language gave her greater access to turn-of-the-millennium youth cultures, many of which are largely defined by their digital engagements.

The UCLA/SPARC Digital Mural Lab teaches students critical computer skills that serve them in navigating through and surviving in our increasingly globalized environment. At the same time, Baca builds upon prior knowledges that young people have of computers and digital technology, allowing their skills to be recognized and added to SPARC's arsenal, while permitting the young people to develop them further. Indeed, digital culture scholars Julian Sefton-Green and David Buckingham observed a similar phenomenon when it came to using digital technology in the classroom: "What tends to be unacknowledged here is the fact that the students will now bring with them into school a whole body of knowledge, skills, competencies and ambitions derived from their out-of-school experience of computers."[41] This new interchange dynamic in media learning and teaching is creating an increasingly interactive environment in Judy Baca's lab, where students and teachers are developing innovative relationships of cultural and intellectual exchange.

Digital Images about Youth by Youth

Baca's adoption of digital technology did not just signify a shift in her working methods, but also prompted a shift in her work's style and iconography. Now the figures populating her murals, produced in collaboration with youth, place these young people at the center of her liberatory visual narratives. Such was the case of the first initiative that came out of the UCLA/SPARC Digital Mural Lab, and of Baca's "Beyond the Mexican Mural"

class, namely, the *Witness to Los Angeles History* (1996) project. *Witness* consisted of a series of digital murals created by the artist and UCLA students, with each piece representing the contributions and histories of the city's different ethnic communities. The series also came out of a collaborative effort between SPARC and the Cornerstone Theater Company in Los Angeles that, at the time, was staging the play *Birth of a Century*, a production precisely about the history of Los Angeles. The digital murals that Baca created with her students then became backdrops for the stage design. The murals were then showcased in various venues throughout Southern California, and functioned independently from the play.

Baca and the young artists who worked with her on this project rejected passive observations of social realities for enactments of more defiant forms of *witnessing*. The digital then became an ideal medium to bring active witnessing into being. Moreover, through the digital, all youthful participants of this project would intertwine the wisdom of their elders with their own ideas in order to create a far-reaching composite of these intergenerational knowledges. The imagery that was chosen by Baca and the students for *Witness to Los Angeles History* came out of what Debra Padilla described as "an intense process of negotiation"[42] between and among generations. The students were charged with selecting figures that would represent each of the city's largest ethnic populations: Native Americans, Asian Americans, African Americans, Latina/os, Filipinos, and Anglo-Americans. The images were then scanned, enhanced, and placed within a digital collage. Both the students and their mentor carried out intensive research to obtain the images, which they called "first-source material." First-sources could be family photographs, personal effects, archival material, etc. A student then submitted an image to represent one of the city's ethnicities to the larger group. The image would need to be approved by everyone else in the group before it became a part of the murals. Many of the resulting digital pieces that composed *Witness to Los Angeles History*, however, featured family photographs belonging to the students themselves and, as such, personal history became collective history for many of them. The figures in these photographs—which would then be featured in the finished mural—became both participants and witness to this counterhistory that Baca and her students were producing. It came as no surprise that three of the six resulting murals featured the figures of young people who stood to represent entire populations.

We now return to *Arnoldo's Brother* (Figure 1), the image used as an opening discussion piece of this chapter. *Arnoldo's Brother* was created to represent Los Angeles' Mexican and Chicana/o community in *Witness to Los Angeles History*. As previously described, the mural depicts a fourteen-year-old Chicano boy wearing sunglasses, standing before a digital backdrop. His glasses reflect images of the U.S.–Mexico border fence and migrant farm workers, suggesting that—in spite of his youth—he is a conscientious witness to his community's history. The background of the mural is largely composed of a graffiti gang roll call. Roll calls, often tagged throughout city spaces, are listings of the various members of any given gang or clique. Interspersed amid the graffiti text, the figures of young Chicana activists emerge in the composition, thus balancing the gender representation in the mural. The pairing of this Chicano boy with the graffiti text, however, was meant to probe the viewer's assumptions and stereotypes about Mexican youth. "People thought that it was a fourteen-year-old gang kid," Debra Padilla told us, "but in reality it's Arnoldo's brother who was a fourteen-year-old honor student."[43] Arnoldo was also the sibling of one of the participating students/artivists who brought his brother's photograph, a first-source material, before the larger group. *Arnoldo's Brother* celebrated Los Angeles' Mexican and Chicana/o heritage by putting particular emphasis on the importance of youth culture and its many dimensions.

Figure 2
Judy Baca and UCLA students, *Toyporina* (1996), digital mural. c SPARC www.sparcmurals.org.

The digital medium with which the mural was created further stressed the youth aesthetic that underpinned the entire series.

Perhaps one of the most famous digital murals from *Witness to Los Angeles History* was the piece representing the Native American population, namely, *Toyporina* (see Figure 2). In the process of carrying out research for this piece, Baca and her students encountered the historical figure of Toyporina, a twenty-four-year-old Tongva woman in the nineteenth century, who led a revolt against the San Gabriel Mission, the site where the city of Los Angeles would eventually be built.[44] The task was then to find a first-source image that could represent or stand for Toyporina. While carrying out research at the University of Southern California for another project, Baca encountered a small nineteenth-century photograph of an anonymous Tongva girl. Baca was deeply captivated by the beauty and poise of the young woman in the picture. She then took the image back to the students in her class, who would then approve her as the visual representation of Toyporina in the mural. When they scanned the photograph and projected it on a large screen, Baca had an unexpected reaction: "The first time she came up on the screen, it just knocked my eyes out. It was so bizarre to see this brown, extremely beautiful woman on the screen, a Tongva woman on the screen in the computer. Why was this so weird?"[45] Baca, in a way, was reacting to the seemingly paradoxical melding of an indigenous *and* digital aesthetic within the same pictorial space. She was also impressed with the amazing flexibility of digital media through which she could greatly enlarge and render monumental that which is small and intimate. Further, she embraced the technology's capacity to proliferate that which has been historically marginalized and erased. Baca contends, "I could actually make [this Tongva woman] giant; I could take her from a postage stamp and into a ten-story building. I could send her over the Internet, put her on the Web, I could disseminate her. Then I really got wild in terms of thinking."[46] Digital technology allowed Baca and her students to transform

and overturn the colonial discourses often attached to indigenous imagery in ways that had not been possible in the past.

The image of the Tongva young woman in *Toyporina* takes center stage in this digital mural's composition. She returns the viewer's gaze with an expression of self-confidence and resolve. Her body, however, bears the scars of colonization and conquest in the form of tattoos depicting Native peoples being hanged and burned at the stake. As such, we are reminded that indigenous women's bodies were often the site of colonization's violent assaults that usually resulted in rape. Toyporina here stands amid a group of Franciscan monks who are staring at her. According to the UCLA students working on the project, the friars represent "the constant scrutiny and dehumanization of the native people."[47] Below them, the architectural structures of the San Gabriel mission emerge as a symbol of the colonial institution that served as a foundation for the city of Los Angeles.

The following year in 1997, Baca and her students at UCLA would embark on the second part of the *Witness to Los Angeles History* project in SPARC. As a result of Baca's reputation as a public artist and the success of the digital mural pieces, the Los Angeles Public Housing Authority approached the artist and her students in the "Beyond the Mexican Mural" class to create a series of public art works in the Estrada Courts Housing Project (East Los Angeles). Estrada Courts occupied a special place in the history of Chicana/o–Latina/o Los Angeles. It is one of the oldest housing projects in Los Angeles, constructed in the early 1940s, in a place where most of its residents are of working-class Mexican and Latin American backgrounds. Estrada is also the site of a major mural initiative that took place in the 1970s, led by community artist Charles "Gato" Felix.[48] Baca and the students then sought to respond to the site's mural history in both laudatory and critical ways. The methodologies the artists used, however, were not unlike other mural projects they had carried out:

> Students conducted oral history interviews with 25 Estrada families, researched US Public Housing policy and archives, and collaborated to define the issues that are represented in the imagery. Photos collected from residents' photo albums were used to depict the complex stories of immigration, teenage pregnancy, poverty and violence that embody the neighborhood's collective consciousness.[49]

The artists in this project immersed themselves in the lives of Estrada residents, using the families' first-source material to tell the counterhistories of this housing project. "The students literally adopted these families," Baca revealed; "they ate Sunday dinners with them. They listened to their stories."[50] In this process, the young artists enacted a decolonizing artivism by bridging their personal subjectivities with those of the families who lived in Estrada Courts; they realized that disenfranchisement and neocolonization can be best understood through a symbiotic connection with those who also suffer their consequences. As such, both the artists and the residents became transformed as they approached their own histories through a critical and radical lens.

Witness to Los Angeles History: Estrada Courts also counted with the crucial participation of a young Chicana artist by the name of Alma López, who was initiated into digital media through her participation in SPARC. López then went on to become a renowned and critically acclaimed digital artist in her own right, whose work combined digital aesthetics with feminist and queer subjectivities. In her mural for the Estrada Courts project entitled *Las Four*, López, together with young Chicana residents of Estrada, acted as shaman-witness artivists to a radical feminist history. They also became transformative artivists whose witnessing transformed their creative and activist experiences. López was keenly aware of the importance of Estrada Courts as a major mural site, yet fashioned her imagery as a form

of feminist contestation of the predominantly masculinist aesthetics that characterized the preexisting murals there. The artist of *Las Four* was partly responding to another mural in Estrada, namely Ernesto de la Loza's *Los Cuatro Grandes* (1993), which celebrated the historical and political contributions of four male heroes, from left to right, César Chávez, Emiliano Zapata, Francisco Villa, and Mario Moreno Cantinflas, all of whom stood as prominent architects of Chicana/o–Mexican culture. López's reaction to this type of imagery forced her to reevaluate the icons of Chicana/o identity with which she and the young women at Estrada were raised:

> I grew up in northeast Los Angeles . . . during the Chicano Mural Renaissance of the 1970s and early 80s. My visual world included: wall size, meticulously spray painted black, old English, graffiti lettering; bakery and market calendars of sexy Ixta draped over the lap of strong Popo; tattoos of voluptuous bare breasted women with long feathered hair; burgundy lips and raccoon eyes painted cholas; and murals mostly depicting Emiliano Zapata, Francisco Villa, and Aztec warriors. . . . To this visual world, my contribution would go beyond the sexualized images of Ixta and the tattoo women; to create images of women parallel in presence to Zapata, Villa and the Aztec warriors.[51]

So Alma and collaborators would replace Villa, Zapata, and the others with four eminent Chicana/Latina/indigenous activists whose historical significance has long been recognized by U.S. Third-World feminists: Dolores Huerta, cofounder of the United Farm Workers; Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, a seventeenth-century Mexican nun whose poems and plays greatly shaped baroque/colonial literature; a soldadera, female soldier of the Mexican Revolution; and Rigoberta Menchú, a contemporary Guatemalan/Mayan peace activist. Behind these monumental women we find Coyolxauhqui, the Aztec moon goddess, who—according to Mexica scripture—was murdered by her brother Huitzilopochtli, god of war, thus ushering in patriarchal rule in Aztec society. Coyolxauhqui held great metaphorical meaning for López and the young Chicana artists, because they interpreted the violent act directed at her by Huitzilopochtli as that "of a brother towards his sister, as the murder of male and female duality and balance, and the violent birth of a patriarchal system."[52]

In spite of the importance that López and the Estrada participants gave to the figures of Huerta, Sor Juana, the soldadera, Menchú, and Coyolxauhqui in *Las Four*, their presence in the mural fades into the background in order to give way to a new generation of radical feminist practitioners, namely, the young working-class Chicana residents of Estrada. Their relationship to the figures in the background, explains López, is that of "spiritual leaders nourishing a future generation of young women who can claim an ancestral legacy as ancient as [that of] the pre-Columbian goddess Coyolxauhqui."[53] For López, establishing a historical and spiritual continuity between indigenous figures like Coyolxauhqui and contemporary Chicanas promotes an indigenous consciousness that is relevant to the average young Chicana living in the barrio. Learning about the story of Coyolxauhqui, in particular, helped these women understand the historical dimensions of their own gender oppression. But López's use of real-life women in her work is precisely what seems to stir controversy among the communities that see her work. Shortly after its installation in Estrada Courts, *Las Four* was vandalized and damaged by a group of young men from Estrada who knew, and apparently disliked, some of the women in the mural, thus objecting to their representation. This episode proved that images of women's empowerment and agency were still regarded as threatening, and even offensive, to some sectors of the Chicana/o community.

Shoulder to Shoulder: Uniting across Difference

In 1999, Baca and SPARC, under the auspices of the Los Angeles Human Relations Commission, organized a summer youth program geared toward easing racial tensions among the city's youth. Calling it the Shoulder to Shoulder Program, Baca—working together with UCLA students as well as artists, writers, and performers from the local area—brought 125 middle school children together, all of them fourteen years old, to participate in a series of workshops that involved the production of visual art, writing, graphic art, and theater. These children had come to SPARC from all over the city and represented the great diversity among youth in the area. What all the workshops had in common was a frank and open dialogue among the young participants around issues of racism, stereotypes, tolerance, and difference. "It was intense, we worked our butts off!" Baca recalled.[54] The goal of the project was to create a space of healing for youth of all cultural, social, and gender backgrounds. Given the highly segregated nature of the Los Angeles urban area, these workshops provided the young people with the opportunity to work together and interact with other children from different neighborhoods, kids with whom they would have no social contact otherwise. Through a decolonizing and liberatory enactment of artivist aesthetics, the young participants of the Shoulder to Shoulder Program came to the realization that race, gender, and class are largely socially constructed and maintained.

The interaction that took place among the fourteen-year-olds in the Shoulder to Shoulder Program was perhaps the most important element of the workshops. Yet the various digital banners printed on vinyl that were produced in the process speak eloquently of the powerful dialogues the young people had with one another that summer. Many of these banners, which were eventually displayed publicly in the streets of Los Angeles, depicted the children literally standing next to one another, "shoulder to shoulder," as they engaged in the social dialogue. These images were the result of sessions in which each child was paired up with a partner from a different social and/or cultural background. Excerpts from their conversations were then incorporated into the overall design of the banners. The piece entitled *Are We Both Americans?* (see Figure 3) depicts Ben and Lupe, two young participants in the project: "[Lupe's] mother was a domestic worker; she worked as a maid. Ben's father worked in the movie industry and came from great wealth," Baca explained.[55] In this image, as well as in the conversations they both had, they confronted the issue of what it meant to be an "American." When asked the question, "What are you?" Ben replied, "I am white," while Lupe responded, "I am a Latina." However, when they were asked whether they were "American," Ben replied affirmatively but Lupe answered "No, I'm a Latina." "Ben, is Lupe an American?" the organizers then asked the boy; he also replied in the negative. The exercise demonstrated how notions of citizenship and national status are deeply connected to ideas about race and class, notions that individuals internalize at a very early age. As a way to challenge these familiar expectations, the placement of the figures within the digital banner provided a counternarrative to the racial discourses that defined the lives of these two children. While the two figures are visually separated by a dark line that cuts vertically across the composition, the children, nevertheless, are speaking and interacting across that line, thus symbolically breaking social barriers. Their status is then "equalized" in the image, as their figures are rendered at the same scale and occupy the same amount of compositional space. These visual devices thus grant them both the rights and entitlements of cultural citizenship.

Many of the children who participated in the Shoulder to Shoulder Program were asked to discuss and talk to each other about the sensitive issue of racial stereotyping. In the

Figure 3
Judy Baca and middle school students, *Shoulder to Shoulder: Are We Both American?* (1999), digital banner. c SPARC www.sparcmurals.org.

digital banner *See Beyond the Stereotypes* (Figure 4), an African American boy and a middle-class European American girl again touch shoulders and reveal the assumptions they held about one another: "She thought I was a frightening revolutionary," he says; "He thought I was a spoiled white girl," she responds. The fact that they both speak to each other's preconceptions, rather than making direct statements like "he is a frightening revolutionary" or "she is a spoiled white girl," further reinforces the process of dialogue involved in the creation of the banner. But dialogue was not always at the core of the visual vocabulary produced in the Shoulder to Shoulder Program, for a number of the pieces also broke with the general structure of the compositions. Many of the middle-school children in the project felt the need to make individual, and often bold, statements about racial stereotyping, and thus devote entire banners to these. When discussing the shooting tragedy at Columbine High School in 1999 near Denver (Colorado), an African American boy in the program created a piece that stirred relative controversy among the other participants and the Human Relations Commission (see Figure 5). Standing alone on the right side panel of the banner, the boy—whose figure is here rendered in a simple black-and-white drawing—appears to be uttering the words inscribed next to him: "They were white suburban kids shooting, not Black. I was relieved." On a superficial level, many held the assumption that the boy somehow felt comforted by a shooting rampage that left thirteen young people dead and dozens injured. On a realistic, or more accurate level, the underlying message was not an endorsement of the Columbine shootings, but rather a critical engagement of the criminalizing images of black youth in the public media, images that persistently and repeatedly naturalized the

Figure 4
Judy Baca and middle school students, *Shoulder to Shoulder: See Beyond Stereotypes* (1999), digital banner. c SPARC www.sparcmurals.org.

connection between violence and teens of color. The Columbine massacre, while terribly tragic, provided this boy with a counternarrative that disrupted and challenged the racial stereotypes that personally affected his own life. Nevertheless, this message apparently got lost in the minds of the city's public officials, who barred the image from being displayed in public; in other words, the banner was censored.

Digital technology in the Shoulder to Shoulder Program became a tool through which children can amplify and widely disseminate their social consciousness; the banners were placed in two public spaces, namely, in the streets of Los Angeles and the cyber domain of SPARC's Web site, where they still reside today. The computer also facilitated the use of various different media to create the banners. The children produced numerous hand-drawn sketches using colored pencils, markers, paint (including murals), and other materials. These sketches then became the background images to the photographs of the children featured in each banner. Digital technology thus allowed these different forms to meld together seamlessly. Most important, however, this technology offered a means by which to allow two very distinct forms of aesthetic consciousness to converge, namely, those of the adults and of the children in the project. While the participating artists, including Baca, provided a structured and organized platform for the middle-school children to express themselves around issues of race in a safe and nonthreatening environment, the kids offered an honest and refreshing form of creativity that is fairly unconcerned with issues of order and control. These two sensibilities are brought together digitally in the images themselves, where the dark framing and the digital photography epitomize the adult aesthetics, while the background drawings

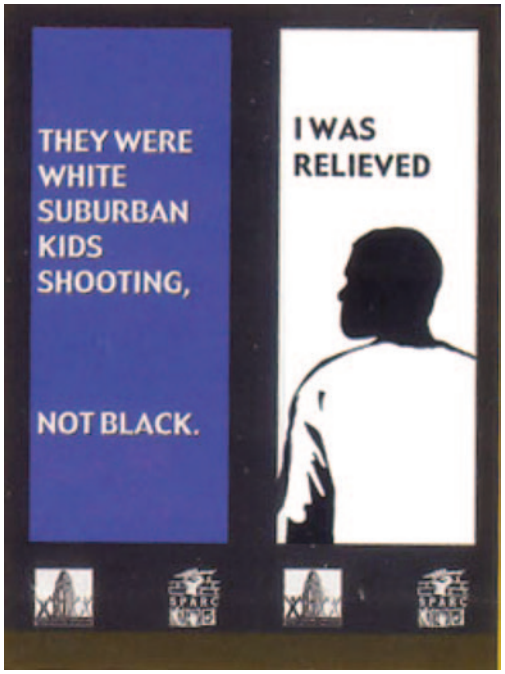

Figure 5
Judy Baca, *Shoulder to Shoulder: They Were White Suburban Kids...* (1999), digital banner. c SPARC www.sparcmurals.org.

and the dialogue text represent the youth creativity. Drawing from the concept of the "machinic assemblage" formulated by theorists Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari—who argue that social products are the result of machine-like convergences of disparate components through movement[56]—Jeffrey S. Juris contends that "digitally powered social movements are . . . 'rhizomatic'—constantly emerging, fusing together, hiving off."[57] The converging and diverging nature of these digital social movements thus allows for collectivity and autonomy to take place the same time, something that greatly facilitated the collaborative form of digital artivism taking place between children and adults in the Shoulder to Shoulder Program.

Beyond the Mexican Mural: Baca's Artivist Pedagogy at UCLA

I think [Judy Baca] is very inspirational. She has a lot of knowledge that she's picked up from years of experience. She's worked with the Chicano Movement, she has done her share of public works with the community. As a teacher she brought that in and she dialogued with us. She would talk about her experience and then she would open up the floor for us to say something. I really appreciated that because it's rare to find professors at the university level who are willing to hear the perspective of the students.[58] —UCLA Chicana/o Studies and Women's Studies undergraduate student.

A great deal of the digital artwork Baca creates with youth has been produced within her UCLA course "Beyond the Mexican Mural—Muralism and Community Development,"

which takes place in SPARC's Digital Mural Lab. In the class, students learn to utilize muralism "as a method of community education, development, and empowerment."[59] Through a series of workshops and studio sessions, students create large-scale, digitally created mural pieces with the goal of placing them in community settings. The work the students produce in this class entails a rigorous process of research, design, and work with community participants. Using much of her experience in working with youth within a public setting, in this class the artist employs a critical pedagogy that brings to the forefront every student's ability to be creative, critical, and self-empowered, regardless of his or her academic, personal, and/or cultural background. Baca facilitates this process by guiding the students through the production of public artworks—namely, murals. Unlike traditional forms of public art, which are supposed to instill a sense of civic pride, and thus indoctrinate audiences with hegemonic ideologies, Baca teaches her students a type of public art that makes a critical intervention into the public space. While many mainstream types of public art are meant to articulate collective identities, Baca's students are instructed in the ways in which the personal can also be collective and even political. As such, the public artworks that come out of "Beyond the Mexican Mural" place youth voices at the center of the urban or public space, a milieu that rarely—if ever— takes into account what young people have to say.

On October 24, 2006, Baca invited us to visit and participate in one of her classes for "Beyond the Mexican Mural." We immediately encountered great enthusiasm and passion for the course material among the students, as one of them directly told us:

> This is the best course I've taken at UCLA in four years because it's extended from the private classroom out into the community. Our class is also very close, we all talk, spend time together. . . . As a fine art student, I realized that I didn't like the gallery space, I didn't like the institution of it. So to me it's amazing to see that there is something else I can do with art, something that really is a political act, so it's a new possibility for me in my life, after I graduate. . . . [This course] is the perfect combination of art, activism and community.[60]

Another student approached us to tell us that this class was a parting gift of sorts for her: "I'm graduating and this is my very last class, but I wanted to take this class my whole career [in UCLA]. . . . It's like what Cesar Chávez said, 'All education should end in service,' that's what this class is leaving me with as I finish UCLA."[61]

During this particular meeting of the course, the students were to bring their works-in-progress for a group critique. As we entered the lab—which was fitted with dozens of high-speed computers, high-definition scanners, laser printers, multimedia equipment, and a computer projector—the mood among the students, Baca, and the staff in SPARC was enthusiastic and eager (see Figure 6). Baca created a relaxed and welcoming atmosphere as the students were invited to help themselves to some tea or coffee from a little kitchen in the lab. Baca began the session by telling students what a group critique entails. Traditionally, group critiques in studio art classes, Baca explained to us, are instances in which students share their works-in-progress with their fellow classmates and instructor in the hopes of receiving meaningful and helpful feedback. These critiques, in conventional art departments, however, have been a source of great anxiety for students of color trying to get through studio art programs. Put-downs, covert racist remarks, and subtle taunting, Baca recounted, are all too often part of the critique experience for students of color:

> Critiques are not meant to take someone apart although within the university systems and art schools—particularly during my period of time as an undergraduate and graduate student—that was the name of

Figure 6
UCLA students awaiting group critique. Social and Public Art Resource and Public Art Resource Center, Venice, CA. October 24, 2006. Photograph by Guisela Latorre and Chela Sandoval.

the game. How much could you take and how could you stand up to the assaults of professors? Literally it was like having your pants taken down, be exposed and be beaten. That doesn't help and it doesn't give you a sense of how to improve your work.[62]

Not only did she assure her students that such behavior and exchanges would not be tolerated in SPARC, but she also began the session by discussing her own work in progress, namely her Robert F. Kennedy Monument for the new school to be built on the site of the recently demolished Ambassador Hotel in Los Angeles (see Figure 7). While, as an established artist, she no longer needed to put herself through the scrutiny of art professors, as a public artist she continued to expose herself to the whims of patrons, art commissions, and corporate sponsors, who often take issue with Baca's political positions. For the Ambassador Hotel, the site of Robert F. Kennedy's fatal shooting, Baca was currently working on a piece that illustrated the relationship between Kennedy and César Chávez, focusing on the day Kennedy visited Chávez during the break of the UFW cofounder's famous fast in 1968. The Gonzalez Goodale Architects, the firm in charge of designing a new school on the site of the demolished Ambassador Hotel, argued that she was using too much "content" rather than articulating more "universal" themes with her piece: "'Universal' has been a euphemism for a dominant culture which is historically Anglo," Baca told the students in the classroom, "at this particular moment 'universal' is Latina/o. I'll keep you posted as to this process but I wanted you to know what it is like for a public artist."[63]

Indeed, as a public artist, she constantly has to put herself in a position of vulnerability before a sometimes hostile audience. While Baca warns of the difficulties of negotiating her position as a public artist, she actively disrupts such power dynamics in her classroom. As such, she creates a safe space within SPARC that is both critical but also nurturing and

Figure 7
Judy Baca discussing her Robert F. Kennedy monument with students. Social and Public Art Resource and Public Art Resource Center, Venice, CA. October 24, 2006. Photograph by Guisela Latorre and Chela Sandoval.

Figure 8
UCLA/SPARC student art work. Social and Public Art Resource and Public Art Resource Center, Venice, CA. October 24, 2006. Photograph by Guisela Latorre and Chela Sandoval.

empowering. For this particular assignment, students were charged with the creation of digital mural pieces that defined their personal relationships to the urban spaces around them, in particular Los Angeles.

In Baca's pedagogy, the traditional critique utilized in art schools becomes a witness ritual where the young students/artivists stand before their works-in-progress to describe the experiences and perceptions that led them to create the images. When the students/artivists finished their explanations of the world that is exemplified in their unique images, they then asked the rest of the class to witness for them; in other words, to share with them what the images generated meant for each spectator. At that point, potential critics are transformed into active witnesses; they become themselves artivists, who describe the images from their own sets of experiences and perceptions of the world. This critique process becomes a collective learning experience for the student/artivist as creator and transformer of reality, and for the active witnesses who understand that sharing widely differing perceptions works to enrich and deepen this shared experience of reality. This kind of pedagogical ritual generates an intense learning experience that pushes artistic, emotional, spiritual, and intellectual boundaries. Each student/artivist addresses his or her relationship to the LA metropolis differently: one seeks control while another seeks liberation from a situation of hopelessness. Still another student creates a history of indigenous identification in which madness and hope express their own kind of language. For one student, the city is represented as overlaid by a network of twisted vines, while another expresses a strong sense of isolation and fear as a recent immigrant living in a hostile urban environment. In another example, a student depicts herself sitting on the sand by the ocean's edge as the city of Los Angeles is reduced to a castle at her side, while another student provides his self-portrait entangled in the city's skyline (Figure 8). In Baca's system of critique as active witnessing, each artivist teaches the others how history, life, and materiality can be expressed and experienced differently.

Conclusion

Baca's pedagogical tools have inspired young people of color for nearly three generations now. Her long-term and proven success in empowering and inspiring youth of color to express themselves through digital technology has gained her a prominent and established reputation in community, activist, and academic settings. These settings, however, do not engage systematically the one social sphere that most critically affects the lives of young people, namely the public school system. While Baca's various community projects do include the participation of elementary, middle, and high school students, these are just temporary interventions—albeit positive and meaningful ones—into the deeply problematic relationship that students of color have with the public school system. There is a great deal of research within the field of Chicana/o studies that demonstrates how young people of color are increasingly more likely to fall between the cracks of the system than are their white counterparts.[64] Much of this research faults the system for the low educational attainment of Chicana/os.

We propose that Baca's methodologies and pedagogy be incorporated into the public school system as part of students' general curriculum. Federal and public funding must be provided to encourage and advance these developments within curricular structures. The incredible pedagogical and liberatory collaborations represented through Baca/SPARC/youth artivism must be recognized by public and private institutions, for they have much to offer our nation at this pivotal juncture of digital media's increasing power and influence. The

model that Baca has produced together with young people is sufficiently developed to be replicated in educational spaces across the United States. Baca's creation of digital artivism works well in areas where peoples are segregated according to race, class, and culture, for Baca's pedagogical technologies thrive on dialogue across these different spheres. However, new digital artivism cannot continue creating inroads toward social, democratic, and egalitarian change without institutional recognition, commitment, and support. Our study has demonstrated how UCLA provided the institutional means to permit Baca, SPARC, and youth of color to enact social dialogue and change by using digital technology.

Ultimately, digital artivism, like the kind practiced by Baca together with young people, depends on the ability to utilize different aesthetic forms, putting them together in innovative ways with the purpose of confronting adversity, thus arriving at more democratic and egalitarian conclusions. Digital artivism demands a new loyalty, not to any specific artistic medium, but to a committed cross-disciplinary aesthetic. But this mode of creating does not simply combine approaches for the mere sake of experimentation; Judy Baca's digital artivism utilizes all these different approaches with the purpose of constructing a brave new world of egalitarian exchange. Having said all this, we again return to the emblematic figure of *Arnoldo's Brother*; for he, like the young participants in SPARC, gazes unflinchingly at inequality and strife, looking right through them to encounter the possibilities of hope and social justice.

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