Report:

Mario’s Furniture, a collaboration by S.E. Barnet and Hillary Mushkin with programmer Clay Chaplin and electronics specialist Lorin Parker

Thanks to the support of Otis, the Mushkin-Barnet project Mario’s Furniture will be exhibited at Telic Arts Exchange (http://2003-2008.telic.info/marios-furniture-2-a-muskin-barnet-game.yeah.html) on Chung King Road in Los Angeles from October 28 through Dec 2, 2006. The project could not have been realized without the funding that allowed us to complete the crucial technical aspects of wireless interactivity and vision recognition programming.

At summer’s end 2005 we were invited to turn the Bolsky Gallery (/bolsky-gallery) in the Galef Fine Arts building into an arts laboratory. The Bolsky became a workspace for developing our interactive project. We began to work on the video recognition programming as well as test out sensors for the wireless technology. Being within the Otis community allowed constant access to an eager and interested audience, an essential part of our trials.

In the fall of 2005 Mario’s Furniture was in residence at The Armory Center for the Arts (http://www.armoryarts.org/) in Pasadena. At this point the game was far enough along, thanks to our stay at the Bolsky, to be able to invite curators to take a look at the work. After their initial visit, Telic Arts Exchange invited us to exhibit Mario’s Furniture at their space. (see Press Release (http://sites/default/files/BarnetPR.pdf) [PDF])

One of the best aspects of the exhibition of Mario’s Furniture at Telic is the additional events schedule. The gallery curators have asked us to host events throughout the duration of the exhibition that will afford us an opportunity to contextualize the project through guest speakers, screenings, and the presentation of other artwork.

Finally, in the coming months UK publishers Intellect Books’ new volume on video games and art will be available. This work includes Art theorist/critic M.A. Greenstein’s essay on Mario’s Furniture.

--Susan Barnet
Fine Arts
Images of *Mario's Furniture* in the Bolsky Gallery, 2005:
Mario’s Furniture - Version 2
A Mushkin-Barnet Game
Completely Interactive and Playable!

Mario’s Furniture integrates wireless technology with artistic production and performance. It is a physicalization of an original video game, incorporating the virtual into real, three-dimensional space. In most video games you just sit on the couch, but when you play Mario’s Furniture you MOVE the couch, in fact you move the whole living room!

Mario’s Furniture began in 2002 as a technically conventional video installation, including a single night of performance. Four years later, Mario’s Furniture - Version 2, created with programmer Clay Chaplin and electronic specialist Lorin Parker is now a wireless environment where viewers become players, physically moving objects while watching themselves and their scores in real time on a large-screen projection. Theorist M.A. Greenstein writes, players actually “shuffle and schlep as fast as they can, a sofa, two chairs, a coffee table, and freestanding lamps in an effort to form a ‘sitting down, conversational arrangement,’ in keeping with one other primary condition, namely to stay within the frame of a relentlessly panning camera.”

In Mario’s Furniture - Version 2 the body is actualized in real and virtual space simultaneously. Players can’t merely manipulate an avatar with a joystick. Playing Mario’s Furniture involves strenuous physicality, parodying conventional video games in which avatars are put in peril while players sit on a couch. Players must physically move the couch to play the game. Mario’s emphasizes how camera and screen effect the construction of social relationships. Players see themselves (and not a stand in) under the camera’s scrutiny, humorously mirroring the absurdity of living within the frame.

With Mario’s Furniture - Version 2 Mushkin and Barnet look at technological and narrative ways in which video and digital media unfold and complicate meaning. The game critically remarks on aesthetics and narrative boy-logic of computer games while reflecting on theories of the digitally decentered subject. As Donna Haraway assigns the female to the technological, we adopt the machine gaze for non-normative purposes - in service of a non-heroic social activity. Mushkin and Barnet’s racing antics against the camera alludes to Chaplin and Keaton, Mario Brothers, Tomb Raider and the deadline pressed Extreme Makeover: Home Edition. They presume a politics of representation and pictorial illusion individually, and collaboratively make a silly yet deadpan, response to 90’s video and digital art - cinematic self-consciousness (Bill Viola), weighty feminist gesturing (Shirin Neshat) and insular avatar based interactive work.

Throughout the duration of this exhibition various events, speakers and screenings will take place. Please refer to the Telic website http://www.telic.info/ for information regarding this schedule.