Assignment 1: Game Research
Due: Monday, September 13th, 2010

Introduction

The majority of software used by architects follows a predominate pattern: users manipulate the mouse in order to draw lines, planes, and volumes. This mode of interaction situates the computer as an analog of previous tools used in architectural design; the result is a new type of drafting board. Though there are considerable variations between specific software packages, these differences in interface fall predictably within the prevailing paradigm. The primary question we will be asking ourselves in this course is: what are potentials in breaking away from this paradigm? In order to re-calibrate our thinking about design software we will explore ways in which digital games engage their players. What interfaces has the video game industry invented that may prove useful to architects in their work?

The Assignment

Each group will select a video game to analyze. The game can be produced for any platform, whether a console (PlayStation, XBox, Wii, etc.), computer (PC, Mac, Linux, etc.), or mobile device (phone, iPod, etc.). When choosing a game, keep in mind that we are attempting to borrow innovative modes of interaction. It is recommended, though not strictly required, that students play their chosen game to deepen their understanding of its gameplay and modes of interaction.

Focus your research on answering the following questions:
1. What is the premise of the game? What is the story? What is the environment of the game world?
2. How is the game played? What does a typical session look like?
3. What is one interesting interface aspect through which the player interacts with the game?
4. How could this interface be adapted to the architectural design process?

Deliverables

Students should come to class with a digital presentation (slideshow, video, game, or other media) that describes the premise, gameplay, and interface of their chosen game. Presentations should include photographs, screen images, video, or other media that offer a detailed look at each of these elements. In addition, the presentation should include diagrams or other images that speculate on the potentials of the game interface to alter the architectural design process. “Game interface” here can refer to any aspect of the game or gaming system that mediates between the digital device that game is being played on and the person playing the game. This could mean some hardware component such as a joystick or other controller, on-screen controls, or a less concrete aspect like the narrative or visual character of the game.