

# Action as the Basis for an Aesthetics of Ludic Subjectivity

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## Introduction

It might be obvious to note that the player of a game exists in relation to the game as an active being. As such, what I have elsewhere termed the “ludic subject” – “the subjective ‘I-in-the-gameworld’ the player crystallizes through engaging with the gameworld” (Vella 2015: 22) – is fundamentally an active subject, and action is its mode of engagement with the gameworld.

The point I wish to make in this paper, however, goes beyond the recognition of a sense of agency as being fundamental to the player’s experience of engaging with the gameworld, a point that has been made often (see, for instance, Murray 1997; Mateas and Stern 2005; Wardrip-Fruin et al. 2009). Instead, what I wish to examine is the idea of action being constitutive of the player’s in-game self – her sense of who she is in relation to the gameworld.

For the sake of specificity, I shall limit my observations to games deploying what I have termed a singular embodied ludic subject-position (Vella 2016: 5) – that is, games in which the player is embodied in the gameworld in the form of a single playable figure. With regard to this category of games, Rune Klevjer draws on Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s argument that “consciousness is in the first place not a matter of ‘I think’ but of ‘I can’” (2002[1945]: 159) – an observation which highlights the centrality of action, or the capacity for action, to Merleau-Ponty’s embodied phenomenology – to argue that the affordances granted by the playable figure in relation to the gameworld represent a “different *I can*” (2012: 22), a different articulation of the capacity to act, and hence a different consciousness.

Likewise, Marta Matylda Kania argues that what she terms the “gameplay situation” – the subjective situatedness towards the gameworld, a “perceptual position of the self-avatar towards the gameworld” (2017, 61), is also intrinsically tied to action – it “establishes the conditions of experience that provides the player with a preconceived understanding of the actions they need to perform in order to play the game” (ibid.).

The model of ludic subject-positioning is an attempt to formalize this idea of “the perceptual standpoint the playable figure establishes for the player in relation to the gameworld” (Vella 2015, 22), understanding it as an experiential Gestalt established through an interrelated set of formal mechanisms – one of the primary such mechanisms being the set of capabilities for action the player is granted towards the gameworld, and, relatedly, the limitations upon the range of actions available to her in the gameworld, the *I can* and the *I cannot*.

In this paper, I shall be considering now is the enactment of the ludic subject: that is, what happens, from the subjective perspective of gameworld experience, when the player begins to engage with the gameworld through the ludic subject-position. Given that the ludic subject-position represents the perceptual situatedness of the player towards the gameworld – an experiential and existential standpoint that determines a particular mode of being-in-the-gameworld – this engagement with the gameworld can then be understood literally as the *enactment* of the ludic subject – a concrete putting-into-action.

By way of grounding an analysis into the enactment of ludic subjectivity, I shall begin with a focus on the conceptuality of the relation between action and the subject. In identifying a conceptual schema within which to tackle this question, I shall bring to bear approaches to action both within the tradition of analytic philosophy – in particular, those of G.E.M. Anscombe, Georg Henrik von Wright, and Donald Davidson – and within continental philosophy, specifically Hannah Arendt and Paul Ricoeur.

Starting with the notion of intention as being central to action, I will pause upon the notion of the double-sidedness of action in its interlinked internal and external dimensions, before considering Ricoeur's application of Merleau-Ponty's notion of the 'I can' as the means of bringing these two aspects of action together. Moving on, then, to the idea of the ascription of intention, I will present the ways in which, in the work of Arendt and Ricoeur, action has been understood as a mechanism of self-disclosure on the part of the agent.

The discussion will then return to the domain of ludic subjectivity through an application of this conceptuality of action to the analysis of a situation of play in *Thief: The Dark Project* (Looking Glass Studios 1998), demonstrating by means of this case study the ways in which a ludic subjectivity is enacted through the player's active engagement with the gameworld.

On this basis, in the argument's concluding movement, I will make the case that the experiential structure of digital game play, organized around the interplay between a perspective internal to the gameworld – that of the ludic subject-position – and a distanced, external perspective, allows for the player's enactment of ludic subjectivity to itself be brought into view, structuring an aesthetics of ludic subjectivity that is inseparable from – and, indeed, consequent to, the player's taking-action in the gameworld.

### **Action and intention**

Fundamental within the analytic philosophy tradition is the distinction between an action and an event in the general sense, a differentiation that, on one level, is made on the basis of the former being the result of an *intention*, with the latter being the result of a *cause*. The difference, simply put, is that intention is forward-looking, in contrast to the retrospection inherent in the determination of the cause of an event. As Georg Henrik von Wright puts it, "causality is [...] contrasted with teleology, and causal explanation with teleological explanation" (1971, 83).

Accordingly, it is with the notion of intention that a conceptualization of action must begin. 'Intention,' G.E.M. Anscombe writes, is itself a problematic term, in that it can be used with at least three distinct senses:

When a man says ‘I am going to do such-and-such’, we should say that this was an expression of intention. We also sometimes speak of an action as intentional, and we may also ask with what intention the thing was done. (1979[1957]: 1)

Intention, then, can be spoken of under the heading of “expression of intention for the future”, “intentional action” – that is, determining *whether or not* a particular action was done intentionally, and “intention in acting” (ibid.). It is in the last of these senses that this investigation shall adopt the concept of intention.

In this formulation, stating the intention underlying an action becomes a means of describing an action:

If an agent does *A* with the intention of doing *B*, there is some description of *A* which reveals the action as reasonable in the light of reasons the agent had in performing it. (Davidson 1980, 85)

In short, as Paul Ricoeur puts it, “to say what an action is, is to say why it is done” (1992: 63). This still leaves it necessary to define more rigorously the manner in which ‘intention’ should be understood as an explanation of action.

As such, intention is, first and foremost, a mental phenomenon. Anscombe writes that:

...if we want to know a man’s intentions it is into the contents of his mind, and only into these, that we must enquire; and hence [...] if we wish to understand what intention is, we must be investigating something whose existence is purely in the sphere of the mind. (1979[1957]: 9)

To think of actions in terms of intentions, then, is to shift the plane on which the analysis of action is conducted from the ontic domain upon which the action *takes place* as an event, resulting in some change in the state of the world, to that of the consciousness within which the intending occurs – as becomes apparent in Ricoeur’s suggestion that intention should be understood as “the aiming of a consciousness in the direction of something I am to do” (1992: 67). By this understanding, “the action is forming an intention” (Davidson 1980: 89), independently of the objective realization of a change in the world.

### **The two sides of action**

This brings a conceptual difficulty into view – namely, how to account for the point of encounter between the subjective origins of the intention and the objective status of an action as an event in the world? Von Wright conceptualizes this by saying that action “presents two aspects: an “inner” and an “outer””, with the former being “the intentionality of the action, the intention or will “behind” its outer manifestations,” and the latter being “some event” in the world, such as “the fact that a certain handle turns or window opens” (1971: 86-87).

Von Wright’s approach to bringing these two aspects of the action together is to link them by means of a systemic logic. By his argument, an action has meaning, for its agent, within the context of a “closed system” (ibid.: 78) that an agent isolates from her environment, rendered in the form of a “state-space” (ibid.: 49) such that an intentional action can be understood as “interference” (ibid.: 61) with the system’s autonomous operation, the intent to change the organization of the system from an initial state *a* to a final state *c* which differs from the state *b* that the system would have achieved if left to its own devices. Ricoeur explains:

...it is in doing something that an agent learns to ‘isolate’ a closed system from its environment and to discover the possibilities of development inherent to this system. The agent learns this by setting the system in motion, beginning from some initial state the agent has ‘isolated.’ It is this setting things in motion that constitutes interference, at the intersection between one of the agent’s abilities and the resources of the system. (1984: 135)

Such a conceptualization of action resonates with a number of insights made at various times both within the philosophy of play and within digital game studies. The notion of the isolation of the domain of ludic action has been touched upon both in Johan Huizinga’s oft-quoted description of the separateness of play within its own “proper boundaries of time and space” (1950: 13), and in Eugen Fink’s development of the notion of the play-world (2012[1957]). Moreover, the idea of the game as a system – developed, for instance, in the work of Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman (2004: 50) – is one that has become commonplace. With this in mind, it is opportune to note that the way in which such a systemic understanding is drawn out of direct gameworld experience, as per Dominic Arsenault and Bernard Perron’s “gameplay spiral” of heuristic engagement (2009: 115-117), hews very close to von Wright’s arguments regarding the way in which the agents constitutes her surrounding situation into the order of a closed system by means of experimentation and observation (1971: 63-64). Even more specifically, von Wright’s argument that it is through being understood as a state-space that a system can become the venue for action bears close affinities to Jesper Juul’s characterization of games as “state machines,” with player input actualizing one branch of the “game tree,” the branching, hierarchically-organized network of possible game states (2005: 60).

The congruences between this systemic approach to action and the equally systemic approach to games, then, are clear. However, von Wright’s conceptualization of action, though it provides us with an explanation for the subject’s formation of an intention in relation to her subjective understanding of an objective domain as a closed system, still leaves unanswered the central question underpinning this double-sided understanding of action: namely, how do we determine the point of articulation between the intending subject and the objective world towards which the intention is directed, and within which it manifests as a physical event?

Ricoeur argues that the key to this “intersection” lies in Merleau-Ponty’s discourse of the “I can.” In this context, this discourse offers:

...an ontology of *one’s own body*, that is of *a* body that is also *my* body and which, by its double allegiance to the order of physical bodies and to that of persons, therefore lies at the point of articulation of the power to act which is ours and of the course of things which belongs to the world order. (Ricoeur 1992: 111).

Ricoeur’s observation here is that, for Merleau-Ponty, this dual nature is the essential character of the body. As Merleau-Ponty puts it:

...our body is a being of two leaves, from one side a thing among things and otherwise what sees them and touches them [...] it unites these two properties within itself, and its double belongingness to the order of the “object” and to the order of the “subject” reveals to us quite unexpected relations between the two orders. (1968: 137)

Merleau-Ponty illustrates this double-sidedness of the body by means of a meditation on the hand as both an instrument of touch *and* as being itself open, through the touch of the other hand, to being encountered as a thing-in-the-world: “in a veritable touching of the touch, when

my right hand touches my left hand [...] the “touching subject” passes over to the rank of the touched” (ibid.: 134). In short: it is through our double-sided nature as embodied beings, both conscious subjects and bodies in the world, that the ‘I can’ is both a structure of our subjective experience of the world, and a capacity to act upon the ontological domain of things in the world to which we belong as a body.

With respect to the ludic subject, this double-sidedness of the body is reflected in the double-sided phenomenological relation of the player to her playable figure, by which the figure is both a subjective standpoint for the player in relation to the gameworld, and an objective entity belonging, ontologically, to the gameworld (Vella 2015: 228). It is thanks to this double-sidedness that the player’s intention to act can take the external, material form of a change in the state of the gameworld.

### **Action as self-disclosure**

There is one final point I wish to draw out of a consideration of the notion of intention: namely, that it requires *ascription* to an agent. As Ricoeur argues, “of *intention* we say that it is someone’s intention, and of someone we say that he or she intends to do something” (1992: 95). Ricoeur’s usage of the term ‘ascription’ highlights not simply the attribution of the intention to the agent (in the sense of saying “this intention *A* belongs to this agent *B*”), but, more radically, its belonging to the agent in the vein of a predicate about *who the agent is*: “ascription marks the reference of all the terms of the conceptual network to its pivotal point: “who?”” (ibid.). In ascribing an intention to an individual, we are saying something about the individual, through the definition of a mental predicate (Strawson 1959: 104): we add, to the set of predicates by which we know the individual, the knowledge that *this is someone who has this intention*. Put differently, we know the individual through her intentions, which, conversely, we can only know as her intentions on the basis of an interpretative act of ascription.

Of course, one’s own actions do not demand interpretation in the same way, given that they belong to the class of things one “*knows without observation*” (ibid., 13), due precisely to the proprioceptive ownership of these actions. As Ricoeur puts it:

I do not say that I knew that I was doing this or that because I had observed it. It is in doing that one knows that one is doing something, what one is doing, and why one is doing it. (1992: 70)

Or, in Max Scheler’s words, “it is essential to the Being of acts that they are Experienced only in their performance itself” (1973[1916]: 371). This, of course, is a result of the fundamental *mineness* of intentional first-personal subjectivity. What role, then, does the ascription of intention play in the analysis of the *self* in action?

For Hannah Arendt, *action* is distinguished from both *work* and *labour*. The basis of this distinction – what makes an action an action – is that, unlike “mere productive activity,” action has an “inherent tendency to disclose the agent together with the act” (1998[1958]: 180). Action, then, represents a self-disclosure on the part of the actor – irrespective of whatever else it is, an action always also constitutes an answer to the question, “Who are you?” (ibid.: 178).

This self-disclosure is understood not as a conscious or willed one, but an involuntary and unavoidable revealing of one’s essential character before the eyes of the community – “one

discloses one's self without ever either knowing himself or being able to calculate beforehand whom he reveals" (ibid.: 192).

Ricoeur follows Arendt in highlighting this revealing character of action, but diverges from her work on this latter point. Given the situation of deliberation before the opportunities for action presented by one's existential situatedness, Ricoeur argues that "making up one's mind is cutting short the debate by making one of the options contemplated one's own" (1992: 95). The free decision to act – to be faced with the branching multiplicity of possible actions, choose *one* action and make it *my own* – comes to be understood as a *self-ascription*. The performing of an intentional action – the aiming of my self, as being-in-the-world, in the direction of a change I wish to bring about in the world – is at the same time a conscious *determination of who I am*. Through the taking of action in the world, then, 'I' come to be constituted as 'I, defined through the set of actions I ascribe to myself in performing them'.

### **The ludic subject in action**

Against the background of this conceptualization of action and its relation to the subject as agent, then, it is possible to discuss the question of action as it relates to ludic subjectivity, and as it aids in the constitution of the ludic self.

Before the taking of action itself, it is as such a disposition towards action that the player-as-ludic-subject's being-in-the-world orients itself towards its situation – a point Gordon Calleja highlights when he argues that the player's relation to the gameworld is "first and foremost a *disposition* and readiness to act" (2011: 41).

An example might serve to illustrate this point. During a game of *Thief: The Dark Project* (Looking Glass 1998), the player, as master thief Garrett, finds herself on the upper floors of a palatial mansion. Hiding in an unlit alcove, she has a view along a corridor she needs to traverse in order to arrive at a room containing an item she is required to steal. Two torches amply light the corridor, and a pair of guards patrol the far end. Concealed in the dark, the player-as-Garrett is safe. Conversely, Garrett would certainly be spotted if the player were to leave the safety of darkness.

Here, the player might stand, immobile, for several minutes, not taking any action – and yet, in all that time, she would be, on a subjective level, far from inactive. She might be taking stock of the situation, observing the guards' movement and trying to calculate the timing of their patrol patterns. She might be consulting her map and attempting to determine whether she might be able to avoid the guards by taking a more circuitous route. She might be looking through her inventory to find any items she could use to cause a distraction that would drive the guards from their posts. In all this, though the player does not actually perform any action, one would be amiss to state that the player's being-in-the-gameworld is not marked by an intensely active disposition, and that this is not intimately tied to her embodiment in the gameworld as Garrett.

In short, the player, on the basis of the "I can" that she *is* as an embodied ludic subject, is considering the web of possibilities of action constituting the instrumental complex which, in Sartre's existential terms, are also, as *her* possibilities, part of her being. It is in these

phenomenological terms that a situation is established against which agency can be exerted, in the form of “the satisfying power to take meaningful action”, to return to Janet Murray’s formulation (1997: 126).

In this situation, the player might decide, after her deliberation, to use two of her limited stock of water arrows to put out the torches in the corridor, thereby allowing herself-as-Garrett to proceed along the corridor unseen. Following von Wright’s theory of action, this could be put in the following way: the player perceives the system that constitutes the gameworld as being in a particular state *A* (the corridor is lit), and forms an intention to act in such a way as to bring about a different state *B* (the corridor is unlit). She could just as easily have decided upon another one of the possibilities forming her instrumental complex, such as, for instance, using normal arrows to kill the two guards – thereby, in von Wright’s terms, actuating a different branch of the possibility space of world-states, resulting in a new end state *C* (in which the corridor is still lit but the guards are dead).

It might certainly be, of course, that the outcome of a player’s action does not match up to her intention: the resulting game state, in this case, would be different to the one she envisioned. The action might fail: the player, for instance, might misjudge the angle at which she launches her water arrows, and, as a result, miss the flaming torches entirely, leading to a world state *D* (the corridor is still lit and the guards are alive, but Garrett has two less water arrows in his inventory). Alternatively, the action might succeed, bringing about the state *B* that was the player’s original intention, but might set in motion a different chain of cause and effect than what the player envisioned. Perhaps the player does manage to put out the torches using the water arrows, but the torch’s being put out alerts the guards to the fact that something is amiss, causing them to break out of their fixed patrol patterns and move closer to Garrett’s location. This will, of course, result in a new world-state and, hence, a new situation within which the player-as-Garrett, on the basis of the same “I can” and the way in which the situation is resolved into an instrumental complex of possibilities, must form a new intention, and so on.

Despite this element of unpredictability that characterizes any translation of intention into action, what is revealed here is an essential *future-orientation* or teleological character to ludic subjectivity – at least, insofar as it relates to, and is constituted by, its capacity for action. The action of launching the water arrows at the flaming torches is therefore intended as leading to a desirable gameworld-state. Moreover, the individual action, and the intention behind it, connects in action-chains following the overarching goal-orientation of the ludic subject. In this regard, Petri Lankoski speaks of the intention attributed to each individual in-game action as coalescing into a granular dimension of moment-to-moment “subgoals” oriented towards the achievement of overarching “regulating goals” (2011, 297) – which, in terms of the constitution of the ludic subject, represent the existential projects towards which its being-in-the-world is directed.

### **The self-disclosure of the ludic subject**

In all of the above, there is no question but that the player ascribes the action that is taken to herself, not to Garrett as a character standing apart from her. It is she who has the internal consciousness of deliberating, of perceiving the possibilities as *her* possibilities. Finally, it is she who ascribes to herself the intention of putting out the water arrows and, concurrently, the decision not to kill the guards.

In doing so, following Ricoeur's argument regarding the self-ascription of action, the player is not only choosing one of the many possible world-states that might result from the range of "I can"s available to her. At the same time, she is also determining her own ludic subjectivity through its enactment: as soon as the action is taken, it becomes part of the set of actions she recognizes as her own.

With respect to the particular action I have used as an example here, the decision to put out the torches rather than, say, taking one's chances and dashing down the brightly-lit corridor, suggests a meticulous, careful disposition; at the same time, the decision to avoid killing the guards might reveal an ethical decision to avoid killing unless absolutely necessary, even if, as in this case, killing the guards would eliminate the risk of being caught. This moral principle, then, is ascribed to the ludic subject 'player-as-Garrett,' which, as *her* ludic subjectivity, the player relates to proprioceptively. The taking of the action, then, is inseparable from the ascription of the qualities, "*I am someone who is meticulous*" and "*I am someone who avoids killing,*" to this ludic subject.

Here the meaning of the phrase "*enactment of the ludic subject*" becomes clear, in that it is only through the player's engagement with the gameworld through the frame of the ludic subject-position that the ludic subject comes to be determined, not only as 'life story,' but also, as the above example demonstrates, as the set of defining predicates that can be extracted from such a 'life story.'

It remains necessary, however, to account for the fact that, while playing *Thief*, the player is aware that the figure she controls is the titular thief, a man named Garrett who lives in the steampunk-tinged medieval City that constitutes the game's represented fictional world. The game provides the player with an array of what Uri Margolin terms "characterization statements" (1986: 206) allowing her to build a coherent idea of who Garrett is as a person defined through a set of predicates that, very likely, does not have a great deal of overlap with the set of predicates by which the player would define herself as a person. Between his history, his voice, his physical appearance, and the actions which the game's events lead him to perform, the player builds an understanding of Garrett as someone who is meticulous, patient, cunning, quick-thinking, courageous but cautious and far from foolhardy, with a streak of sardonic cynicism and a pronounced – but not complete – amorality.

These characteristics are Garrett's, not the player's – but to play *Thief* is to take on the subjective position delineated by these attributes as your own. Certainly, some degree of role-playing – the conscious or unconscious willingness to "inhabit the headspace of someone other" (Bowman 2010: 8) – can be a factor in this regard. Fundamentally, however, it is the mechanisms of ludic subject-positioning that lead the player to "see as" and "play as" Garrett. It is Garrett's physical vulnerability that necessitates caution, the impossibility of surviving a straight-up fight with multiple assailants that demands resourceful quick-thinking if a plan goes awry and Garrett is spotted, the need to sit and observe guard patrol routes from a concealed vantage-point that requires patience, the multiplicity of possible approaches and paths of traversal that demands cunning in choosing the best option for a given situation: and so on. In these ways – and in many others – it is not simply that the player consciously decides that she



is going to ‘play as’ Garrett, but that the being-in-the-gameworld that *Thief* establishes lead the player to adopt Garrett’s subjectivity as her own, to think of herself as Garrett.

### **Ludic subjectivity as an aesthetics of action**

For both Arendt and Ricoeur, then, the importance of action is dissociated from its material end result. This is an approach to action that “stresses the urge to self-disclosure at the expense of all other factors” (Arendt 1998[1958]: 194). Arendt draws on Aristotle (*Nicomachean Ethics* 1094a 1-5) to characterize action, by this understanding, as *energeia*, in which “the end (*telos*) is not pursued but lies in the activity itself” (ibid.: 206). Though an action is invariably an intention oriented towards effecting some change in the state of the world, its self-disclosing, or self-determining, quality lies in its performance itself, independently of the achievement of its end.

Needless to say, this hews remarkably close to understandings of play that have been put forward within philosophy. Hans-Georg Gadamer, in particular, has spoken of play as a “living self-representation” of the self-movement of living beings (1986: 23). For this self-representation to occur, however, the player cannot remain firmly and exclusively tied to the ludic subject-position. Instead, her own ludic subjectivity needs to be available to her as an object of perception – which can only be the case if she is able to adopt a second, distanced perspective through which to frame a perception of her own ludic subjectivity.

Once again, the philosophy of play has anticipated this insight. Eugen Fink has spoken about the “double existence” of the player in “two dimensions” (2015[1958: 24-25), which allows her at any moment to step out of her play-role and be aware of it *as* her role. Similarly, Gadamer writes that “in the act of play I stand over against myself as an onlooker” (1986: 23).

It is hardly surprising that, in the domain of interactive art, Katja Kwastek has drawn upon the notion of play to argue that the action which constitutes the “material” of the interactive art work – in that the recipient of the work must respond to the work’s “interaction proposition” precisely by taking action (2013: 47) - “must be brought forth and experienced at the same time,” meaning that such artworks set in motion an oscillation “between absorption in the interaction and distanced (self-)reflection” (ibid.: 162). It is thanks to this constant interplay between the standpoint of absorbed engagement and that of detached, critical reflection that “one’s own actions become available as an object of reflection” (ibid.: 163).

As digital artefacts setting up an interaction proposition in the shape of the ludic subject-position, digital games follow a similar experiential structure. I have elsewhere made the case that:

...the player’s experience of a game is determined by her simultaneous inhabitation of two distinct phenomenal standpoints: a perspective internal to the gameworld, from which ludic actions are taken in a teleological orientation towards the task set by the game, and an external perspective from which the game – and the player’s own actions within it – is viewed in the aesthetic mode defined by critical distance and a disinterested, contemplative attitude. (Vella 2016: 81)

Kania complicates this further, arguing for a perspectival structure that is not twofold but threefold. By her understanding, the internal perspective is itself structured around the interplay

between two subjective situations. As I mentioned in the introduction to this paper, the first of these – the *gameplay situation* – is analogous to the idea of the ludic subject-position, being “The second – the *aesthetic situation* – “reflects over the in-game position of the self-avatar, who realises their situatedness while perceiving the gameworld” (ibid.: 69). While the term ‘aesthetic’ is somewhat problematic here, the idea of a reflexive standpoint upon the player’s own in-game situation is a necessary one. To this situation we could attribute, for example, the player’s hesitation when a guard wanders into her sights in *Thief*, as she considers who she is or wants to be in the game, and what path of action would be most concurrent with that self.

So far, this is precisely the same as our relation to the actions we perform in any of the domains of our life. We act, pre-reflectively, on the basis of our ‘I can’ within our existential situation, and we are then able to take a reflective step back to contemplate our actions and the self they disclose. What is different in the situation of digital game play, then, is that the internal perspective, with these two interrelating subjective standpoints, is itself caught in the frame of the external perspective, by which the game is viewed from the outside as a technological artefact (ibid.: 52). The player’s in-game subjectivity – both the intentional actions she takes towards the gameworld from the standpoint of the gameplay situation (or, to use the term I have employed throughout this analysis, the ludic subject-position), and her reflexive recognition of her own ludic subjectivity through her ascription of these actions to her in-game self – itself thus becomes an element of the aesthetic unity of the game as object.

## **Conclusion**

It is in this sense, then, that the conditions of experience established by digital game play allow for the possibility of an aesthetics of subjectivity, with action as its foundation. Through acting upon the gameworld from the standpoint of the ludic subject-position, the player enacts a ludic self – a self that is disclosed through the self-ascription of the actions she takes in the gameworld, emerging as the ‘who’ uniting all of the player’s actions. This self thus emerges through the player’s reflection upon her own in-game actions – but what is unique to the experiential structure of digital games is the way in which this enactment of selfhood is itself framed within the aesthetic structure of the game object.

## **Games**

THIEF: THE DARK PROJECT. Looking Glass Studios, PC, 1998.

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