ANALOG

(on *Katamari Damacy*)

SISYPHUS, FOUNDER of Corinth, father of Odysseus, founder of the Ismithian Games, is best known for a most cruel and unusual punishment, meted out to him by the Gods. He was to roll a huge stone up the mountainside, watch helplessly as it rolled back down again, and then start all over again. Nobody knows what he did that required such a punishment. Perhaps it was for revealing the designs of the Gods to mortals. Revealing the forms beyond the mere particulars of mortal life would, in topical times, be a serious crime. Or perhaps, more prosaically, it was for his habit of murdering seafarers and travelers. Topical space, where each law, each God, is bordered by zones of indifference, would surely be troubled by such a transgression of the rules of "xenia," of the gift one owes to strangers. Anne Carson: "The characteristic features of xenia, namely its basis in reciprocation and its assumption of perpetuity, seem to have

woven a texture of personal alliances that held the ancient world together." Or so it was in topical times.*

[077] IN TOPOGRAPHIC times, Sisyphus is a hero. He revels in this new world from which the Gods and their intangible forms have fled and a great industrial engine usurps their place. The task of Sisyphus becomes everyone's labor: pointless, repetitive, endless, shoulder to the wheel of fortune. There are no longer any lawless spaces. There are no gaps between topics. All of space is within the law. There are no more border zones where indifference prevails. Certainly it gets much harder to get away with murdering travelers. But in topographic times, it is time itself that is not quite so completely subordinated to rules, to ends, to purposes. There is a limit to the working day, and even within the working day not every second is called to account. Albert Camus: "I leave Sisyphus at the foot of the mountain! One always finds one's burden again. But Sisyphus teaches the higher fidelity that negates the Gods and raises rocks. He too concludes that all is well. This universe henceforth without a master seems to him neither sterile nor futile. Each atom of that stone, each mineral flake of that night-filled mountain, in itself forms a world."* The topical Sisyphus played fast and loose with the gaps of space, between the topics; the topographic Sisyphus played in the gaps of time and exploited those gaps to turn everything to account for himself alone.

[078] WHERE IS Sisyphus now? Using the analog sticks on the game controller, you move a little character who rolls a ball S R L

topical	topographic	topological
analog > digital	analog & digital	analog < digital
Homer's Odyssey	Myth of Sisyphus	Katamari Damarcy

called a Katamari. The game is called *Katamari Damacy* (see Fig. D).* The name translates roughly as "clump spirit," which might in turn translate as "analog." As the Katamari ball rolls, things stick to it. At first it is small things that stick, household items picked up off the living room floor. The ball gets bigger as things stick, and so it can pick up bigger things. Once your ball is big enough, you move out of the house and into the world. To move the ball, you twizzle the little analog joysticks. Push the sticks forward, and the character rolls the ball forward. Pull the sticks back and the character rolls the ball back. Turn left, turn right—it feels as though the variable pressure on the sticks translates into variable movements. This is analog—a relation of continuous variation. Only it isn't really. It is a digital game. The game converts the continuous movement of your thumbs on the sticks into a digital code. It turns movements into decisions—back/forwards, left/right, stop/start. An algorithm calculates the outcome of each movement. If you roll your ball over a small object, you pick it up. If you roll your ball over one that is too big, you collide with it, throwing off a few things you have already gathered. Analog spirit becomes digital code.

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[079] **ALL GAMES** are digital. Without exception. They all come down to a strict decision: out or in, offside or onside, goal or no goal. Anything else is just "play." Jesper Juul: "The affinity between computers and games is one of the ironies of human history." But not at all surprising. From the start, games were a proto-computer—machines assembled out of human motion, inanimate materials, and the occasional dubious call by the referee. Sisyphus is condemned to a useless labor which is at the same time useless play, in that it cannot bring about a decision. The rock he rolls never crosses a line. It rolls right past the notional top of the mountain and overshoots the bottom of its own momentum. It is not an algorithm because it can never end. But in *Katamari Damacy,* things are different. Rather than the rolling of the ball being entirely useless, now it is entirely purposeful. Time, like space, no longer harbors indifference. Brenda Laurel: "Even the smallest fragments of your idle time have been colonized." As you roll your ball around, making it bigger and bigger, an icon in the corner of the screen shows your progress. The icon shows your ball as a circle inside a larger one, which is the size it must grow to if you are to win this level. It grows, gradually, incrementally, but at some point—a decision. Big enough! An analog progression stops at the digital threshold.*

[080] **HERE IS** a version of the Katamari myth: You are a Prince sent down to earth by a careless King who in a moment of boredom got drunk and destroyed the heavens. The Katamari balls you roll up are offerings to him. If your ball is big enough, he uses it to replace one of the stars he

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trashed in the sky. The King then sets for the Prince the task of rolling up a bigger one. Perhaps this storyline is an allegory for the relation that holds now between the analog and the digital. The twizzling of the sticks on the controller, the rolling up of the balls on the screen, is the task demanded by gamespace—a task that gamespace can only recognize by rewarding the gamer with a score. Topology, with its endless, intricate lines—wireless, satellite, fiber optic—turns anything and everything into a meaningless smear of data. Gamespace installs itself in topology to reduce that smear to a decision, a yes, a no, a straight line, and to convey back to the gamer the result of the gamer's actions. The analog is now just a way of experiencing the digital. The decision on whether something can appear or not appear is digital. You and your character the Prince are confined to the analog, rolling from topic to topic. The King commands the digital heavens. He decides what point in the sky each ball is to occupy.

IN THE myth of Sisyphus the task is to roll the ball to the top without quite knowing where the top is. There's no mark, no point, no code. Sisyphus pushes the ball up, but it either falls short or falls over the unmarked peak and rolls back down again. In the myth of Katamari there is no such ambiguity. Each threshold is clearly marked. The analog movement of rolling the ball, continuously increasing its size, takes place within the given limits of the digital. There is an exact mark at which it flips from being too small to just the right size. The reign of topology subordinates the analog to the digital. Where once analog and dig-

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ital maintained an ambiguous and continuous—analog—relation to each other and to the world, the digital now distinguishes itself sharply from the analog, subsuming the analog difference under the digital distinction. This is a transformation not merely in forms of communication or entertainment, not even in forms of power or of topos, but a change in being itself. The digital appears, finally, to install topology in the world—except in the process it has installed the world within topology. In *Katamari Damacy,* the world is just stuff, there for the clumping. It is King Digital's decision on its name, size, and place in the heavens that gives it being.

[082] **THE SCREEN** in *Katamari Damacy* shows a clock in the corner, an old-fashioned analog clock with a sweeping hand. The game is an allegorithm of a double process—by which the analog movements of the gamer are transformed into the digital but also by which the digital decisions of the game are expressed to the gamer in a familiar analog form. Gamespace subordinates all of time and space to the digital. Paul Virilio: "Space had been measured, mapped, time has become clock time, the diversity of relief, of topography, gave way to topology."* In topographic times the clocktower showed its face to the town over which it presided; now time is blinking digits, seen anywhere and everywhere. Just check your cell phone. The hands of the analog clock turn time into movement in space, reducing it to a line that rotates on a plane. The digital clock substitutes one coded sign for another, at fixed intervals, drawing each from an abstract space where all the signs of the

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code exist outside of time. All of time becomes a series of discrete, equivalent, and interchangeable units. At each interval, time can be arrested and made to yield a number. Where the analog temporalized space, now the digital spatializes time.

[083] **TWIST** the sticks on the controller, and on the screen the Prince turns the ball. Roll the ball, and it gradually grows as it picks things up. The analog icon in the corner grows as the ball grows. One movement doubles another. The analog records, in this measuring continuum, how several movements, operating together, produce a transformation. It tracks the movement of rolling the ball, a movement that continuously transforms itself out of itself. The analog is all about relations. The digital is all about boundaries. The digital does not follow a moving line; it imposes a grid of lines that function as thresholds. The line at which the ball is deemed big enough is imposed by King Digital. In the analog, difference is a productivity in excess of itself; in the digital, distinction is a negation that comes from outside of time. Roll the ball as much as you like, but unless it reaches the size King Digital demands within the time he allows, you fail—and are subjected to his lofty disdain. This is the limit to movement that appears time and time again.

[084] **THE ANALOG** is variation along a line, a difference of more—and less. The digital is divided by a line, a distinction between either/or. Either the ball clumps enough stuff be a star or it doesn't. The analog may vary along more

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than one line at once, producing the appearance of a qualitative difference. The digital introduces a code, which may produce complex relations among its terms, but all the terms are separated by the same line of absolute distinction. All the Katamari balls that are big enough become stars, each with its own name and location, but all are points in the same heavens. In this digital cosmos, everything is of the same substance. Nothing is really qualitatively different. A cow, a car, your cousin: each has its shape and color, but in the end it's all the same, just stuff. In *Katamari Damacy* it is mostly consumer stuff, but this goes far beyond a critique of the commodity. Topology can make infinite digital distinctions. It is all just bits, and all bits are equivalent. The digital separates everything into discrete segments by imposing a universal code that allows anything to be connected to anything else—topology—but prevents anything from ever being different. The cosmos of difference is what King Digital has lost, and what he commands his gamer Prince to replace with a cosmos composed of mere distinctions.

[085] **THE ANALOG** may move backward or forward along a line, or even track movement across three or more dimensions; but only with the imposition of the digital code is it possible to cut the terms bounded by the digital line and rearrange them. Rather than an analog movement through space and time, the digital opens the possibility of jumping between points in a space outside of time in which terms are arrayed along different axes and are drawn together via the code. Rather than a continuous line moving out from a point into a three-dimensional space, one

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imagines rather a three-dimensional space of fixed points, which can be called upon by the code to make up a straight line of distinct units. Because it is digital, the game can be "saved." After you have successfully rolled a ball, you can save it. Saving takes place at the digital threshold. The digital creates a timeless space that can be saved by making all of time equivalent. It is a time without violence. What is saved does not suffer from erosion or decomposition or decay. It always comes back as the same—unless the system crashes and the digital can no longer impose its code, in which case it may never come back at all. The digital cosmos is more perfect, yet so much more fragile. It is the realm of Plato's forms made concrete and saved to disk.

[086]

AS THE Prince rolls bigger and bigger balls, he gets to play in a bigger and bigger topos. The game starts inside an apartment, then moves on to the town and finally to the world. This stepping up through bigger and bigger scales repeats the stepping up through the scales of the topical, the topographic and the topological of which the game is an allegorithm. What gives the game its charm is the seemingly ridiculous idea that a ball of household items could be a star. Even more odd: the last and largest ball replaces the smallest heavenly body—a mere moon. But this is of a piece with the ways of topology. In topological times, it is not just that the digital now operates on a planetary scale. It is that it operates across scales, connecting the infinitesimal to the gigantic. The tiniest switch of electric current can launch a cruise missile. Form is detached from scale.

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[087] **KING DIGITAL** destroyed the heavens, in a moment of boredom, in a fit of indifference. This is the danger of topology. Indifference is no longer something that lurks merely in the margins of space or time. Having been squeezed more and more to the margin of both space and time, rather than disappearing, indifference threatens to become total, pervasive, immanent. The Prince is what the Prince has achieved—a level, a number, and nothing but. Julian Stallabrass: "Emotional attachment to the game is established through labor, emerging out of the Sisyphean nature of the player's task."* For all his laid-back style, King Digital makes a terrible demand, as appalling as that made of Sisyphus by the Gods. He commands the gamer to the game, yet promises nothing but victory until defeat. The only reward is that the very time itself that the gamer commits to the task will make the task worthwhile. The digital object exists in a space that chunks it into bits, each of equivalent value. The digital subject also exists in a time that chunks it into bits, each of equivalent value. This is the price paid by the gamer to gamespace.

[088] **DIGITAL OBJECT**, digital subject—these are byproducts of a boredom that, seeking respite from nothingness, projects its lines across all space and time, turning it into a topology of commodity space and military space. This is the reckless act of creation with which *Katamari Damacy* begins—the King's destruction of the mythic heaven of the old Gods, and the project of replacing it by commanding the transformation of a human, analog movement into an airless matrix of machine code. This is the new task of Sis-

yphus. Gamespace is always and everywhere the imposition of the digital as a way of laying an invisible hand on the world—or an all-too-visible fist. Where the invisible hand opens its digits to calculate what it may gain, the invisible fist closes them to calculate what it may claim.

[089]

THE MILITARY industrial complex developed photography, radar, radio—all the lines of analog telesthesia—as a means of measuring and controlling its forces. This development reached a limit, and its forces exceeded its capacity to manage them. Digital telesthesia—starting perhaps with the SAGE computer system of the 1950s—emerged as the means of command, control, and communication. Paul Edwards: "For SAGE set the key pattern for other high-technology weapon systems, a nested set of increasingly comprehensive military enclosures for global oversight and control." The theory of the digital, and of its distinction from the analog, emerges as a byproduct of this attempt at self-control by the military industrial complex, but it transformed the complex into something else. The expansive movement of the military machine calls into being a code that can monitor and manage it. The analog begets the digital, but only produces the concept of the analog after the fact. Anthony Wilden: "Obviously, without the digital, we could not speak of the analog." Without the recognition of the ball as a putative star, it cannot be named. The military entertainment complex emerges out of the control of the analog by the digital, of the military and industrial production lines by the digital lines of command, and by the extension of the digital to all aspects of everyday life.*

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[090] WITHOUT the analog, play leaves no trace. Without the digital, play yields no score. Neither analog nor digital is play itself. But what can one say about play? Play is what has to be posited for there to be anything for either the analog or the digital to track, and yet play is an elusive concept at best. Play theorist Brian Sutton-Smith: "We all play occasionally, and we all know what play feels like. But when it comes to making theoretical statements about what play is, we fall into silliness."* Perhaps the very concept of play appears only retrospectively. Obviously, without the analog and the digital, we could not speak of play, even as play exceeds the analog line along which it is traced and the digital line across which it is measured. Via the analog, play is captured in art; via the digital, play is captured in games. The analog flattens play out into a single line, so that its movement may continue, in reduced form, into another space. The play of the fingers on the controller is recorded via the graphic art on the screen. The analog enables a movement to communicate from topos to topos. The digital codifies play, translating it onto the very different space of number and logic—of code.

[091] WHICH came first, play or game? Which came first, moves or rules? Sisyphus was interested in both navigation and commerce, at a time when both still had a tenuous map of the spaces through which they plied their ships and their trade. The rules emerged out of the moves. Play produced what, after the fact, could be marked a transgression. Sisyphus transgressed—either by killing another traveler or perhaps by seeking to know the rules of the Gods in ad-

vance. His punishment is an eternal move which can never give rise to a game, which yields no end, no win, no recognition. Now the terms are reversed. Play does not inspire the game; the game animates play. Behind the subordination of the analog to the digital is the subordination of play to game. Tracing the line of the move, the play, matters less than the score it yields, the threshold it crosses. King Digital makes quite the opposite demand of the Prince to that made of Sisyphus by the Gods. The eternal task is no longer the move that can never cross the finish line, it is the move that can do nothing but yield a measure, a score, a number, a rank. Rather than play that can never end, it is the game that stops, and starts, and stops, and starts, and stops, and starts—forever.

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THE TERMS analog and digital are invariably treated as if the relation between them was itself a digital one. This is a sign of the times. These terms are to be treated as discrete and absolutely distinct, a code with two absolute terms. Any ambiguity or play that might threaten to deconstruct the distinction is to be resolved with distinctions of an ever-finer resolution. This in turn leads to ever more complexity in managing the proliferation of bits, which in turn requires ever more powerful data-crunching engines. The military entertainment complex discovers experimentally that if the relation between the analog and the digital is digital, an absolute boundary, then the domain of the digital can be perfected as one of purely relative and numerical value—a gamespace. This digital realm can then become the locus for command and control of the analog remain-

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der, which it treats as a mere residue. The lines of the digital can be inscribed ever more extensively and intensively on the world, to the point where a digital heaven is realized, and the analog seems to vanish, and play becomes a mere effect of the digital. The Analog Prince only rolls the ball, steering this way and that, because King Digital commands it. And why does he command it? To make the universe over, to recreate being itself, as an effect of the digital as a command.

[093] THE DIGITAL, once installed in the world, defeats the logic of the storyline within which the digital serves to make the analog manifest, but does not control it. The novel, which from James Fenimore Cooper to William Gibson narrates the rise and fall of the military industrial complex, uses the codes of language to follow a series of movements beyond language's ken. The digital produces not just new kinds of media but a whole new topos, in which the role and rule of the line is reversed. One no longer follows a line to find where it divides; one divides with a line to make a distinction. Storyline becomes gamespace. The storyline that inaugurates the world of *Katamari Damacy* is not a creation myth but a destruction myth. The storyline's last task is to erase itself and initiate the new conditions of difference for gamespace. This task—like that of Sisyphus—must be endlessly repeated.

[094] THE DIGITAL, once installed in the world, accelerates the potential for change, but for change always of the same type. The Analog Prince can roll up many things to make his S R L

Katamari balls, but any difference among these objects is lost. All that matters is their aggregation, glommed together as more and more of the same. Likewise, the military entertainment complex grids the earth so it may gird it, making it over in the image of its digital rulings, making it amenable to the imposition of a code of unambiguous stratifications. Distinctions proliferate wildly, beyond the simple dichotomies of the topographic. But these distinctions are always and everywhere exchangeable equivalents within the logistics of commodity space and military space. Roll up more and more balls, populate the heavens with a veritable Milky Way, but each is distinct from the other always in the same way. Drew Milne: "What once ventured forth as processual *mathesis* becomes the reified calculus of administration, a logic of numerical sameness screened from nihilistic relativity."*

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THE DIGITAL emerges as military, but achieves acceptance as entertainment. J. C. Herz: "Most of the technology that's now used in videogames had its origins in military research. When you trace back the patents, it's virtually impossible to find an arcade or console component that evolved in the absence of a Defense Department grant."* The military versions of digital telesthesia make the world over as a military space, but the digital does not yet become a culture other than for a small band of specialists tied to the military industrial complex. The coming together of the digital and the entertainment commodity inscribes the digital not just in space and time but in cultural perceptions of space and time.

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[096] THE DIGITAL game is a very particular commodity. It is not just the usual store of entertaining representations transferred from analog and mechanical reproduction to a digital form. Rather, it makes the digital itself into entertainment. The digital always addresses its subject as a gamer, as a calculator and competitor who has value only in relation to a mark, a score. The digital inscribes gamespace within the subject itself. Gamespace makes topology seem like it could have, if not meaning, then at least an algorithm. Gamespace makes the uploading of the world into topology seem natural and inevitable. Yet at the same time it offers the digital in its purest form, where the transformation of analog into digital is always consistent, repeatable—in a word, fair. While the game makes the digital seem inescapable, its ambiguity is in the way it also makes the digital seem like it could be an atopian realm. The game naturalizes gamespace, and yet calls it to account as inadequate in its own terms.

[097] THE DIGITAL makes the analog itself appear as something distinct. The digital rules a line between analog and digital, making a slippery difference into a clear distinction. But perhaps, having made the distinction appear, the perspective can be reversed, and the digital can be perceived from the point of view of its analog residue. What might emerge is rather the play between the analog and the digital. The digital might become again the threshold that turns a movement into a break, rather than imposing the break on movement. The gamer as theorist might look toward a transformation of what matters within gamespace, a style of play that edges away from agon, distinction, decision,

the fatal either/or. Because after a while it's just no fun. Johan Huizinga: "And undoubtedly the predominance of the agonistic principle does lead to decadence in the long run."*

[098] "I DON'T play games," says Keita Takahashi, designer of *Katamari Damacy*. He is a sculptor. "I am happy going through this game phase of my life, where I can get paid and eat."* As the digital subsumes the analog, so too the designer subsumes the artist. The longing to return to art as an analog pursuit—the trace of the hand in clay or paint—may be in vain. But the artist within the designer may still inscribe the analog in the heart of the digital as something irreducible. The artist is now the insider who finds a new style of trifling within the game. The artist as outsider is dead, for there is no outside from which to signal back across the border. The limit to the game has to be found from within. The Analog Prince is the very figure of the artist in topological times, who plays gamely, twisting this way and that on the controls, trying to get out into bigger and bigger spaces, but always unable to escape gamespace.

[099] KING Digital may rule in *Katamari Damacy,* but it is his subordinate, the Prince, upon whose labors this digital topology is built. Not the least of the charms of Takahashi's work is this foregrounding of the labor the gamer performs. It is no longer labor as punishment for defying the Gods. It is no longer absurd labor, performed consciously and joyously in spite of the absence of the Gods. Topology installs, in place of the absent Gods, King Digital, and his

demand that, while labor is punishingly hard and absurdly pointless, it nevertheless has its measure. Sisyphus, the Analog Prince, labors to roll up everything in this world-made-over under the mark of the digital and offer it up for appraisal. What the digital has always wanted—to be the form of all forms—has come to pass. Our punishment for attempting to steal those forms for our own purposes is to labor endlessly to repeat them. *Katamari Damacy* merely extends the atopia of the digital to the heavens themselves.

[100] WHEN the Prince succeeds in completing a level, *Katamari Damacy* rewards the gamer with a cut scene, a short animation about the Hoshino family. They are cute but rather chunky, as if the digital had already snapped them to its grid. The Hoshinos watch their astronaut father Tomio as he begins his voyage to the Moon. Tomio's mission is canceled because there is no Moon to which to travel. The last mission of the game, "Make the Moon," requires rolling up most of the objects on Earth, including the Hoshino family and their father's rocket. Once the Prince has restored the Moon to the King's satisfaction, a final cut scene shows the Hoshino family—mother and father, boy and girl—on the new Moon. Having completed the reconstruction of the cosmos as one of digital distinctions rather than analog differences, a digital people find themselves already there, already inhabiting the Moon to which Tomio was to travel. There is no need to travel—that great pastime of topographic times. Now there's no place to go that is not subject to the same code. The reign of King Digital, the King of All Cosmos, is complete.*

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