

Star Ocean: Till the End of Time; **a Nietzschean approach to games**

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INTRODUCTION

Star Ocean: Till the End of Time is the third chapter of the JRPG (Japanese Role Playing Game) series *Star Ocean*, developed by tri-Ace and published by Square Enix in 2004 worldwide. Its narrative is sci-fi with few fantasy elements and it is set in the future (A.D 2858) in our own universe. It specifically revolves around the final discovery by the playable characters that our world is itself a huge MMORPG (Massive Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Game), a videogame and that we are all just programs that resemble only in appearance their humanoid developers and users. The objective of the game is to save the universe from its deletion by God, who is just the main programmer of our world-simulation.

With this research, I intend to demonstrate how *Star Ocean: Till the End of Time* attempts a self-reflection on video game media from a Nietzschean perspective.

The question whether such approach is coincidental or intentionally developed by tri-Ace is left out from this study. In fact, there is not enough evidence to support one option over the other.

However, it is quite probable that this specific product reflects also a tendency of video game media and especially frequently recurring within Japanese role-playing games: the theme of deicide, expressed through both gameplay and narrative, and direct references to Nietzsche's philosophy. Regarding deicide, it is present as final objective in several JRPGs, as such as *Final Fantasy VI*, *Final Fantasy Tactics*, *Final Fantasy X*, *Xenogears* and *Breath of Fire 3*. For what concerns Nietzsche, his renowned sentence 'God is dead' is uttered by Lightning in *Final Fantasy XIII*: Lightning returns in the final battle. *Xenogears* expressively refers to Nietzsche's conception; each of the three episodes of the *Xenosaga's* series is titled after a text of the German philosopher. In *Metal Gear Solid V: The Phantom Pain* a mission opens with the Nietzschean quote, 'There are no facts. There are only interpretations'. Finally, *Nier: Automata* features a character reflecting on Nietzsche's personality and on one of his argument against the State.

Firstly, I will analyze how Nietzsche's critique of Platonic-Christian distinction between true world and false world is applied by *Star Ocean: Till the End of Time* to the distinction between real and virtual world. In fact, this game overturns the classic sci-fi version of the Plato's Myth of the Cave - utterly embodied by the *Matrix* trilogy through

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the entanglement between gameplay and narrative since the very outset. In this regard, I will focus my analysis specifically on the tutorial, which corresponds to a holographic videogame played by two of the main played characters far before learning the truth about the universe they live in.

I will then highlight how this approach suggests a positive acceptance of our possible status of simulacra in accordance to Deleuze's point of view and in contrast to Baudrillard's conception; all in a world where videogame and reality are fused.

Secondly, I will determine how *Star Ocean: Till the End of Time* embodies the same form of atheism supported by Nietzsche in his most symbolic statement 'God is death' from *The Gay Science* (1992). To do so:

- I will display all the instances in which the belief in God and religion in general appears in this game, in order to prove how recurrent this topic is along the entire game - both through the gameplay and the narrative.
- Afterwards, I will analyze the last section of the game, where you have to defeat the programmer of our universe (God) before he cancels it. In this specific instance, the player joins fight with a team of playable characters from very variegated social, technological and cultural backgrounds. Put apart their previous divergences (which relate to the political setting of this world), these characters find themselves fighting against a common enemy for their independence and for the survival of the universe they live in, despite its very virtual nature.

This analysis of the final boss fight is necessary to demonstrate how this third chapter of Star Ocean series embodies the same emancipatory, practical and not ontological notion of radical atheism supported by Nietzsche (and also by existential philosopher as such as Camus). In other words, did God exist and did he create us, we would not have any obligation to bow before him.

In the conclusion, I will link these two 'Nietzschian answers' given by *till the End of* to the intertwined questions 'What if God existed?' and 'What if we were all computer programmed entities?' to the relation toward technology and A.I. that this same game suggests us to have. In fact, this game does not just reinforce emancipation toward superior entities and acceptance of our condition of unsubstantial beings. It also warns us against acting as superb and careless divinities toward our own 'technological creations' (particularly Artificial Intelligence). Therefore, this final part will refer to Latour's article *Love Your Monsters: Why We Must Care for Our Technologies As We Do Our Children* (2011), which underlines how technology (and then media as such as computer games) is not only a tool in our hand, not requiring any care from us, but the opposite of it.

This work contributes to DIGRA for two main reasons. The first is because it illustrates the emancipatory potential game can assume by developing them in the same direction of products as such as *Star Ocean: Till the End of Time*. Moreover, it highlights how computer games can also be a means to reflect on the relation we should have with technology as a whole, which is not of fear, hilarity or worship but of care and caution.

OPTIONAL BIO

My main formation is primarily in philosophy (mostly continental) and sociology (with particular reference to the French context); and secondarily in psychology (with particular reference to Jung, Hillman, Lacan and Freud). My PhD thesis focuses on how technology affects us and frame our thought within a bidirectional relationship.

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