

# On Eating Without a Face in *Arctic Eggs* (2024)

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The first vegan product we get to fry in *Arctic Eggs* (The Water Museum 2024) is a cigarette. I did not hope for a vegan run; the game is called *Arctic Eggs*, and it is a dystopian frying sim set in the late 21<sup>st</sup> century. Yet I flinch when asked to fry a live cockroach; flinch because I feel for the cockroach, not because I am disgusted by it. Later, I come back and fry two of them at the same time.

The game, as most texts of Western cultures, could be described as carnist (Potts 2016). One of the main sources of pleasure is overcoming the material resistance (Janik 2022) of a frying pan along with its various contents, from eggs, through fish and sausages, to cockroaches, cigarettes, shot glasses with ice, and bullets. Technically, the game would not have to employ non-human animals as obstacles, as tools (Jański 2016); would not have to govern their bodies and use them for profit (Shukin 2009); would not have to represent them as generic, powerless, and even though killable and ephemeral – abundant (Imbierowicz 2022, Van Ooijen 2018). Technically, we could have been frying pancakes.

*Arctic Eggs'* carnism, however, goes beyond repeating and reinforcing the mainstream carnism of North America and Europe. In its world, a colony set in the Arctic in a rather distant future, the fusion between people and machines has reached the science-fiction level. Human body parts are being replaced with electronic ones. Old age, illness, and disobedience can be mitigated with replacements. All prisoners had their heads replaced. With limbs goes memory, identity, the sense of taste. The existence of transhuman subjects (Braidotti 2013) – from people with minor enhancements until the Saint of six stomachs, consisting mostly of body parts in jars – puts the carnism of the game and the anthropocentric treatment of non-human animals in a different perspective.

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In this paper, I am employing the tools of posthumanism, transhumanism, and animal studies (besides the ones mentioned above, Wolfe 2010, Haraway 2008, Singer 2015, and others) as well as, minorly, an auto-ethnography of a pro-animal-studies scholar playing a game about frying animal bodies, their excretions, and multiple other meaningful artifacts. I am doing so to explore the animal treatment in Arctic Eggs as an interesting example of a borderline animal use which, on the one hand, is clearly abusive as most animal uses, but on the other hand, is interestingly intertwined with questions of identity and ability of the subjects frying and consuming. “The face is what forbids us to kill,” wrote Emmanuel Lévinas (1985, 86). Patryk Szaj (2016) argues that the face Lévinas described – a sign of an irreducible Other that calls for non-violence, respect, care, dialogue – might belong to a non-human animal as much as to a human one. And yet the perception of the face of the Other is subjective; rooted in the person perceiving it. In Arctic Eggs, we never see the avatar; we do not get to know what is *left of them*. Can they perceive a face of the Other without having one? Can we face another without facing ourselves? Can I fry eggs on top of Mount Everest? Try me.

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