

**Alex:** I want to say thank you to the organizers for inviting me to this chat, and for all of you for coming along. I'm very much looking forward to your questions and discussing issues we all care very much about. I have not been to China but it is amazing that the life and story of a pig in the city of Foshan was able to reach me via social media and inspire me on a journey that led to my book, *The Pig in Thin Air*. It shows how connected we all are and can be.

简艺: Thanks for agreeing to join us tonight for this 16th edition of Global Dialogue. You're the first scholar/writer/activist we have had.

**Alex:** Okay, thank you. So, let me introduce myself. I live in the north of England, although I was born in and grew up in London, UK. I grew up in a very normal British family. I consider myself an advocate for animals, a writer and a scholar. My main passion is to try and help change our relationship with other species, and to secure a sustainable planet for all.

For my early life, I was sensitive to animals but did not connect them with food. I was similar to most people around the world: I was not taught nor educated about where our food comes from, and who the animal was before it died. I grew up, however, with a strong sense of wanting to end injustice, and of being a writer, and thinking—hoping—writing could change the world.

I'm now a university professor at the University of Sunderland. I teach both journalism and creative writing, with an expertise in environmental writing and writing about human-animal issues. I have published articles and essays on these issues, and I have a new book coming out in 2017 on Environmental Journalism and Writing. I took on the task of writing this book as a piece of activism, to ensure that our writers and journalists of the future take animal activism and environmental issues together, seriously. As you know intensive animal agriculture is responsible for at least 14.5% of all greenhouse gas emissions, but probably it is a much larger figure.

I was a vegetarian since 1993, when I was disgusted by the stories of whale killing by European countries such as Norway, and Iceland. However, I didn't know anything about the dairy industry, so I just gave up meat. I worked for many different organizations, but in 1999 began to work for charitable organizations in environmental campaigning and poverty reduction. It was not until 2010 when I became vegan when I began to make connections between animal agriculture and our environment. Much of my activism was stimulated by finding out about animals via social media, and then through my scholarship and research.

何以为食观众: Could you talk about what else you do in addition to writing?

**Alex:** Ok. My main vocation is as a writer. My vocation, as I see it, is to synthesize knowledge and experience into new ideas and forms to help make our work more effective, and our societies more just and compassionate. Out of all the above action and thinking I wrote my book, *The Pig in Thin Air*, which is published with the American publisher Lantern Books, and which uses my own personal story to tell a tale about the role of the bodily encounter

in animal activism. I am currently doing many talks and discussions about this book. My next project is to look more closely at the role that farmed animal sanctuaries play in changing our perspectives and bodily relationships with other animals.

In 2014 I was awarded a Winston Churchill Travel Fellowship to go and explore the best forms of farmed animal protection in Canada and the United States, to bring that knowledge back to the United Kingdom. I had already been working with marine mammal protection organizations in the UK to help educate young people in animal protection and awareness. My aim was to come closer to the bodies of animals so as to understand them better. But, importantly, also to understand the ways in which bodily encounter (human body to nonhuman body; and human bodies together in collective witnessing) are essential, and in my view, perhaps the most important form of animal activism.

I am a director of the UK based Vegan Lifestyle Association. We are aiming to bring together all of the UK's vegans with all those people who may be vegetarian or even still eating meat, but who want to know more about veganism and live a healthier, more ethical lifestyle. We are "ethical vegans" in that we are doing this for the animals, but we are also "inclusive" as an ethical position. I am also on the Academic Committee of the UK's Vegan Society. I hope that is enough information to begin with?

何以为食观众: How did the idea of writing *The Pig in Thin Air* come about?

**Alex:** the idea for the book came from seeing an image of a pig jumping from the back of a truck on the way to slaughter. I had been thinking a lot about the bodies of animals, and how we hardly ever see them alive but only as products. But when an animal jumps and escapes from its fate, she (the animal) changes HER relationship to US by becoming an individual. I wanted to explore that changing relationship.

I wanted to write a book about that relationship, and to come close to the bodies of other animals to discover more about our relationships. Also, as a writer, the best way to think is to write about it!

何以为食观众: I am really curious about what were you thinking when you saw that picture (of the pig) for the first time? Do you think animals can think in a similar way like us?

**Alex:** Thanks. Curiosity is a really important characteristic, and I teach it to all my students to make their writing better! When I saw that picture for the first time, yes, I thought that the pig was experiencing freedom for the first time, and I wondered how it felt for her. The picture was so still, with the Chinese city in the background, but much hidden, too—such as the threat of climate change. Research tells us that animals feel many similar instinctive emotions as we do: fear, joy, shame . . .

Pigs and other animals do not have the same higher brain structures as we do

that allows for our complex language, but we have many similar brain structures that allow for social behavior, vocal learning, empathy, grief, and fears.

**Alex:** What do people think when they see animals, especially those who escape for freedom?

何以为食观众: I would think they are just like humans!

**Alex:** Yes! They certainly have every desire for life we do.

何以为食观众: I thought that these animals are eager for freedom and don't want to be slaughtered.

**Alex:** Thanks. Yes I agree, these animals suffer a lot in the conditions of the farms/factories, and they do naturally want freedom . . . especially freedom to move their bodies, as we also crave freedom to move our bodies.

简艺: Can you tell us a little more about what you conclude in your book, *The Pig in the Thin Air*? What are the main points that you put forward and how have people responded to them during your discussions and talks in the UK and abroad?

**Alex:** My main conclusion and lesson for activism of any kind (not just animal activism) and indeed a lesson for life, is that "all change is bodily change."

简艺: When I saw the picture of the pig in thin air, I thought she would gain temporary freedom (of course, at least she got that freedom). However, what follows was the inevitable fate of being slaughtered because the fact was she had nowhere to go in the hostile human world.

**Alex:** You also asked about the response to the book. The response has been very positive, and especially from people who are not vegan or animal activists. Because the book is a mix of personal memoir and research, as well as arguing a point, people feel they are being invited to share a story, rather than being lectured at.

简艺: Most people believe a pig would eventually end up on the dinner table.

**Alex:** Yes, in most cases the animal is rounded up and put back on the truck. In this lucky instance, she was adopted by the police as a mascot. What I mean is that we are bodily beings, and we often forget that if we want to change our world around us, then it begins with how we interact with the world through our bodies. When we, as activists, writers or academics, when we are arguing or making our points, if we want others to change, we must not only change their minds, but change how they feel (about themselves) in their bodies. Think about trying to convince a meat-eater to give up meat, or even telling a bad sleeper to sleep better!

何以为食观众: At this stage, what we can do is set an example for friends around us . . . hopefully we can reduce animal cruelty by being vegetarian.

**Alex:** Yes, being a model for others is very important, but should also go beyond what we eat to how we talk and refer to others (all others, not just animals). Animals should always be a “who” not a “what”—and we should always ask not “what can we do for them” but we should ask animals directly “what are YOU going through?”

**Alex:** My response to the picture is that the pig has gained a moment of freedom but eventually she would end up in a slaughterhouse, because she can escape to nowhere—all around her there are hostile humans who equal pig to pork.

何以为食观众: Do you think that animal factories are built so far away from people’s sight that we lose (bodily) contact with them, and we become more numb with the body on our plate? After all, we wouldn’t think about eating our pet.

**Alex:** Yes, slaughterhouses have been moved out of city centers, or hidden behind blank walls, so we do not see the animals. It used to be very different of course, when slaughterhouses were in the city centers (in the US and UK). We have lost complete contact with the living body of the animal, but there is more, too. It is not only any contact, but also “moral attention” we need to pay to the animal. This is philosopher, Lori Gruen’s, term for empathy. And we have been very well educated to see some animals as pets, and some as food. There is a huge amount of social and economic energy put into keeping things this way.

何以为食观众: Asia, as well as China, is a large region for pork consumption. In the recent earthquake in Japan, a rescued pig was quickly sent to the slaughterhouse. Mercy for Animals reported that the social issues arising from pork consumption need long-term studies and continuous discussions.

**Alex:** Yes, China produces over half of the world's pork consumption, and is moving more towards the intensive agricultural model of the US. Mercy for Animals is correct that we need to really explore the social issues around pork consumption, and also we need to look at the cultural identity of eating pork (and other meats). Much meat consumption is considered masculine, or to be of important for class—in the reverse, pork is not allowed for Muslims or Jews. What we eat is a cultural issue. If the culture changes the reward structure for eating animals, we would then stop eating them (as long as we found other, better rewards). This is how brain chemistry works too.

何以为食观众: Could you tell me more on the relationship between human body and animal welfare?

**Alex:** The human body is the place where our society and culture is formed. What we feel disgusting or joyful, fearful or full of love, in fact shapes not only

our personal lives but also our public spaces and laws. This is true for how we shape animal welfare laws and practices too. If as a country or as a human species we were to always see how animals are treated within factory farms, we would be disgusted, and this is a bodily, felt response, and that disgust would change what is acceptable. This has happened, for example, in changing laws about “live animal exports” from one country to another.

If you want, I can talk about the writing of the book? The book took me six months to write, and three more months to edit with the help of the publisher. I did not write the book in one line, but wrote sections of the book in pieces, and then “knitted” it all together at the end. It took about four drafts of getting the pieces in the right order. The book is a mix of academic style, personal style and creativity. It was very enjoyable to write, and the personal story is, I think, really important to help make more scholarly, activist argument more palatable for more people—that is, for it to be “digested” by both mind and body!

何以为食观众: I couldn't agree more on the “both mind and body,” we need to balance our mind and body!

**Alex:** Thanks! Also, during the writing of the book my mother died (passed away). Writing the book and having it published was also an opportunity to write about my childhood and to recognize how hard my mother worked for myself and my sister. She always put food on our plates, even if that food was meat. That is: food, love and family are so closely connected. We must respect that as activists and writers.

何以为食观众: So sorry to hear that. But, yes, you are right. We should never lose the core spirit of respecting every single being and holding love dear.

何以为食观众: Has the book, *The Pig in Thin Air*, brought you any changes in life?

**Alex:** *The Pig in Thin Air* has brought me much closer to the pig as a species, and it has allowed me to tell my story of personal growth as an activist. It has helped me become clearer about my vocation as a writer, and in a way has helped me to select the subject to write about with more confidence and certainty. I have always, as a creative writer, been interested in many things—often too many things!—and when working on a book you need to be focused. The book has also brought me into contact with many very wonderful people and given me lots of opportunity to show people that personal stories are central to effective advocacy

何以为食观众: I want to buy your book. Is there a Chinese version or bilingual in Chinese and English?

**Alex:** I'm afraid there is no Chinese translation yet. But I will ask my publisher, and I will also ask a student of mine who speaks Chinese to translate some of it and to share this.

何以为食观众: In 2010, I read from the Chinese media that slaughterhouses in the U.S. use spray guns to blow off the brains in pigs. Subsequently the workers in the slaughterhouses contracted a strange disease and died. It was suspected that a poisonous element in the air was the cause. Separately, female workers in Australian slaughterhouses killed their boyfriends under mysterious circumstances. My point is whether we should collect these stories for the reference of meat eaters. Perhaps they prove the point that animal spirits have come back to life to haunt those who killed them. Is there a way to prove this in western science?

**Alex:** I do not know if Western science can provide answers to these stories, but there is evidence that people who are cruel to animals, correlates to people also being cruel to other human beings. In both Gail Eisnitz's book, *Slaughterhouse*, and Timothy Pachirat's book, *Every 12 Seconds*, there is lots of evidence of the very brutal conditions, for the humans too, of working in animal slaughter. I do think it is a good thing to collect all of this evidence, yes, but I am unsure if these stories are the best ones to convince meat eaters to stop eating meat. Again, it is “out of sight out of mind” and stories need to be “felt” within the body as well as the mind for them to be effective.

何以为食观众: Alex, did you mention in your book any practical ways to change people's attitudes and behaviors towards animals?

**Alex:** Yes, there are practical ways to change people's attitudes and behaviors, and I am glad you have used those two words, “attitudes” and “behaviors.” In the book, I took part in and talked about activities to bring people closer to the actual animal body, and while it is still alive too . . . so one key practical thing to do is to create more sanctuaries for farmed animals where they can live safely, and then to bring our friends and family to interact with those animals, to see they are enjoying life and living with (and worthy of respect).

In the book I also talk about “putting our bodies on the front line” of activism and being model advocates and we need to do this by “embodying activism”—so, for example, I did a 45 mile / 66 kilometer run from the factory farm to the slaughterhouse, following the lines taken by the trucks. I did this in Toronto, Canada. I did this to “embody” the experience of the animals. It was a powerful form of activism.

(Thanks for the questions.) Just to finish responding to Mr. Shi, it is important that we note that changing people's behaviors is in fact easier than changing their attitudes, and that to change the behavior—for example, through legislation—then leads more easily to attitude change. This is really important when thinking about our approaches—so we get people to try vegan meals, rather than asking them to “become vegan” in their identities.

何以为食观众: Hi Alex, have you ever done any research on the minds of those people working in slaughterhouses? What kind of people are they usually?

**Alex:** I have not done this work on the minds of people who work in slaughterhouses, but Gail Eisnitz did this, as have others, such as Tim Pachirat, who went undercover in a slaughterhouse. The people are very often low paid, low educated, and in the U.S. they are often illegal immigrants and they are desperate for jobs. They are not always men, either, but sometimes women.

They perform very hard tasks, and they are often injured. Many slaughterhouses have over 100% turnover in a year in some tasks (that is, every person who works there leaves in a year). In Pachirat's book, the people who work in slaughter talk about the “shooter”—the person who administers the bolt gun shot to the head of the animal—as the actual killer. They don't see themselves as killers, only this one person out of say 200 or 300. They all do not want that job. They all say that one job will drive you crazy and violent. This is from the people who work there.

**何以为食观众:** I wonder what's the percentage of vegan/vegetarian in UK and the trend.

**Alex:** At the moment it is around 8-10% vegetarian, with around 0.5% vegan, at the most. But in the last few years many, many more people are trying vegan diets. We have Veganuary, which is a campaign where people give up all animal products for the month of January. And there are many more restaurants now serving more vegetarian and vegan options. It really has been noticeable how much more interest there is in vegan meals and vegan ethics

**何以为食观众:** Great! I want to share with you a little bit about myself. I started trying vegetarian meals without any idea of being an animal advocate or something, and I did not think much about the moral questions. But I feel good on a vegetarian diet and never feel bad for not having meat. So I think it's really good to give it a try. We can feel the good changes on ourselves!

**Alex:** That's great! It's true, the behavior can change before the attitude—and of course they are connected! I notice how you talk about how you “felt” and how “good” it felt, showing these are bodily responses to your behaviors . . . Great that you did this!

**简艺:** Wow, phew, there's a lot to digest. Really very inspirational, Alex Lockwood what you've been doing. Many thanks!

**Alex:** Thanks, I'm really pleased to be a part of this dialogue.

**何以为食观众:** Thanks Alex, one more question, do you know if any method is taken to lessen the pain of dying for animals before the shooters shoot them?

**Alex:** Hi, unfortunately the shooter IS the method of lessening the pain (it is

meant to stun them before they have their throats cut). In Halal and other religious forms of slaughter, they don't even have this.

何以为食观众: You said your aim was to come closer to the bodies of animals so as to understand them better. I think “bodily encounter” is a really creative and interesting perspective. Could you give us a more detailed description on the “bodily encounter” or what have you achieved on this perspective? Thanks!

**Alex:** Thanks. Yes, of course. The “bodily encounter” is a close felt and visceral experience that can happen in any area of life, not just activism. If we look at how people who suffer from trauma are now being treated, this is also with “bodily encounter”—that is, not through medication, but through things like massage and eye movement therapy, through bodily therapies.

**Alex:** In activism, “bodily encounter” means being able to make ourselves vulnerable to what might happen to us, so that we can better experience and understand what is happening to others. The way we experience this vulnerability in others most fully is by coming very close to their actual bodies, and seeing THEIR vulnerability. So, for example, witnessing the pigs in trucks moments before they go into the slaughterhouse (or any animal of course). When you see their faces, look into their eyes up close, you see their vulnerability, and you “feel” their powerlessness and shame, too. I know this sounds strange, but when I looked into the eyes of pigs on the way to slaughter, many looked “ashamed”—perhaps that is anthropomorphism, or perhaps it is understanding they are too like us, feeling ashamed when powerless.

何以为食观众: It's always hard for me to describe their emotions when I look into their (the animals on the market) eyes, but the “ashamed” seems to be the very word that I have been searching for. Thanks, Alex.

**Alex:** It is very sad.

何以为食观众: Yes, a line in a movie occurred to me: “I'm sorry for my birth and existence.”

何以为食观众: In western countries, such as Australia, many slaughterhouses recruit Chinese students to work there. Does this happen in the UK? If so, how should we explain the issues to these Chinese students who are keen to get a job, albeit in a slaughterhouse, that comes with occupational hazards?

**Alex:** As a university professor I have seen a massive increase in Chinese students in the UK. Here, where I live in Newcastle, we have a very large population of Chinese students, with our own “Chinatown” in the city.

简艺: I believe many of us today would like to stay in touch with you and further explore the topics you elaborated on today. I believe it would be really



good if we set up a special column for you on our *What's For Dinner* social media platform here on WeChat to share some of your essays, articles, etc. I think many will benefit from reading them and deepen their understanding of the issues we all are interested in.

By the way, participants today were all recruited through our *What's For Dinner* network and some of our articles are very well read and spread.

**Alex:** I do not know the figures on students working in slaughterhouses, although I do know they work in other agricultural areas, such as egg farming and along the coasts. Explaining these issues to your Chinese students would, I think, be about first listening to their experiences and relations with animals, and asking them to begin to consider animals with “moral attention” and to begin to feel with their bodies about how animals feel. This goes back to the cultural questions around eating animals and how we treat them. There are many vegetarian and vegan societies in universities, and I would suggest there being a connection between these societies and the Chinese student societies, as a start.

简艺: And you certainly can inspire a lot of people, including but not only limited to activists.

**Alex:** Thank you, I would be very happy to continue the dialogue and share information and action from here in the UK and the US around these issues, and also to learn from you and your networks.

简艺: Yes, that would be wonderful!

何以为食观众: Thank you so much. I hope we hear more from you soon (whether it's your articles, essay etc.), and we are looking forward to the Chinese version of the book! I am sure we would gain a lot of inspiration from you!

**Alex:** Thank you to everyone who engaged and who listened. Thanks for the invite!

简艺: There's so much more to talk about it, and we WILL follow up with you about perhaps having a Alex Lockwood column or other ways to keep this dialogue going and really help activism to grow in this country and around the globe.

As we all know, China is only going to consume a greater portion of meat produced in the world with our population and pace of development.

**Alex:** I look forward to it!

简艺: But relatively, our activism and our civil society in general are still at their infancy.

**Alex:** Yes, in particular the consumption of pork is set to double or triple in the next 30 years, but that is completely unsustainable for the planet. Anything we

can do to work together on these issues is welcome!

简艺: There's a lot to do.

何以为食观众: To reduce pain, maybe we can euthanize the animals before slaughtering them.

**Alex:** That would be a good welfare step, but the industry will not do that as it is too expensive. The animals need to be awake and alive so they can move into the slaughterhouse.

Thanks to all the volunteers and translators!

何以为食观众: Thank you Alex and thank you Jian and all the volunteers tonight. It feels good to see the growing interest in all the topics discussed here. Thanks!

何以为食观众: Thanks for your insight. I look forward to hearing more from you in the near future. I do go to Vegan Society events in London from time to time. Perhaps I will bump into you one of these days.

**Alex:** Thanks, hope to see you there some time! (I have an article on the Vegan Society blog this week, too on just this subject: <https://www.vegansociety.com/whats-new/blog/importance-bodily-encounters-animal-activism>).

简艺: Thank you, Alex. Have a great day and feel free to hang out around here too!

**Alex:** Thanks. I have to go now, but speak to you all again soon I hope. Bye!