

BA Festival of Science in Norwich, 2006
The x-change, Tuesday 5th September



Panellists:

- **Dr Diana Bell**, University of East Anglia
- **Dr David Dickson**, Science and Development Network
- **Professor Chris French**, Goldsmiths College, London
- **Professor Ludmilla Jordanova**, President of the BA's History of Science section, King's College London
- **Tony Juniper**, Friends of the Earth
- **Dr Tim Lenton**, the BA's Charles Lyell Award lecturer, University of East Anglia
- **Dr Rupert Sheldrake**, Biologist and Author

Host: **Quentin Cooper**

Tuesday's night x-change event at the BA Festival of Science saw the panel and the audience engage in the liveliest and most interactive discussion of the week. With speakers covering topics ranging from bird flu to climate change to the portraits of scientists, attendees got not only to hear about some of the hot topics of the Festival, but also to challenge the scientists and to ask their most pressing questions about scientific issues that touch us all.

Quentin kicked off the evening with conservation biologist Diana Bell, who revealed that her group has discovered that the H5N1 virus, so called bird flu, can infect and kill a number of other animals, such as tigers, leopards, cats, rats and primates, as well as over 85% of birds. The potential for this virus to spread has been severely underestimated, and only increased monitoring of H5N1 cases in all mammals all over the world will be able to slow the spread of this deadly disease.

Next up was David Dickson, director of the Science and Development Network, a London-based information service. He tackled the question *Can Science Feed Africa?* Unfortunately, the answer appeared to be no, due to current agricultural policies, world trade, intellectual property issues and climate change, but Dr Dickson claims that there are things that science can do to help. We need to return to square one, with increased funding to the universities for development of scientists and science journalists, as well as political support.

After a visual demonstration of the top ten scientists according to the public, most of whom were not actually scientists, nor even human, Ludmilla Jordanova, BA History of Science President and Trustee of the National Portrait Gallery described the changing attitudes towards the way that scientists are portrayed in art. No longer is the scientist revered as a demi-god with paintings and sculptures for the public to idolise. However, portraiture can increase the status and visibility of today's scientists, and even celebrity scientists or satirical images can be good for the promotion of scientists in society.

The BA Charles Lyell Award lecturer Tim Lenton initiated the most heated discussion of the evening with the hottest topic of the Festival, climate change. Spurred on by a controversial address from the BA president Frances Cairncross, Dr Lenton revealed that climate change is not an inevitability to be given up on, but that there are many issues that we can tackle with current technology, such as nuclear fission or renewable energy sources. With 100% of scientists agreeing about the existence of climate change, the UK is no longer wondering whether to address climate change, but determining what to do and when, both politically and technologically.

Tony Juniper described what science can do for a sustainable future, and how we can change the attitudes and perceptions of society, sparking a debate. It was proposed that we use law, tax and financial incentives to persuade the public to shift their ideals and that the government should remove non-green options from society to obviate public confusion over scientific issues.

Finally, Rupert Sheldrake and Chris French battled it out over the existence of telephone telepathy, with Sheldrake arguing that his research has shown an incidence above chance that one can predict who is about to ring. French is unable to confirm this result, and criticised Sheldrake's lack of reproducibility by other scientists. He proposed that a collaboration between them would be the only way to solve the debate.

Vicki Stronge