

D'Alembert's Dream

Phoebe Von Held worked with scientists at the National Institute for Medical Research to develop a dramatisation of Denis Diderot's 18th-century text *D'Alembert's Dream*, which envisages the cosmos as a delirious universe of scientific speculation and metaphor. This animation is an extract.

Woman: In your mind's eye, do exactly what nature does sometimes, cut through a section of one of the bundles, perhaps the eye for example. Now what do you think will happen? The animal will be born with no eyes – or perhaps it will have a single one in the middle of its forehead.

Man: What will become a pair of eyes initially is a single group of cells, it's what's called an eye field. That single group of cells gets split into two by the formation of the midline, so the central region of the developing nervous system. And that splitting to form the two eyes, if that doesn't happen, you wind up with cyclopia.

Woman: So it could be that the Cyclops was not a creature of the fables.

[End of transcript]