

Waves Passing in the Night

author: Lawrence Weschler

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Synopsis

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For film aficionados, Walter Murch is legendary - a three-time Academy Award winner, arguably the most admired sound and film editor in the world for his work on *Apocalypse Now*, *The Godfather* trilogy, *The English Patient*, and many others. Outside of the studio, his mind is wide-ranging; his passion, pursued for several decades, has been astrophysics, in particular the rehabilitation of Titius-Bode, a long-discredited 18th century theory regarding the patterns by which planets and moons array themselves in gravitational systems across the universe. Though as a consummate outsider he's had a hard time attracting any sort of comprehensive hearing from professional astrophysicists, Murch has made advances that even some of them find intriguing, including a connection between Titius Bode and earlier notions - going back past Kepler and Pythagorus - of musical harmony in the heavens. Unfazed by rejection, ever probing, Murch perseveres in the highest traditions of outsider science.

Lawrence Weschler brings Murch's quest alive in all its seemingly quixotic yet still plausible splendour, probing the basis for how we know what we know and who gets to say. 'The wholesale rejection of alternative theories has repeatedly held back the progress of vital science,' Weschler observes, citing early 20th-century German amateur Alfred Wegener, whose speculations about continental drift were ridiculed at first, only to be accepted as fact decades later. Theoretical physicist Lee Smolin says, 'It is controversy that brings science alive' - and Murch's quest does that in spades. His fascination with the way the planets and their moons are arranged opens up the field of celestial mechanics for a general audience, sparking an awareness of the vast and (to us) invisible forces constantly at play in the universe.

Reader's comments

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