

IN HIS sometimes forgotten role as movie critic, the late economics writer Padraic McGuinness said that film is the art that subsumes all others. Films can be about any art and some use many in their making. Some seem mysterious as the credits roll. We know what a film editor does, but what does the job feel like?

Here is Tony Buckley: "Like the tailor cutting his cloth, the physical cutting of celluloid makes one feel a craftsman. The film running through one's fingers, threading the machine, rewinding, holding the bobbin on your left thumb and balancing the speed of the rewind so as not to burn your fingers, is an enormously satisfying experience ... Not so any more. Editing the celluloid was the basis of the craft for over 80 years until the invention of Lightworks and Avid computer editing machines."

Despite the nostalgia, Buckley (still actively involved at age 72) has always embraced new technology. He has edited many Australian films, including *Age Of Consent*, *Adam's Woman* and *Wake in Fright*!! whose excellence startled film buffs when it was rescreened this year. The adaptation process from Kenneth Cook's novel is an engrossing story.

In the 1970s, Buckley was asked to assemble and cut Rudolph Nureyev's *Don Quixote*. His experiences with the dancer, here and in London, are worth the price of admission. Yes, Nureyev was difficult, promiscuous and cunning but also funny and charming. He insisted that Buckley do the final editing. Buckley's editing goes back to the days of newsreel theatres, and if he had done nothing else he would have a valuable book on his hands. Ultimately he was to make his mark as a producer of such films as *Caddie* (1975), *Bliss* (1985 and which was nominated for a Palme d'Or at Cannes), and *Oyster Farmer* (2004), and of such television series as *Poor Man's Orange* (1987) and *The Harp in the South* (1986).

Buckley has also been a restorer and archivist of early Australian classics and has served on many film boards. In this book, there is an interesting insight into the role played by eccentric prime minister John Gorton in encouraging our film industry. Robert Menzies, on the other hand, had basically decided that we couldn't act, couldn't direct and should forget films. There also is a surprising blast aimed at Fairfax writer Michael Duffy, whose views, Buckley believes, are much like those of Menzies. Nor does Buckley hesitate to finger duplicity in the industry.

Buckley's book begins with his boyhood in Crows Nest, where his father and three uncles were keen amateur cinematographers.

There are charming evocations of the art deco Sesqui theatre (named for the sesquicentenary of of Sydney's foundation) with a photo of this archetypical structure, which is one of many photographs in the book.

Buckley began working for Cinesound in his teens !! which, with rival Movietone, supplied news digests for movie houses and newsreel theatres. Buckley is too brief on the curious newsreel venues, where you could escape non-cinematic reality all day for a shilling. The news was accompanied by such features as *Behind the Eightball* with Joe McDoakes and the *Three Stooges*. Later Buckley put together the hugely popular *The Beatles at the Stadium* for Cinesound.

It is through his experiences as producer that Buckley reveals the mass of headaches that is film-making: weather, location, finance, logistics, selling an idea in a world where "nobody knows nothing", to quote the Hollywood adage.

How do you persuade Dame Joan Sutherland to play Mum Rudd opposite Leo McKern as Dad in *On Our Selection* (1995)? All is revealed. Buckley went to the original Steele Rudd stories rather than adapting the film from a play only distantly related to them, as earlier director Ken G. Hall had done. Inexplicably, this angered Hall but the two remained friends until Hall's death in 1994. This is great stuff. The cover painting is Edward Hopper's classic *New York Movie*.