A crowd peers through the high glass windows into the lobby of the IMAX theatre at about 300 dignified people dressed in black ties and evening gowns. The theatre is located on the third floor of Winnipeg’s new Portage Place mall which stretches three city blocks down the city’s main east-west drag.

The crowd is waiting to get into three cinemas on the other side of the shopping centre and are idly curious about the spectacle on the other side of the glass.

“Look, there’s Mayor Bill Norrie and Arthur Wood, the publisher of the Winnipeg Free Press. And that must be Arnold Spohr, artistic director of the Royal Winnipeg Ballet with the exquisitely emaciated prima ballerina Evelyn Hart on his arm.”

For those invited to the theatre’s opening this cool late September evening.

Don Macdonald is a reporter with the Canadian Press in Winnipeg.

In Truffaut by Truffaut, texts, documents and photographs speak in the voice of one of the most influential contemporary directors, reveal the essential nature of François Truffaut’s personality. Assembled by Dominique Rabourdin, this rich collection illuminates Truffaut’s method of dealing with story, performers and production, as well as his overall approach to cinema. (Abrams, N.Y.C., $42.50; $50 after 11/1/88).

The creative and managerial problems inherent in the planning of television series are knowledgably discussed by Richard A. Blum and Richard D. Lindheim in Primetime: Network Television Programming. This comprehensive study examines in detail the input of creative and management personnel as well as of the viewing public. The scheduling strategies based on extensive testing are precisely defined, as is the process of developing series, mini-series and TV specials. Excerpts from scripts, sample budgets, shooting schedules and other production data are included. (Focal Press, Stoneham, MA, $19.95).

How to write and sell screenplays is considered in two current books. Professor Alan A. Armer, a film/TV professional turned academic, examines the principles and techniques of the craft in Writing the Screenplay: Film and TV, an informative and highly readable text. In The Screenwriter’s Guide, Joseph Gillis offers useful tips on the successful presentation, protection and sale of film/TV scripts, together with a master list of agents and producers. (Wadsworth, Belmont, CA, $19; NY: Zoetropic, $9.95).

In Film Magic, David Hutchison expertly outlines the basic principles of the art and techniques of special effects. He includes miniatures, frame-by-frame model animation, traveling mattes and matte paintings, and computerized imaging, as used in such films as Star Wars, E.T., 2010, and King Kong. A useful glossary and a descriptive guide to 80 special effects movies are appended. (Prentice-Hall, N.Y., $12.95).

A film genre as old as the medium itself is surveyed in a comprehensive reference volume, The Encyclopedia of Horror Movies. Expertly edited by Phil Hardy and a large staff, it describes 1300 films whose diverse plots and story angles have been scaring audiences ever since Georges Méliès’ 1896 The Haunted Castle. Abundant illustrations provide a suitable framework to the entries’ detailed synopses. (Harper & Row, N.Y.C., $34.50).

The encyclopedic 12-volume Motion Picture Guide extends field, gives you the famous IMAX you-are-there sensation. And the screen, although 5 1/2 storey high and 22 metres wide, doesn’t extend past the peripheral vision of the viewers and therefore doesn’t engulf them.

What is astonishing, however, is the rare experience of viewing our own people, culture and terrain on celluloid. A gathering is that on Lake Winnipeg, a hockey game on the local radio station, a Hutterite colony — this is our world and it’s a revelation to see it reproduced.

But Heartland doesn’t capitalize on the technology. Only the flight of a crop duster over a sunflower field gives you the famous IMAX you-are-there sensation. And the screen, although 5 1/2 storey high and 22 metres wide, doesn’t extend past the peripheral vision of the viewers and therefore doesn’t engulf them.

Perhaps part of the disappointment of the evening is that the governments chose to pay $7.5 million to produce a tourist attraction. The money would have been better spent if each of these seven filmmakers had been given $1 million to produce movies with stories as well as images of Manitoba. It wouldn’t have brought the tourists running, but it would have stimulated filmmaking and produced a body of work that shows the beauty and torment of life on the Prairies.

by Don Macdonald

Don Macdonald is a reporter with the Canadian Press in Winnipeg.