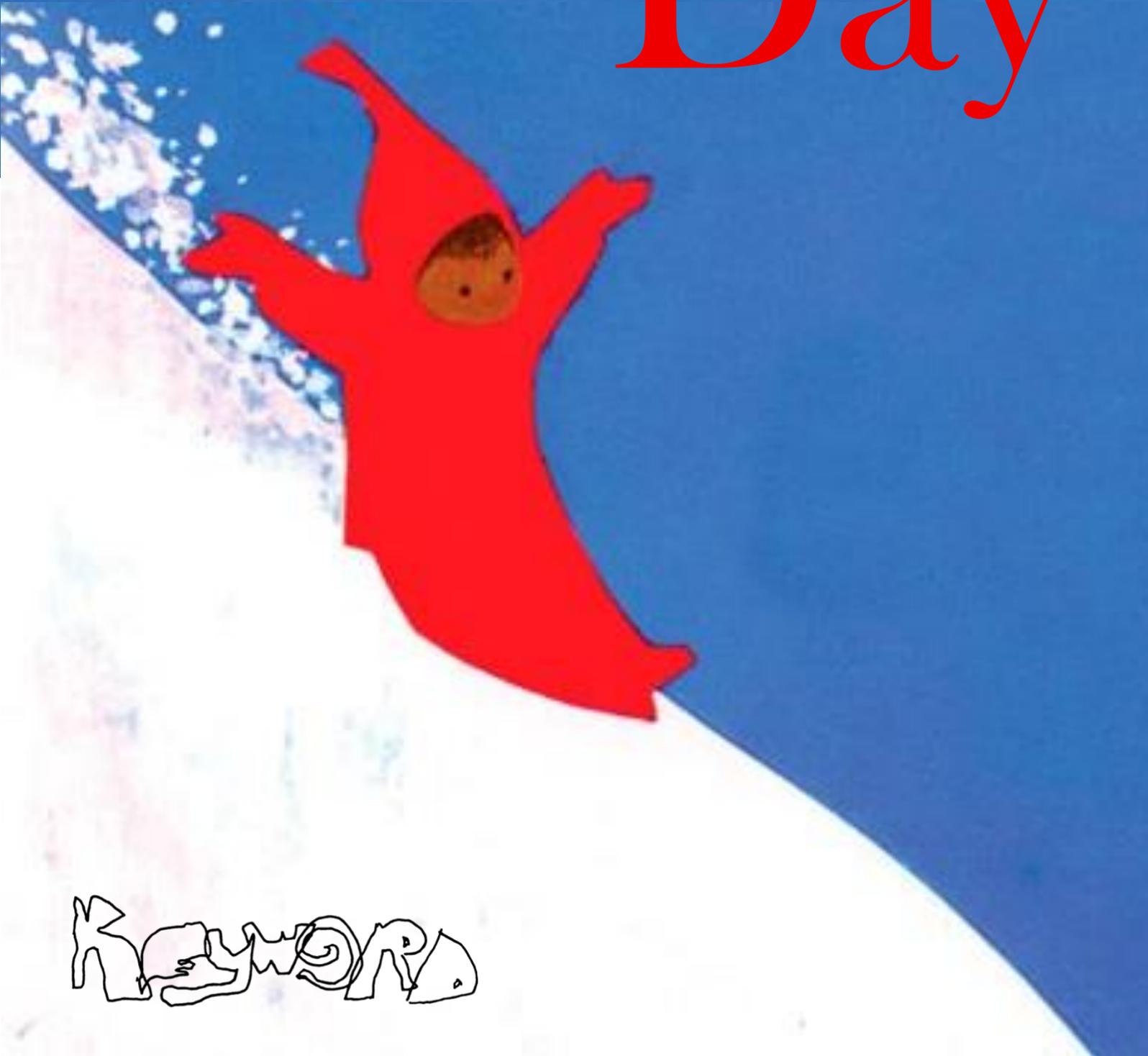
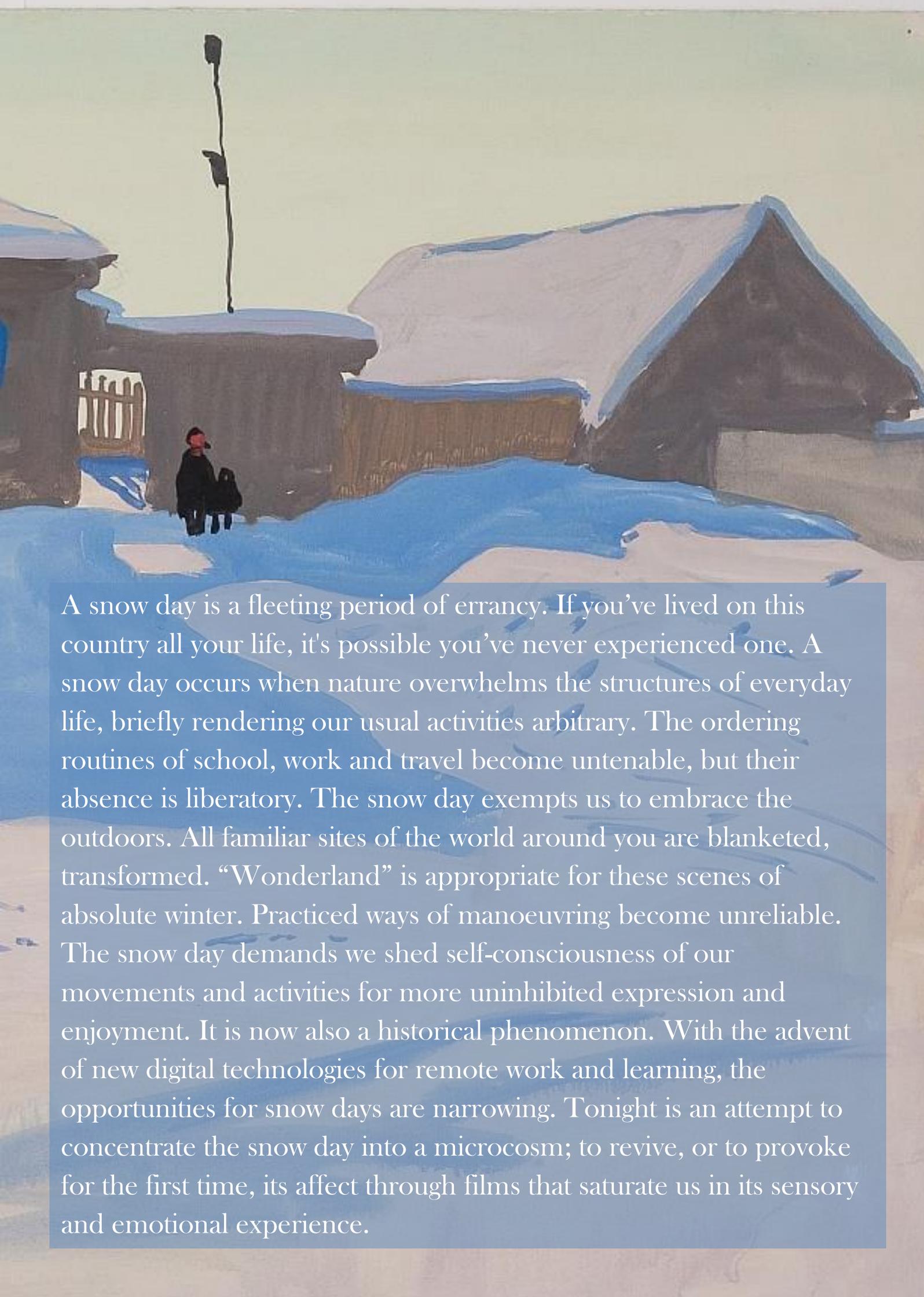


Snow Day



KEYWORD



A snow day is a fleeting period of errancy. If you've lived on this country all your life, it's possible you've never experienced one. A snow day occurs when nature overwhelms the structures of everyday life, briefly rendering our usual activities arbitrary. The ordering routines of school, work and travel become untenable, but their absence is liberatory. The snow day exempts us to embrace the outdoors. All familiar sites of the world around you are blanketed, transformed. "Wonderland" is appropriate for these scenes of absolute winter. Practiced ways of manoeuvring become unreliable. The snow day demands we shed self-consciousness of our movements and activities for more uninhibited expression and enjoyment. It is now also a historical phenomenon. With the advent of new digital technologies for remote work and learning, the opportunities for snow days are narrowing. Tonight is an attempt to concentrate the snow day into a microcosm; to revive, or to provoke for the first time, its affect through films that saturate us in its sensory and emotional experience.

Doorway and Thought (1971)

Dir. Larry Gottheim

The program will open and close with two consuming snowscapes from legendary avant garde filmmaker Larry Gottheim. These films are deceptively minimalist: single shots gently panning across unbelievably white fields (revealed to be, surprisingly, shot in colour).

Doorway is like opening your eyes in the morning to bear witness to a new outside world. No longer a zone to traverse between locations, but the desired location itself. The realism of the subject and our proximity to it intensifies incrementally with each frame that brings its totality into view. Gottheim's intimacy with this snow world is palpable. It's evidence of the filmmaker heeding his own advice: "you shouldn't actually press the start button until you feel such a real connection with what you're filming!"¹

Doorway is what we awaken to, and *Thought* is a goodbye to the dream. The snow day is at a close, this is the vision we're leaving behind. There is a sense of completeness and right as elements of the scene shift into place in this more limited field of view. It is an opportunity for a final, deeper concentration on snow and a recollection of its bygone appearances from this evening.

If You Want to Get Married... You Have to Learn How to Build an Igloo! (2011)

Dir. Allen Auksaq

To contextualise the snow day as a particular cultural phenomenon, but also really *feel* it, we go where snow is the everyday. Inuit director Allen Auksaq meticulously captures the construction of an igloo in this episode from a series by Nunavummiut filmmakers. Auksaq rejects any explanatory narration for this favoured documentary subject and instead translates Indigenous knowledge using the language of film.² Through his single, insanely active, camera we get a concentrated look at the intricacies of the construction, which comes into its final form in five satisfying and adrenaline filled minutes. With Auksaq's perfect concentration of our gaze, and builder Dean Ittuksarjuat's cool confidence, igloo building emerges as a naturalised cultural practice, but one that remains outstanding in how it harmonises with its environment. This film leads our program with an unparalleled sensory experience of the feel of snow, evocated through the dazzling array of textures on-screen and its striking, unobstructed, sound. We invite you to partake further by putting your flesh to ice (Sorry, that sounds like a *Saw* trap - we're handing out icy poles)!

The Rink (1962)

Dir. Gilles Carle

Ah, now this is a snow day! Documentary filmmaker Gilles Carle homes in on the joy of liberated community indulgence in the cold at this winter's day on *The Rink*. While the primary focus is children's joy, the snow day is a contaminant. Carle's camera enthusiastically trails from toddlers triumphing in their first steps on ice, to the social lives of teenagers, the thrill of a hockey game, and the happy oversight of guardians. *The Rink* is remarkable in capturing the role of light and colour in the nostalgic fantasy of the snow day. Although at times it appears there is no sun, the snow works so intensely to reflect light that the world is unceasingly bright. The saturated colours of snow suits seem to pick up latent rainbows in the white, their glimmer balanced by the softness of puffs of warm breath into icy air. The joy of this snow day is marked by a characteristic sense of longing and urgency, provoked by the jubilant music's invitation for us to join in, but also by how quickly the winter day's short hours pass. Although everyone leaves happy, there's a melancholy to the image we end the film on, the hub of recent activity nearly empty of life.

Winter Beyond Winter (2016) and *The Crack Up* (2017)

The snow day's liminality also begs pensiveness. The films of the late Johanthan Schwartz can be difficult, yet deeply relieving, in how they channel the pain that accompanies intense love. In *Winter beyond Winter* Schwartz's look out at a snow day functions a look in, towards his own family. The startling beauty of the snowcapped mountains and endless forest border on the sublime but seem to nurture Schwartz's family as they envelop them. This unbridled intimacy matches the filmmaker's own tender closeness to his children and elder that we bear witness to through his camera. However, with the sonic accompaniment of a too-young voice reading the painful end of McCarthy's *The Road*, and a too-old one working through a nursery rhyme, it's impossible to avoid the harsh pushes of father time urging us forwards.

The Crack-Up was Schwartz's final film before his untimely death. This is snow without civilisation, and at its most gut wrenching. Despite the endlessness of the icy wasteland, the world before us is persistently fracturing, slipping away. This fear of the inevitable only orients us inwards and backwards in time: faint images of a blooming spring fight with flashes from Schwartz's past. *The Crack-Up* serves as an intensification of a sadness that can underscore a snow day. Just as easily as it briefly dismisses them, it can force us to reckon with the limits of time and happiness.

Wandering Through Winter (1970)

Wandering through Winter might be more fun the less you know. This is a vision of North American winter wilderness straight from the 1970s popular imaginary. Formally, however, the film might as well be some kind of pornography for perverted alien voyeurs of our planet. While its star is the natural beauty of these great arctic landscapes, in its current format it evokes sensations of being out of the cold and bundled up warm inside - its own kind of pleasure.

Wandering through Winter now only exists as a damaged transfer of a public library's VHS copy, despite being from some of the biggest names in 80's Canadian TV. Part of a series of all four seasons, only winter and autumn are currently watchable, and the summer is completely lost. This is the kind of movie you find channel surfing at 4pm as a snowstorm sets in. Weird, wonderful, memorable, it's a film you'll never see again, of incredible winter wildlife you might only see once.

Credits

Images

Ezra Jack Keats, Illustration from *The Snowy Day*, 1962

Viktor Popkov, *Winter*, 1958

Ferdinand Ruszczyc, *Winter Tale*, 1904

Josh Rowan, 'Hug', 'Snowman', 'Snow Trip', 2025

Alexander Alexeyevich Borisoff, *Les Glaciers, mer de Kara*

1906

Hideaki Kobayashi, Still from *Wandering Through Winter*,

1970

Text and Program

Ava Lawton

Endnotes

1. Larry Gottheim, interviewed by Franciso Rojas, "An Interview with Larry Gottheim," *Chute Film Co-Op*, 2024.

2. Preceding examples of igloo building in popular documentary film include a scene in Robert J Flaherty's *Nanook of the North* (1922) and NFBC's own *How to Build an Igloo* (d. Douglas Wilkinson,

Keyword S1.6 - Errancy - Season One Finale
Snow Day Program

- 8:00pm ----- Door (music performance of welcome from Jac)
- 8:45pm ----- Introduction/Acknowledgement
- 9:00pm ----- Snow Day Screening starts, selection of seven experimental shorts, curated by Ava Lawton
Doorway (1971) by Larry Gottheim
If You Want to Get Married... You Have to Learn How to Build an Igloo! (2011) by Allen Auksaq
The Rink (1962) by Gilles Carle
Winter Beyond Winter (2016) by Johnathan Schwartz
The Crack Up (2017) by Johnathan Schwartz
- 9:50pm ----- Intermission/Get up, stretch/Grab a drink and a snack
- 10:05pm ----- Snow Day Screening resumes
Wandering Through Winter (1970) Canadian TV
- 10:40pm ----- Improvised score to last film, **Thought** by Larry Gottheim, by Jac
- 10:45pm ----- Jac full performance
Craft activities begin
VHS screening room opens
- 12:15am ----- Select Poetry/Book readings by guest readers
- 12:30am ----- Music performance by Zev and Ace
- 1:30am ----- Open mic for further readings/Statements /Thoughts/Discussion
- 3:00am ----- Crafts end, VHS screening room closes, event ends, the snow has melted and the year continues

