Apprehending seasons with our bodies: a group activity

Background:

The CALENDARS project developed a physical activity for a group of participants to discuss the rhythms comprising seasons, and the multiple ways that groups of people perceive seasons depending on the rhythms they attune to. We tested and refined this activity over three student courses in 2023/2024. We saw participants could easily relate to and engage with concepts of seasonal rhythms by moving their bodies in space relative to others in the group. Insofar as rhythms are defined by repetitive motion and change (e.g. of the tides, a beating heart, or a bus timetable), they are able to be apprehended through bodily motion in space, and the relation of temporalities to each other can be seen in the relation between bodies in space. Conceptually, this approach is built on scholars like Henri Lefebvre and his work on rhythmanalysis, where the body is the best instrument for sensing rhythms, or the work of Tim Ingold who sees time as sensed through bodily tasks.

Objectives:

i. To invite a group of participants to critically think about seasons as comprising patterns of rhythms, and how this opens for multiple ways of representing the year.
ii. To destabilise universalised models of seasons, and see seasons as specific to people and places
iii. For participants to reflect on seasonality as relationally defined by their patterns of thinking, acting and feeling, and the rhythms that they coordinate their activities to.

Requirements:

This activity has been designed for:

o a group of 10-30 people

o a duration of 20-40 minutes

o an open space about 15 metres in circumference. The activity has been run outdoors, in areas near a patch of dirt or gravel where the instructor has illustrated concepts by

drawing in the dirt with a stick. But it could equally be run indoors.

Method:

1. The activity starts with the group standing around the instructor. The instructor asks the group to identify seasonal rhythms and how they repeat as cycles from year to year. One way of illustrating this concept is by drawing a sine curve circling around on itself – that is, a circle drawn with a wiggly line (on paper, or scratched on the ground with a stick). The instructor asks the group for examples where rhythms form patterns that we can recognise and name as a season. For instance, the way annual rhythms of sea temperature and fish migration coincide in a pattern we recognise as fishing season. Finally, the instructor notes that a circle is a widely used shape for representing the year in European cultures, but that there are other ways of representing the shape of the year and they invite the group to draw other examples.

2. The group now forms into a circle like a clock, which represents the year marked out by the 12 months of the Gregorian calendar. Four individuals (the instructor and three others) stand static in position at 3 o'clock (March), 6 o'clock (June), 9 o'clock (September), and 12 o'clock (December) for this part of the activity, and all others can move when asked. The instructor informs participants that this activity shows how seasons vary across people and places. The instructor asks participants (except the four static individuals) to move to the part of the circle where they feel the year begins for them. Some may move to the January part of the circle (as the start of the Gregorian calendar), but others may feel the year starts elsewhere for them, according to agricultural or school rhythms for example. The instructor selects participants at random and asks them why they stand where they do. The instructor can then repeat this step with a series of other questions, which can be adjusted to the group; when is the busiest time of the year? The wettest part of the year? Your favourite time of the year? And so on.

3. For the final part of this activity, participants re-form the circle, and the instructor asks for volunteers to 'walk their year.' This means that they enter the circle and go to the point

where the year starts for them. They then walk clockwise around the Gregorian calendar circle, recounting what they are doing at different points of the year. This works best if volunteers choose one aspect of their life – for example their gardening, sports, or professional work – and how this activity changes around the year, perhaps pausing at important temporal reference points; key deadlines, or marker days.

4. The activity is now finished, and the instructor may reflect on some of the key differences in how people in the group perceive the seasons and act seasonally, depending on where they come from, and the activities they are engaged in. It can also be interesting to note any key temporal markers that are common to people in a group, such as cultural festivals like Christmas, or the school holidays, and act to synchronise across different notions of seasons.