

## Sauna

The many special virtues of the sauna have been widely discussed in films, books and articles in the recent years. I just want to join in, in this choir.

I became a member of the nonprofit sauna association in Tanto in 2016, founded thanks to Ingrid Silléns citizen proposal. It has since become one of my most important places, even in my dreams, often as a place where I loose things, like my work-keys, my phone, my research notes. (ref).

And throughout this research I have come to understand that I actually do loose things there. Men sakerna jag förlorar var kanske inte så livsnödvändiga som jag först trodde. They get lost because there emerge other things that replace them, that make them obsolete

*Tanto Sauna, Easter Saturday 2025*

The sauna is unbooked all day. When I arrive I am all alone, but after a while, another member shows up.

We start talking. He told me about things he was learning at the Swedish Defence University—like the OODA loop. OODA stands for Observe, Orient, Decide, and Act. It's a concept used to analyze military leadership and decision-making in iterative cycles.

I go out into the ice cold water.

As I come back into the heat I say; that in my case, it's probably more like the OAOADA loop—Observe, Act, Orient, Act, Decide, Act.... The doing must be part of it from the beginning and continue throughout, even if only as a tentative probing rather than as final action. I continued to speake about artistic research and practical knowledge. I explained the tendency of the hyper-connected brain to translate all input—experience and knowledge—into a “sensory form” that serves as a guide when navigating complex or overwhelming information. For me, this form takes the shape of inner visual worlds. I can intuitively sense whether a decision is right or wrong based on whether it “fits” with this internal visual system. Others may have different forms—musical structures, cogwheel-like machinery, or even olfactory cues—that guide them in making decisions.

He said it reminded him of another recent lecture at the Defence University, which covered Daniel Kahneman's research on System 1 and System 2—the distinction between fast, automatic, emotional processes in the brain, and slow, deliberate, controlled ones. The automatic system is much faster than the controlled one, therefore it can be more effective to trust your gut feeling. However, with it comes the risk of being directed by prejudice and bias. Though when it comes to specialists—people who have dedicated thousands of hours to a particular domain of interest, the automatic system is very reliable.

Hm, I said, I suppose that having music-making or image-making as a constant companion throughout life weaves your entire range of experiences into that sensory or visual system. Over time, you might then become a kind of expert—not necessarily on the individual pieces of information themselves, but on how they relate to and resonate within that internal imagery. You develop an intuitive grasp of coherence, pattern, and meaning within that system."

*April 25, Solvik Sauna*

the water is cold but the sunrays are warm.

In the Solvik sauna on Ingarö, we talk about our children—their quirks, interests, and friendships; those who've become teenagers and stay out late, call to say they're sleeping over at a friend's house whose name we've never heard before.

E says, "My son has autism. He spent a lot of time at home and didn't have many friends, so I didn't worry much about that. But now he's started at an animation school in another town and lives there. I worry he forgets to eat."

"Oh," I say, "My child is autistic too. I'm actually writing right now about the connection between animation and autism. When I've taught in various animation programs, I've always felt that autistic people are overrepresented there."

E: "Yes, that's what my son's teacher says, too, when I call and ask whether he'll manage the school trip. They say, 'It usually works out fine—most of the students here are a bit like him.' But—what is your research about?"

In the dim, sensory-rich environment of the sauna, I've often been able to explain and formulate things that were previously out of cognitive reach. My body is warm, soft and unafraid.

"...Hmm... I have been exploring why animation so often conveys a deep sense of being part of a living, animate nature. I've always experienced a gradual *becoming-with* when animating—especially a *becoming-with* clay during stop-motion animation.

And while researching autism to figure out this other correlation I've sensed between animation and autism—I came across "sensorimotor processing". It involves switching between and gradually adjusting sensory input and motor output, eventually coupling the two in the brain.

I've concluded that this process is what gives us the feeling of being *one* with what we animate. And further, I think that we are drawn to animation in the first place *because* we have this sensorimotor processing tendency. We tend to engage sensorimotor processing in everything we encounter—like playing with water or rocks, tapping with sticks, things that looks a lot like neurodivergent stimming...."

The open-ended conversations with people whose names or job titles I rarely know—but with whom I share the intimate experience of heat, moisture, the sharpness of cold water; whether they prefer the brightness of day, the darkness of night, or the foggy morning—have often opened up my view on things. Thanks to their stories, questions and warm listening, I've been able to perceive and formulate things that had long been hidden in plain sight. The above examples are just two of hundreds such occasions.

The chock of the cold water, it activates a knowing of the body that has been dumbed down into a slumber. The cold water reminds me that this sense can be trusted even when I've been taught otherwise. I can let go of these tensions.

And when the heat of the sauna softens the body again, opens it up to be with others—in silence, in conversation, and shared reflection. For every time I get in the cold water, another layer of tension is cleared away and for every time I enter the sauna the softness deepens and the connections of this particular situation root. And things I have always known in that sense begins to take up its place again.

- This essay is dedicated to Karin. Without her I would have been stuck reading articles many times when what I really needed was that cold water to show me the way.