

#BYGGNADSVÅRD: MOBILISING ALTERNATIVE NARRATIVES OF BUILDING CARE

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ABSTRACT

Old buildings are imbued with problems and possibilities shaped by their material condition. This article unfolds around material stories circulating on Instagram with the hashtag #byggnavård, using the Swedish concept *byggnavård* ('building care') as a lens to investigate material-discursive entanglements of heritage, sustainability and material care. Drawing on ethnographic and diffractive approaches, the article explores how conservation principles and sustainability are articulated in vernacular accounts of building care and how materials participate in the renegotiation of old buildings and maintenance and repair practices. The analysis shows how conservation ethics and environmental concerns are worked out through ordinary repair decisions and material encounters in a highly mediated social media setting. In this context, building care emerges as a regime of care that rethinks material relations and buildings as sustainable.

KEYWORDS: building care • renovation • repair • sustainability • heritage

INTRODUCTION

Renovated, retrofitted, restored, demolished or preserved. Old buildings are imbued with problems and possibilities, and a range of material involvements. In popular culture, derelict houses, countryside cottages and historic homes are represented in layered, polyphonic, and often contradictory ways. Old houses are simultaneously portrayed as burdensome money pits, dream homes, escapist fantasies, valuable heritage, investment opportunities, and as enabling alternative modes of living.

This article unfolds around material stories of old buildings expressed under the hashtag #byggnavård on the image-based social media platform Instagram where material forms and relations offline are shared, established, imagined, and reflected on. Houses are built, demolished, repaired, worn down, neglected, cared for, lived in. On Instagram they become stories shared through a combination of images and words. As I began exploring people's relationships with old buildings and built heritage on this platform, I noticed the increasing use of the Swedish term *byggnavård* ('building

care') alongside *hållbarhet* ('sustainability'). The aim of the article is to explore vernacular articulations of the mix between building care and sustainability.

The concept *byggnadsvård* is used by a broad field of practitioners, organisations and amateurs with different backgrounds and visions on what it entails; on Instagram the line between experts and non-experts is blurred. This Swedish term literally translates as 'building care' but is often referred to as 'building preservation' or 'building conservation'. The definition and meaning of this concept are continually negotiated across academic, professional, and popular culture contexts. While the academisation of building conservation has created experts in the vast field of management of historic environments and objects as heritage, it is also of high interest to enthusiastic amateurs with older buildings in Sweden (Holmberg 2019). *Byggnadsvård* is used to refer to material objects and buildings, a style, and an approach enacted through practical engagement with a building. In the user-generated content on Instagram, formalised building conservation principles and logics of maintenance and repair mix with contemporary renovation dreams, lively building materials, practices of everyday life, and broader concerns about the environment. Everyone with access to the platform can use the word to mark their post. Rather than constituting a fixed meaning, the notion of *byggnadsvård* is brimming with complexities, compromise and tension, as heritage scholar Ingrid Martins Holmberg (ibid.: 7) has noted. For clarity, I use the term building care for vernacular discourses and building conservation for more formalised academic and professional discourses, while acknowledging their overlap.

In this article, I frame building care as a vernacular heritage practice, or a particular regime of care, "a series of contingent and emergent modes of caring for, valuing, and assuming an ethical stance toward the future" (Harrison 2015: 39). I understand care here as a situated ethical and material practice that attends to relations, labour and neglected things (Puig de la Bellacasa 2011). Although the concept moves along the fringes of official and regulated heritage practice, and many definitions circulate, it is grounded in conservation ethics and principles. It is, to varying degrees, associated with the attentive care for old materialities, the aesthetic appreciation of historic buildings, and a concern for retaining culturally and historically significant values embodied in existing buildings.

Informed by posthumanist and new materialist attention to more-than-human agencies, this article draws on Karen Barad's (2007: 3) agential realism and the concept of intra-action to approach matter and meaning as "inextricably fused together" in material-discursive entanglements. I draw on a mix of ethnographic approaches, using the hashtag stream #byggnadsvård as an entry point for compiling textual fragments into empirical excerpts and developing material-discursive motifs. This involves attending to how building care and sustainability unfold in vernacular accounts through relations (Gullion 2018: 134) between materials, values, ethics and aesthetics. The questions that guide me are: 1) how are building conservation principles and notions of sustainability negotiated and mobilised in vernacular accounts of building care; and 2) how do materials and their properties participate in the renegotiation of the value of old buildings and maintenance and repair practices.

The article proceeds in three steps. First, I situate and unpack the Swedish concept of *byggnadsvård* in relation to heritage and introduce the conservation principles and ethics that frame the enquiry and guide the analysis. Second, I introduce the theoretical

lens, describe my approach to Instagram as a visual social media field, and outline how I gathered material and compiled the excerpts that inform the analysis. Third, I flesh out four material-discursive motifs through close readings of posts and images collected from the hashtag stream *#byggnadsvård*: 1) housekeeping, where building care and sustainability are framed as ‘good housekeeping’ with resources; 2) listen to the house, where caution is framed as a slow ethic grounded in attentive noticing; 3) temporal layers, articulated through the Swedish metaphor of *årsringar*, which literally refers to tree growth rings and is used to describe accumulated material layers of age, alteration, and wear in buildings over time; and 4) sustainability, which fleshes out the politics of material fit, evaluated through repairability, compatibility and material capacities.

BUILDING CARE, CONSERVATION AND SUSTAINABILITY

As an approach to existing materialities, *byggnadsvård* outlines a specific orientation to the material care of buildings grounded in established conservation principles and ethics. In this section, I situate building care in relation to conservation and heritage logics of maintenance and repair. I then briefly unpack how environmental concerns have reconfigured approaches and the value of old buildings and their materialities.

Although maintenance has always been needed for buildings, interest in building care has varied. Following the change from traditional building crafts to standardised industrial production, the renovation and repair of existing buildings became “a special issue rather than routine work” (Jokilehto 1999: 19). The objects of conservation are generally considered differently from ordinary objects and thus require distinct forms of care and expertise. As a specific kind of repair, conservation is a modern practice (Wetterberg 2011; Pendlebury 2013), as is the identification of specific buildings and building parts as historic and worthy of being carried on into the future through careful maintenance and repair.

Although grounded in shared values, philosophies and principles, building conservation encompasses coexisting paradigms (Ashworth 2011: 4) and a spectrum of practices and activities (Pendlebury 2013: 712), leading to different interpretations of appropriate approaches. In the context of professional, academically grounded heritage management, practice is guided by ethical guidelines and principles shaped through negotiation. These have become formalised in international charters outlining best practice and proven methods for conservation, such as the Burra Charter (2013). Even though written principles and ethics establish a common ground for heritage professionals to work from, they do not have set meanings. They are rather sites of negotiation between a broad range of actors and diverse orientations, “not only as a way of knowing but also, indissolubly, as ethical orientations, emotions, identities and ideologies of various kinds” as Thomas Yarrow (2019: 19) points out.

In the Swedish context, the principles of caution, skilful technique, minimum intervention, like-for-like renewal, and material knowledge are outlined as foundational tenets of good *byggnadsvård* by, for example, Swedish architect Stig Robertsson (2002) in a guide published by the Swedish National Heritage Board. Building care principles are further reiterated and renegotiated in numerous publications intended for the public and on user-generated social media platforms. These guiding tenets instruct owners

of old buildings to take time and listen attentively to the house, carefully assessing what needs to be done, allowing historic layers to coexist and balancing the contemporary needs of people with the building's capacity to endure and remain sound.

Responding to environmental concerns, sustainable development has become a frame of reference for heritage management (Bortolotto 2025: 29). The integration of sustainability narratives into the realm of heritage discourse has unsettled conventional understandings of heritage and marks a fundamental shift from the imperative to "arrest change" towards maintaining viability through adaptation and responsiveness to changing concerns and contexts (ibid.: 23). Increasing ecological awareness has furthermore seeped into popular framings of built heritage and architecture as sustainable (Kalakoski and Thorgrimsdottir 2023). In Sweden, increasing general interest in the everyday material care for old buildings, framed as *byggnadsvård*, has also been associated with the rise of social media, in convergence with an emerging ecological ethos (Holmberg et al. 2017). As Yarrow's (2016) ethnographic insights highlight, contemporary environmental concerns have led to the renegotiation of the meaning and value of old buildings.

The dominant approach to reducing carbon emissions in buildings emphasises energy savings and retrofit improvements (e.g., Webb 2017; Wise et al. 2021). However, building conservation and heritage management have also been reinterpreted and justified through a *resource perspective* that frames historic buildings as non-renewable resources (Ashley-Smith 2002). From this perspective, environmental impact is measured in *embodied energy*, or the energy that is spent on building materials throughout their whole lifecycle, from extraction to the waste stream (Webb 2017: 750). Heritage management has thus become entwined with environmental care and waste management, as Rodney Harrison (2020) highlights, and the care of the existing building stock is framed as valuable for achieving climate goals (Leijonhufvud et al. 2022). In this vein, the Swedish Association for Building Conservation (Byggnadsvårdsföreningen n.d.) currently defines *byggnadsvård*, or building care, as "resource management" and an approach to building, developing and renovating with material, structures and methods "that create lasting value for houses and people".

Heritage practices have also been reframed as householding, as Holmberg (2019: 2) suggests, "in the sense of using resources wisely, for gain beyond the individual, and with long-term perspectives. It includes activities of saving, safeguarding, mending, and care-taking, and it is an activity in opposition to exploitation". Building care thus emerges as a future-making practice, concerned with the past, but implicated in the crafting of imagined and desired futures (Harrison 2020). Mindful of the contingencies and inequity ingrained in the "endangerment sensibility" that underpins both practices of heritage and sustainability (Harrison and Sterling 2023: 93), these function as a lens through which to see how broader concerns are folded into what counts as 'good' and 'sustainable' building care in a contemporary context. Thinking about the sustainability of buildings from the perspective of building conservation foregrounds qualitative attention to the continuity of existing materials and to the ongoing maintenance and repair of buildings.

Even though buildings are made by humans, they unfold as dynamic participants that continuously change through processes of breakdown and erosion that exceed human control (Latour and Yaneva 2017; Yaneva 2017). They also undergo what Orvar Löfgren (2005: 139) and Anneli Palmsköld (2015: 33) have framed as “cultural wear and tear”, where meanings and values fade and wither away without necessarily producing visible material erosion. These more-than-human processes contribute to the transformation of buildings materially and discursively.

In this article, I draw on Barad’s (2007: 3) agential realism in order to trace entanglements of materials and meanings, in particular the concepts of material-discursive entanglements and intra-action. This orientation also involves attending to the “vibrant materiality that runs alongside and inside humans” (Bennett 2010: viii) within and around buildings. Jane Bennett’s (2010: 112) notion of vibrant matter adds a focus on the lively forces of materials in shaping discourses that link building care to sustainability. The term intra-action refers to distributed more-than-human agencies that do not pre-exist their relations but emerge through them in ongoing material-discursive practices (Barad 2007: 140). This means that I do not treat materials, practices and values as separate, but rather as co-emerging. Building on this, I approach buildings as heterogeneous and lively combinations of matters and meanings that emerge from encounters between diverse elements, materialities and humans. Analytically, this foregrounds the relationality between materials and human practices of doing and thinking with buildings.

As discussed in the introduction, I understand building care as a contingent and emergent mode of care (Harrison 2015: 39) that operates along the fringes of heritage practice. As Holmberg (2019: 6) notes, even within building conservation, the distinctions implied by intervention categories often blur in practice, and the maintenance and repair of old buildings does not involve a single set of activities or a coherent set of actors. A lens of maintenance and repair brings into view the intertwined materials, relations and practices involved in the upkeep of a building. The acts of fixing and routine upkeep can be seen as sites of contestation and negotiation rather than mere technical acts (e.g., Jackson 2014; Graziano and Trogal 2017; Mattern 2018; Denis and Pontille 2023). Drawing on posthumanist theories of care (Puig de la Bellacasa 2011), I understand maintenance and repair as relational practices that draw attention to neglected things, under-recognised labour, and the multiple more-than-human actors that transform and are transformed.

In this article, I engage with Steven J. Jackson’s (2014: 221) framing of ‘broken world thinking’ and the prompt to take material fragility and decay as creative starting points rather than as novelty, progress, or growth. This involves foregrounding the affective and ethical engagement involved in fixing and caring for material things “*as things* undertaken beyond and beneath the instrumentalist relations usually held to govern our interactions with objects” (Jackson 2019: 428). Insights from maintenance and repair studies sharpen the focus on building care practices that navigate the fuzzy borders between the old and the new, and between heritage and sustainability. From this perspective, ‘building care’ resides at the margins of heritage and sustainability discourses as a contingent regime of care, where matters and meanings are intra-actively contested and reshaped.

These theoretical strands guide my attention towards buildings and materials as active participants in entangled material-discursive practices. They foreground buildings as ongoing, responsive and unfolding rather than static and passive entities subject to human control, and ground the research in the material, the fragmented and the marginal rather than in formalised doctrine.

METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

Three methodological trajectories converge and mix in this article. Through European ethnology my attention is drawn to everyday materialities and environments as entangled sites where theory, method, materials, and affect fold into one another (Löfgren 2014; Ehn et al. 2016). I furthermore build on ethnographic insights and approaches from the fields of material culture studies (Woodward 2020), building conservation (Yarrow 2016; 2018; 2019), and maintenance and repair (Jackson 2019; Denis and Pontille 2023). The enquiry is informed by experimental approaches that engage qualitatively with social media research in a complex context where the digital is intertwined with everyday life (Markham 2013; Pink et al. 2016; Hine 2017). Finally, attention to materialities and the relationality of matter developed in recent work on diffractive ethnographies for enacting posthumanist and new materialist thinking (Gullion 2018; Blom et al. 2025) is central to my approach.

I frame this research as ethnographic in a flexible sense that foregrounds iterative responsiveness and attention to materiality rather than a fixed set of techniques. In line with Tom O'Dell and Robert Willim (2011: 31), I approach ethnography as a compositional practice, drawing on empirical materials gathered across multiple overlapping sites rather than treating it as a linear, logically ordered whole. The compositional view resonates with European ethnology's use of bricolage to describe the way fragmented and everyday stories are assembled from a mix of past and present materials (Löfgren 2014; Ehn et al. 2016). Bricolage is also a keyword in Annette Markham's (2018) 'remix methods' for digital and social media research. As a metaphor for research, bricolage emphasises the assembly and reworking of existing materials through a critically oriented, reflexive engagement, as Markham (ibid.: 48) highlights. Jackson's (2014: 237) 'broken world thinking' also supports this fragmentary orientation, treating breakdown and repair as starting points. Practically, this translates into working with partial, assembled traces in compiled empirical excerpts.

Diffractive ethnography emerges as a non-prescriptive and divergent mode of ethnographic enquiry grounded in a new materialist ontology that foregrounds the agency of matter and the co-constitution of matter and meaning (Gullion 2018; Blom et al. 2025). The optical metaphor of diffraction and Barad's (2007: 30) iterative practice of "reading insights through one another" invite iterative re-reading, mixing, and exploring "dynamic unfoldings and processes of change" (Gullion 2018: 134). Practically, a diffractive approach acknowledges the researcher's performative role in knowledge production (ibid.: 102). For me, a diffractive ethnography, together with insights from bricolage and remix methods, becomes a practice of layering and compiling insights. In this study, I attend to the intra-active relations between people, material repair practices, tools, digital images, conservation principles, and sustainability discourses.

METHODS AND MATERIALS

I approach Instagram as a material-discursive field where marginal aspects of building care emerge alongside more formalised heritage and sustainability narratives. The analysis foregrounds how material relations shape the negotiation between conservation principles and sustainability values, and how 'good' building care is framed.

Following recent calls for creative, playful and adaptive approaches to social media ethnography (Quan-Haase and Sloan 2017; Caliandro and Graham 2020; Niederer and Colombo 2024), I focused on gathering fragmented, vibrant, layered and nonlinear glimpses from the empirical material. These provide insights into how building care and sustainability entangle, unfold, and are re-negotiated in unregulated, socially mediated, material and mundane settings.

Drawing on approaches to digital ethnography, the hashtag #byggnadsvård was a starting point for gathering insights. As metadata markers, hashtags organise content and function rhetorically to convey messages, mobilise attention and build communities (Bruns and Burgess 2011; Daer et al. 2015; Brock 2020). They embed posts in a broader context and have become a site for social analysis, shaping shared visual sensibilities and enabling the circulation of everyday experiences across online and offline settings (Geismar 2017). In what follows, this hashtag stream is a primary site for tracing how building care is visually mediated and negotiated in relation to sustainability and conservation principles.

While much Instagram research foregrounds self-presentation, selfies and influencer culture (e.g. Tiidenberg 2018; Abidin 2020), I focus on how mundane practices and materials shape meaning as they are narrated visually across online and offline settings (Serafinelli 2017; Leaver et al. 2020). Visual social media has become implicated in self-representation and the making of mundane places, objects, and physical environments that are photogenic, 'instagrammable', or 'insta-worthy' (Caldeira et al. 2020; Caldeira 2021). Social practices and mundane moments are, in this context, hyper-represented visually (Serafinelli and Villi 2017: 165), and individuals increasingly think of events, practices, people, and surround-

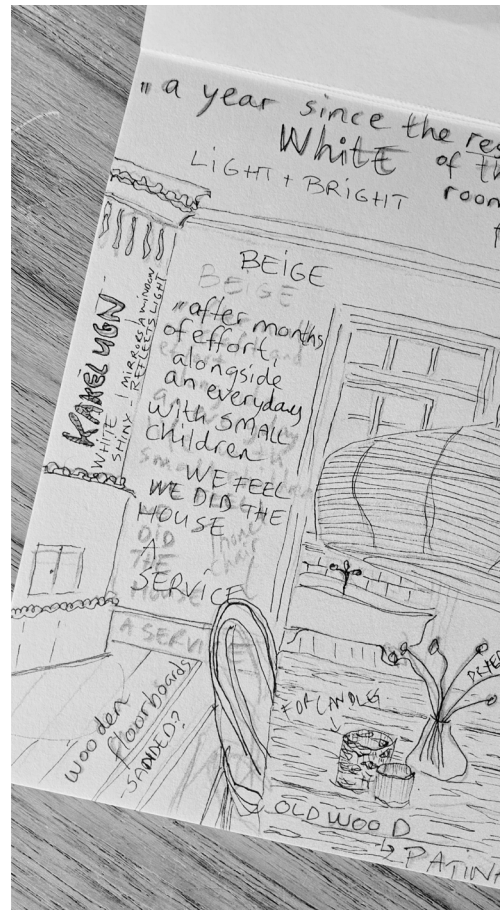


Photo 1. Sketched fieldnote. A glimpse from the gathering of data on Instagram. Photo and sketch by the author.

ings in visual terms, as images to share. Such mediation is a key factor in shaping relationships and affiliations, as Elisa Serafinelli (2017: 94) argues.

The empirical material I build on in this article consists of Instagram posts tagged *#byggnadsvård*, collected intermittently between October 2017 and April 2025. Over this period, the hashtag stream grew from about 50,000 to 276,000 posts. Rather than systematically scraping all posts tagged with *#byggnadsvård* over a fixed period for exhaustive coverage or a representative sample, I revisited the hashtag periodically and manually collected posts from the hashtag stream. For the selected posts, I captured screenshots of the images with captions, compiled associated hashtags into a document, and, when relevant, collected comment threads. Throughout, I also wrote fieldnotes, described images and captions in my own words, and made quick drawings in a sketchbook. This article draws on a collection of posts that implied conservation principles, sustainability and environmental concerns related to materiality, maintenance, and repair.

In line with the visual methods for digital research outlined by Sabine Niederer and Gabriele Colombo (2024), I iteratively moved between zooming out (examining larger collections in bulk to reveal patterns) and zooming in (close reading of clusters around recurring topics and individual posts). This cycle was repeated with insights at one scale guiding attention at the other. This procedure of studying images and texts in groups (Colombo 2019) sharpened my focus on visual and aesthetic cues, materiality and how building care and sustainability are articulated as entangled.

The ‘raw’ material collected from the hashtag stream was then curated, translated and condensed into analytical renderings presented as 15 compiled excerpts and four layered images. These fragmented pieces scattered throughout the article provide insights and indicate the material-discursive flow on the platform. The compilations attend to moments where materials, ethics, principles and values intra-act and produce meaning. The article thus offers glimpses into the “rush of stories” (Tsing 2015: 37) that swirl in the material-discursive field of building care.

I only included empirical material from public Instagram accounts. Even if public content on social media permitted reuse, privacy and consent issues are ambiguous in highly searchable digital environments, and, as Markham (2012: 335) notes, vulnerability and traceability remain key concerns. Because the hashtag stream includes posts from many different users over time, obtaining informed consent was impractical. I approach ethics as ongoing and situational and do not include exact locations, account names, verbatim quotes, or identifiable images. I translated the originals from Swedish to English and paraphrased identifying details when necessary to reduce traceability. The images were made transparent and grayscale. The material is de-personalised through layering and compilation, shifting the focus from individuals to materiality and recurring motifs through which conservation principles are named or implied. Following Markham’s (ibid.: 342) discussion of ‘fabrication’ through composite accounts as an ethical representational strategy, I use composites to reduce traceability while attending to discursive patterns, hint at visual features (Colombo 2019: 192) in the field, and providing glimpses into the *#byggnadsvård* hashtag stream.

In the analysis that follows, the compiled excerpts operate as analytical devices for tracing recurring material-discursive configurations across the hashtag stream. The pieces are deliberately partial, intended to foreground patterns rather than represent the field exhaustively. The analysis unfolds through four recurring motifs outlined in

the following analytical sections, starting with how building care is reframed through a resource perspective.

HOUSEKEEPING

At first glance, during initial scrolling through the hashtag stream *#byggnadsvård* on Instagram, building care emerges as a picturesque aesthetic entangled with broader imaginaries. Wooden buildings, red cottages, timber structures, linoleum-painted surfaces, and a soft colour palette. On closer inspection, many of the images marked with *#byggnadsvård* turn the gaze back towards the material past not only to romanticise it, but also to evoke critique of the present, to propose alternatives for the future, and to guide the practice of ongoing building care and renovation. The posts marked with *#byggnadsvård* are often part of a longer story framed as a house adventure (Swe. *husäventyr*) or a renovation journey (Swe. *renoveringsresa*). These narrate an unfolding relationship between people and houses and tend to frame derelict and broken houses as rugged pearls in need of gentle care, full of potential, opportunities and possibilities. While the house adventure emerges as an important trope in how domestic repair is narrated and visualised on social media, it is beyond the scope of this article to delve into it. This section traces the reframing of building care in relation to sustainability as it emerges in the hashtag stream.

In the posts collected for this research, building care is generally associated with ongoing processes of householding with resources and with what Jackson (2019: 427) refers to as material care. The following excerpt, compiled from multiple posts and comments, assembles recurring formulations found within vernacular expressions of building care in the hashtag stream:

Byggnadsvård used to be all about nostalgia and romantics. Now it is all about the future. It's about sustainability. It is sustainable.

It's about taking good care of what you already have.

Hot trend. Growing. A trend that not only benefits the house and its history, but also the planet. Sparked by a pandemic and climate thinking.

(Compiled excerpt 1)

Read together, these utterances show how *byggnadsvård* is explicitly associated with sustainability and care. This rhetorical function of the hashtag is reinforced by its association with other hashtags, such as *#hållbartbyggande* ('sustainable-building') or *#återbruk* ('reuse'). It's narrated as a responsive phenomenon in transformation, from nostalgia to futurity. The juxtaposition of 'then' and 'now' resonates with broader shifts in built heritage and conservation discourses towards a future-oriented resource perspective that emphasises regular upkeep, long-term thinking and good housekeeping with materials (Robertsson 2002; Holmberg 2019; Harrison 2020). The framing of building care as a hot, growing trend indicates increased popularity and visibility in popular media. Although some find the association with what is momentarily fashionable problematic, this rise in popularity is often narrated as a positive in this context. As portrayed in the excerpt above, it evokes interest in care that benefits existing buildings, historic value and the future of the planet.



Photo 2. A layered compilation image from eight screenshots from the #byggnadsvård hashtag stream. The above images show derelict red Swedish timber houses undergoing repairs that ensure their continued existence as houses. Photo collage from screenshots compiled and transformed by the author.

The critique of consumption and fast-paced renovation trends situates building care as an everyday sustainability ethic. Framed this way, taking care of existing buildings aligns with reducing the use of new resources, emerging as efficient. Refraining from action is repeatedly framed as an active decision that is challenging in the contemporary context but also deemed necessary for changed consumption patterns:

No one questions the standards we live by. What we take for granted. In these interior design-hysterical times. Renovation-hysterical. Consumption-hysteria. The renovation fever. Renovation rage. Why aren't the consequences of our obsession with renovation discussed more.

Renewed to follow trends. Buildings demolished, whole interiors blown out. For short-lived trends and fleeting desires.

It feels like a syndrome that sweeps over the Western world. The transience, ease of access, consumption that makes us feel empty when we don't get to build anything that feels lasting, something to feel at home in and be proud of. There is nothing wrong with wanting to decorate and have a cosy home. But how we consume our home interior feels unhealthy. Replacing when you simply feel like it. It doesn't make sense to tear everything out. It's ok to break the norms.

(Compiled excerpt 2)

Byggnadsvård is repeatedly pitted against mainstream renovation norms and a dominant "throwaway culture". The embedded critique is often harsh, questioning trends and consumption patterns, the modus operandi of the building industry, decision makers and the public. The fast-paced renovation culture is frequently challenged in building care stories that highlight and explicitly discuss the consequences of such endeavours; waste generated and values lost. While the longevity of materialities can be ensured

through carefully considered acts of maintenance and repair, the “cultural wear and tear” (Löfgren 2005: 139; Palmsköld 2015: 33) remains a challenge.

Building care is also repeatedly expressed as an alternative lifestyle, attitude or mindset that influences other areas of life and exemplifies circular and ecological modes of attention. In the observed Instagram posts, *byggnadsvård* is repeatedly paired with affective evaluations, as the following assembled excerpt indicates:

I see it as some kind of attention or care for nature and the environment. For the climate. It feels nice.

We could save so many resources if modern things were made to be repaired or had replaceable parts. Most of what we have is reused and fixed. And it works for us.

We should care for what we have. It feels more sustainable. We need to take care of what we have. It can help save the climate. Repairing rather than replacing saves resources and reduces emissions. It uses materials and methods that ensure long-term sustainability. Older buildings are made with care.

It also feels good from an environmental point of view. It's a good life philosophy.
(Compiled excerpt 3)

When building care is conflated with environmental care, the care for material resources becomes relevant for the continuity of the past and the possibility of a future. Read through a new materialist lens, sustainability and building conservation emerge as questions of ongoing reconfiguration between materials, practices and values. The discussion of the repairability of modern things foregrounds the question of how materials hold together temporally, and how they resist or invite different forms of care.

Taken together, the accumulated glimpses from the hashtag stream in this section reposition *byggnadsvård* as a future-oriented ethic of material care, where sustainability unfolds as a practice attuned to agentic and vibrant materialities. The empirical glimpses in this section hint at a processual, responsive and relational mode of knowing and sustaining the continuity of materials as beneficial and sustainable. A focus on maintenance and repair guided by a conservation ethos is also mobilised to highlight controversies within current approaches to the sustainability of the built environment. The affective charge is noticeable, building care is framed as a mode of attention and a way of caring that “feels good” and extends beyond the building itself.

In the stream of stories associated with the hashtag *byggnadsvård*, “sustainability” is repeatedly mobilised to revalue the care for old buildings and question a system that devalues practices of care and repair. The increasing popularity of the *byggnadsvård* approach is even framed as a public backlash against throwaway attitudes and fast-paced renovation norms. Caution is repeatedly implied and the sensitive and ongoing care of ageing buildings is furthermore articulated as a neglected aspect in the agenda to reduce emissions and waste associated with building and homemaking practices. Slowing down, cooling the renovation fever, and the importance of mending mindsets and consumption patterns emerge as common tropes.

This reframing adds another dimension to what, how, and for whom things should be carried forward, situating ecological concerns in everyday practices and negotiations about the ongoing upkeep of materials. Building care is positioned as an alternative that respects the embodied values of existing buildings and ensures long-term cultural and

material sustainability. The maintenance and repair of material environments become norm-breaking efforts that postpone early demise and stretch the use value of buildings, while retaining their cultural value. In what follows, I zoom in on how the conservation principles of caution shape repair choices and strengthen sustainability claims by slowing down, listening and letting be.

LISTEN TO THE HOUSE

A recurring piece of advice in the building care hashtag stream is to ‘listen to the house’, live in it before making changes and avoid hasty decisions. In this section, I explore how careful attention, slowness, and ongoing maintenance are framed as forms of sustainable engagement with material environments.

This vernacular articulation of conservation ethics is grounded in the principle of caution, or *varsamhet*, a foundational tenet of good *byggnadsvård* (see Robertsson 2002). It is essentially precautionary and central to the professional and academic field of conservation, calling for careful daily management, appropriate use of materials, thorough documentation and long-term planning grounded in a deep understanding of a building’s fabric and significance. In the hashtag stream, the logic of caution is iterated as advice for attentive listening:

The care put into the craft of older houses. Older buildings are made with care. And time. Things were allowed to take time. Building a house took time. They were, after all, intended to last for years to come. Caring for them takes time. It will take longer than expected.

We take it one day at a time.

Byggnadsvård is mainly about listening to the house. Spend time in the house before renovation. Become familiar with its characteristics. When you take the time to listen to a building, you will find that there are no simple answers.

(Compiled excerpt 4)

Read through the conservation ethos, the advice to ‘listen’ enacts what Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing (2015: 23) calls the “arts of noticing”, where temporal rhythms and material cues guide attention, intervention and restraint. The advice to ‘listen’ encourages care for the building on its own terms, with all its messiness, beyond the short-term human gain and individual lifespan. Taking the time to listen reveals that there are no quick solutions. The care for material things, as Jackson (2019: 428) frames it, “names a kind of patient attending, a slow and attentive *being with* by which the trajectory of others is secured and sustained through time”. Looking back and pausing before proceeding slows fast-paced narratives and fosters careful engagement with an agentic building whose materialities propose limits.

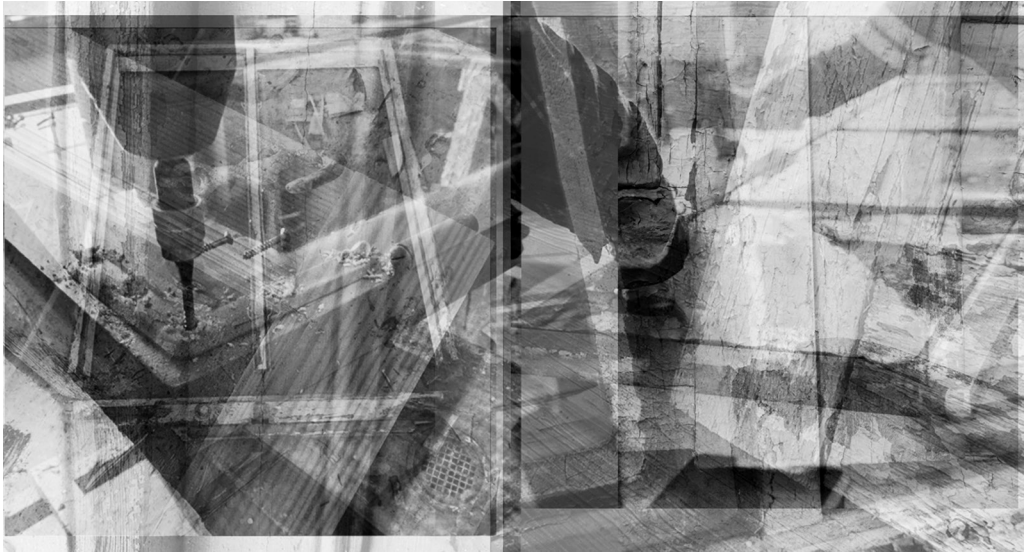


Photo 3. A layered compilation image from eight screenshots from the #byggnadsvård hashtag stream. These depict a common trope of window repairs, where a story of building care is told through materials, tools, and the work of hands. In these, the condition of existing windows is evaluated through careful examination, and their careful repair is documented and justified visually. Photo collage from screenshots compiled and transformed by the author.

The temporal demands of building care repeatedly surface in the hashtag stream. Care time tends to be slow and sometimes tedious. Caring for ageing buildings usually consumes money, time and effort. This is visualised in posts that foreground the messy backstory and the labour behind the polished ‘after’ shot, showing moments of breaking, waiting, scraping and cleaning. Text in captions and comment threads frequently raises questions about the value of maintenance and repair and what counts as wasted time. As the following excerpt shows, repair is framed as a resource-oriented restraint that keeps materials going and postpones them from becoming waste:

Is it a waste of time to repair this window? Only postponing the inevitable? But if you postpone the inevitable with this one, you will postpone the making of the next. You will postpone the growth of the mountain of waste. So, keep on repairing when it’s possible. Going to the gym also takes time and effort. Golf is an expensive hobby. I spend my holidays on this rather than flying off somewhere. Why not spend time, money and effort on fixing a house?

(Compiled excerpt 5)

The ongoing care for existing materials is defended through a reassessment of what counts as wasted time and justified through comparison with other socially acceptable time- and money-intensive pursuits. Repair is framed as a postponing endeavour; it does indeed postpone the inevitable, but by doing so, it slows the growth of material waste. Framing it as a hobby and the comparison with the gym, playing golf, and going on holiday reads as an effort to normalise building care as a legitimate use of time and money. This implicitly questions why consumption is culturally valued, whereas maintenance

and repair must be justified. Patience and tolerance for the slow temporality, the labour, and the cost of caring for materials emerge as an antidote to hasty renovations and the logics of planned obsolescence.

The building care logic of repair is often framed as an embodied attunement through an emphasis on noticing, responding, and learning from and with the materiality of the building. Caution also appears as humility, knowing when to surrender and involve specialised craftspeople. In this sense, building care is articulated as a relational practice grounded in skilful technique and close encounters with lively materials. The following excerpt foregrounds the relationality between bodies and buildings and how repair reinforces this bond and supports a sense of companionship through bodily work:

Byggnadsvård gives me a physical and direct relationship with my house. It anchors you to the house and the place, in a very natural way. I paint and scratch and fix and lift. I inspect, climb and crawl and live in the house with my whole being. It is creative all the time. And it's meaningful.

I think modern people need to use their body more.

The more time we spend together, the closer we become. We establish a relationship that feels...well...real. Sometimes I stroke the wall, like I'm petting it. Hello, my friend, how are you? What do you need?

I feel like my house is an individual. I help it and do things on its own terms. I don't see myself as an owner of this house but a user.

(Compiled excerpt 6)

In this rendering, old buildings in need of care emerge as dynamic participants in the renovation process rather than mere subjects of human control. The repeated emphasis on intimacy and physical effort produces an attunement to the building's material condition and possible unforeseen futures. Being physically involved with a building is also articulated as creative and meaningful, and the subtle note on the lack of bodily work also hints at a critique of contemporary norms of convenience. Repair grounded in building care, becomes an intra-active practice of being-with, and the agency of the house becomes explicit in remarks that highlight the house's capacity to anchor bodies and attention, set limits and shape decisions. The shift from 'owner' to 'user' recalls 19th-century ideas about custodianship and a sentiment that buildings of past times "are not ours. They belong partly to those who built them, and partly to all the generations of mankind who are to follow us." (Ruskin 1887: 182) Read alongside the advice to listen to the house and proceed cautiously, the excerpt frames repair as a relational practice through which agency is distributed across bodies, tools and materials.

In the hashtag stream, caring for a building in this way is also characterised by compromises and constant negotiation. Many also pointed out that the lack of economic means for drastic renovation and replacement contributed to the preservation of the building. In professional contexts, conservation practice is often framed in terms of striking a balance or finding a "happy medium" between preserving every detail and a total alteration to meet contemporary needs and tastes (Muñoz-Viñas 2009: 57). This balancing logic of caution in the renovation process is articulated as a matter of weighing competing needs and constraints:

Everything is a balancing act between what you want and what you need. And what the house needs. We try to listen to the house, the wallet, and our time and energy. (Compiled excerpt 7)

'Listening' in this sense calls for carefully calibrated renovation choices amid competing demands. The renovation process is frequently articulated as an ongoing negotiation between human needs and longings and the existing building. This process is complex, it involves other factors, and is shaped by finite resources (time, money, energy) and broader sustainability and heritage concerns. In this context, caution and restraint are often valued. I repeatedly observed claims that sometimes being lazy can be the best tip, because postponing action might postpone unnecessary renewal. Likewise, limited economic means are sometimes framed as a condition that inadvertently supports preservation of historic details by discouraging hasty renovations and drastic replacements.

In a productionist consumer culture, such deliberate moments of pause can be difficult to sustain because the urge to optimise, refresh and update has become the norm. Here, the principle of caution emerges as a temporal ethic that shapes material awareness and repair practices. The slower pace of renewal is articulated as potentially beneficial for human bodies, wallets, buildings and the environment. Caution also reorients judgment about what should be left in place and involves a negotiation between needs, wants, and other situated constraints. In the next section, I move from the temporal rhythms of caution to the conservation logic of minimum intervention, focusing on how diverse material histories shape intervention and aesthetics.

TEMPORAL LAYERS

A critical framing of building care comes to the fore in discussions of continuity and change, where older buildings are valued for the temporal depth embodied in the material traces of use and modification. These traces are framed through the metaphor of *årsringar*, referring to the annual growth rings on trees and depicted as a patchwork of materials that accumulate over time and do not conform to a single period or style. Within this motif, restraint from drastic change becomes an aesthetic and ethical stance. Accepting and caring for material layers and traces is articulated as 'good' from both a conservation standpoint, because it preserves material traces of the past, and an environmental perspective, because it minimises the use of resources.

Articulations about the value of preserving such temporal layers evoke the fundamental conservation principle of minimum intervention, or "changing as much as necessary but as little as possible" (Burra Charter 2013). The principle of minimum intervention extends beyond the temporal ethic of taking things slowly, proceeding with caution and doing less. Conservation is always a negotiation between what is allowed to continue and what is erased. Every intervention, or non-intervention, has consequences, whether the intention is to save, bring back, or let be. The principle of minimum intervention can be read as an apparatus for such negotiations. It emerges as an iterative movement between "doing something" and "doing nothing" (Ashley-Smith 2018: 7). Rather than calling for no action at all, it can be understood as a "balanced meaning-loss" as conservation scholar Salvador Muñoz-Viñas (2009: 56–57) suggests. In conservation discourses, the terms authenticity and retaining character are frequently

uttered and their meanings debated. As Yarrow (2018: 340) highlights, in official conservation discourses, authenticity does not mean a return to a perceived original but a logic of continuity in which change is expected and managed.

In the hashtag stream, minimum intervention emerges as an ethico-aesthetic commitment to layered and irregular time. Worn finishes and wallpaper tears evoke curiosity and make time legible. Anachronistic kitchen cabinets, appliances, and windows create dilemmas about what to keep, repair, remove or replace. Renovation plans and aesthetic longings for a return to a former version are aired and critically discussed in comments, as distilled in the following excerpt:

An old house should not be like a museum. It is living, ongoing and mixed. Different times coexist in a house. Every epoch leaves traces. Also, ours. And this is fascinating. *Byggnadsvård* is about preserving the passing of time, not only the beginning.
The houses should be allowed to change. They should tolerate adjustments to meet new needs. Just like humans change. But modernisation should be carried out with care and intention. These later additions are also part of the house.
It is important to show that the houses have lived for a long time. Different times peeking through a tear in the wall. If they could speak.
The annual rings build character.

(Compiled excerpt 8)

Temporal layers are framed as an integral part of the building's character. The anthropomorphism articulated in discussions about living and speaking houses signals the agency of materials in the continuous history of a building. The building's vibrant materiality actively shapes what counts as 'good' building care. The museum is repeatedly evoked to represent a purifying logic, whereas the building presents itself as complex and full of possible futures.

Drawing on the Swedish metaphor of *årsringar*, the temporal layers motif reframes later additions that do not fit the perceived original style as historical traces and signs of life rather than mistakes to be corrected. Change is accepted as ongoing, and the mixed layers emerge as active carriers of history. In official conservation discourses, the notion of character "allows for the possibility that even as things change, essential qualities are not transformed" (Yarrow 2018: 343). In this sense, retaining character does not necessarily signal a return to a specific point in history. Caring for temporal layers, guided by the principle of minimum intervention, becomes an ethico-aesthetic commitment to continuity, where diversity is accepted and aesthetically negotiated.

This negotiation is also visible in vernacular definitions of the term *byggnadsvård* in the hashtag stream, where renewal is weighed against the loss of a sense of temporal depth conveyed through materiality. While the value of timely aesthetics and historicity is often highlighted, the following compiled excerpt distils a recurring refusal of the tendency to save, preserve and bring back old 'authentic' or 'nice' versions of buildings:

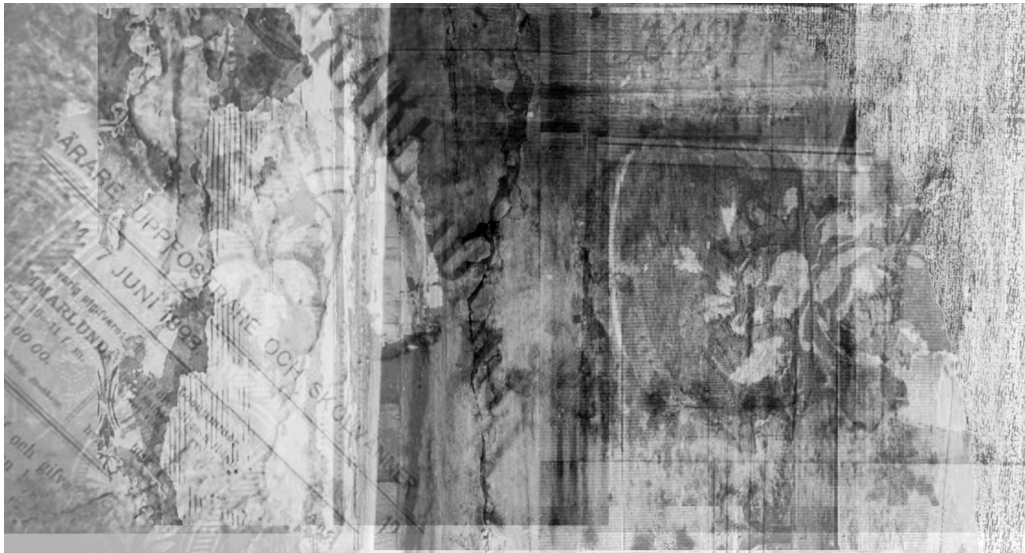


Photo 4. A layered compilation image from eight screenshots from the #byggnadsvård hashtag stream. These frame temporal layers as årsringar or 'growth rings' accumulated in the building over time. The accumulated material traces from the past are depicted through close-ups of layered material on walls during renovation. Photo collage from screenshots compiled and transformed by the author.

Many strive to bring back the old, to 'save' it or 'preserve' it, but it is often a really harsh approach. Restoring something old often makes it feel new. We don't want the material to feel new.

It is not important to recreate the original to the smallest detail. Everything shouldn't be from a certain year, when the house was built.

It's nice to take care of something or repair but it doesn't have to be in the nice *byggnadsvård* style or a nice old style, all straight and super functional.

(Compiled excerpt 9)

Read through the conservation logics of minimum intervention and continuity as change (Yarrow 2018: 340), making an old building feel new reads as a loss of time depth and the building fabric's capacity to carry on multiple histories. The excerpt also shows how environmental reasoning is brought in to restrain stylistic renovations. Renewal and replacement are repeatedly problematised and questioned within this entangled framing of building care and environmental care.

Along with this refusal of framing building care as stylistic renovation and a matter of returning old and derelict buildings to their former glory, building care is framed as continuous care enacted through small and ongoing repair and maintenance acts paired with an ethos of accepting what is there and letting be:

For me, *byggnadsvård* is not about going back to the original at all costs, but about taking care of what is already there, as long as it is not damaging it.

To engage with *byggnadsvård* is simply to take care of one's home and not let it fall apart. If you just do the simplest things on a regular basis, you can get very far, before the house is damaged of course.

It seems that the biggest obstacle for many is, mentally, to simply fix what is bad and let the rest be. We are often asked what we are going to do with this or that. But we just intend to let it be. We consume too much.
Save on work, resources and annual rings.

(Compiled excerpt 10)

Here, building care is articulated as a practice of selective repair grounded in material knowledge and a consideration of balancing needs and wants beyond individual gain. Taking care of what is already there rests on material knowledge, understanding of values and knowing what can be fixed and when something is damaged beyond repair. This also involves being aware that every act of repair is consequential and can lead to damage and a loss of meaning.

In the hashtag stream, the acceptance of accumulated material traces and mixed temporal layers is often framed as an ethical and practical stance that counters dominant norms of renewal and restrains consumption. Waiting for unwanted appliances, flooring, furniture, or cabinets to break beyond repair before renewal is not only acceptable but valuable from both conservation and environmental perspectives. This restraint is justified as a good use of resources and fosters what I describe as mended aesthetics, an acceptance of unwanted things and of appearances that do not fit the picture-perfect ideal:

The flooring looked a bit out of place. Not original. Damaged, but only superficially.
Tearing it out for something that looked more fitting, not a chance! Of course, it was nicer with the original, but it's nice now, too. Considering the environment, it is unnecessary to replace. The opposite of wear, tear and throw away.
Byggnadsvård is about renovating as people did in the past. Use what you have around. Find the simplest solution that fits the aim. It is also very creative.
The diversity and variegation are important.
True beauty. With just the right amount of ugliness. #takewhatyouhave #buildingcareinpractice #sustainablebuilding

(Compiled excerpt 11)

The tension between restoring the 'beautiful old' and keeping the more recent 'ugly old' reappears repeatedly in the hashtag stream. The environmental reasoning frames untimely replacements as unnecessary. This has aesthetic consequences. Waiting patiently for things to break beyond fixing cultivates a tolerance of irregularity and layering. These are not simply to be tolerated but also appreciated as part of the building's history and heritage. A bricolage attitude emerges, embracing what is already there and valuing existing materials simply because they are there, becoming attuned to them and learning to love them, even when they are imperfect or unwanted. This 'make do and mend' mindset and the constraints imposed by the building care approach trouble personal taste and the desire to transform homes to reflect dogmatic interpretations of authenticity, fleeting trends and individual desires. The value of aesthetics is not disregarded, but it needs to be renegotiated in relation to other concerns. Building care-in-practice subverts the binary distinction between 'beautiful' and 'ugly' so that they start to fuse.

Environmental concerns embedded in everyday life have indeed resulted in the renegotiation of the meaning and value of old buildings (Yarrow 2016). The turn towards sustainability demands an alternative aesthetic that accepts imperfections and the coexistence of different materials and style periods. This counters the idea that authenticity resides in an 'original' moment; instead, it is in continuity and the building's passage through time. Coming to terms with this patchwork aesthetic requires openness and a willingness to make compromises. The interplay between ethics, aesthetics and material properties thereby shapes practices of material care: what endures, what can be maintained or repaired, and what must be replaced.

Read through the diffractive lens of Barad (2007) and Bennett (2010), sustainable building care is shaped through an intimate intra-action with vibrant materials. Staying with compromised outcomes, tedious tasks and 'letting things be' requires a tolerance of material resistance, slow time and the ongoing negotiation of meanings, values, temporalities and aesthetics. In this way, the motif of temporal layers emerges as a justification for restraint on aesthetic, heritage, and environmental grounds. In the next section, I zoom in on the principle of like-for-like materials and the debates surrounding material choices.

SUSTAINABILITY

Comparing different temporalities of building, maintenance and material breakdown is a common theme in building care stories. Conservation principles organise and guide action while the materials, through their ongoing breakdown, call for particular forms of care. Engaging with stories that discuss the lifecycles of materials and how different materials "set in motion relations between things that become sites of responsibility and effect" (Gabrys et al. 2013: 4), this section touches on a critical material awareness that emerges through the intra-action (Barad 2007) between building carers, the assemblage of the building and the passing of time. This section traces how conservation principles, focused on material knowledge and like-for-like replacements, operate as an apparatus that determines what becomes identifiable as sustainable materiality for good building care.

A common visual motif that underlines the value of maintenance and repair for sustainability depicts close-up images of building parts, such as a log wall or a wooden window frame, before, during, and after fixing. This motif is frequently used by professional craftspeople to demonstrate and highlight the value and aesthetics of the heritage regime of repair. Even if the repairs end up being invisible their visibility is highlighted in the images. This kind of repair work, where only the parts that need replacing are replaced, is usually admired within this context.

Replace like with like. Only if needed. It should be obvious.

(Compiled excerpt 12)

Grounded in the conservation principle of like-for-like materials and techniques, the value of choosing the appropriate materials, using resources sparingly and caring for existing materials is reiterated in these show-and-tell stories. Images such as these visually communicate like-for-like mending. As the short excerpt suggests, this should be obvious but isn't, given the prevailing fancy for drastic renovation discussed previ-

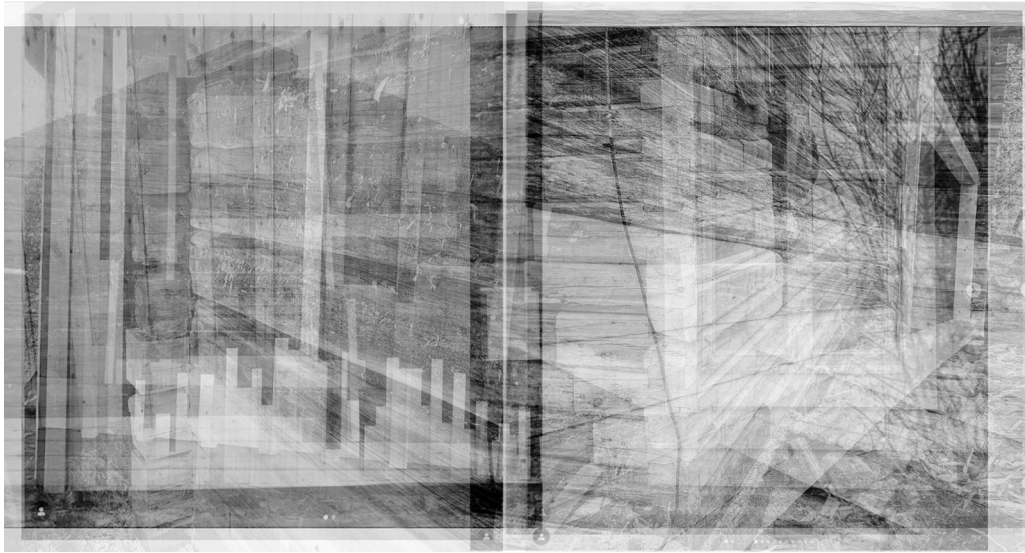


Photo 5. A layered compilation image from eight screenshots from the #byggnadsvård hashtag stream. These demonstrate, through close-ups of materiality, a minimum intervention approach as well as visibility of repair work in building care stories. Photo collage from screenshots compiled and transformed by the author.

ously. Posts of this genre, sometimes gently, provoke critique, but by demonstrating how materials behave and transform under different conditions and how they can be cared for, they are instructive and foster material awareness through engagement. The craft of building conservation rests on in-depth material knowledge and knowing what is repairable, although this does depend on skilful craft, attention and intra-action with matter that unfolds over time. In relation to sustainability discourses, repair work, or mending, following the principle of minimum intervention ensures the continuity of usable materials by replacing only parts, thereby minimising the use of new materials.

The motif of repaired walls and windows is often tangled up with a sentiment that materials also have different capacities to transform beautifully over time, and thus are worth caring for, rather than when they 'go bad' and are more easily discarded, allowing them to follow a linear path towards becoming waste.

A tension emerges between the appreciation of materials that are considered beautiful and well-aged and the recognition of transformation deemed less aesthetically pleasing and/or historically inappropriate. Even if certain materials are considered more historically correct, not every material has the capacity to transform in a way that is aesthetically pleasing or in a way that supports the building's temporal, processual and agentic materialities. The difference between materials that are good or bad for a house comes down to how these transform over time and how they perform, or intra-act, with the existing building. While historic, traditional, natural and good materials often entangle, such simplistic conclusions are also called into question.

There is a difference between material from the time, and material that is good for the house. Historic material is not inherently good for the house, or the environment for that matter. Taking care of a building is also relevant for new build-

ings. They should last as long as the old ones. To last they need to be taken care of. In a way that fits the way it is built.

(Compiled excerpt 13)

Here, the common assumption that all historical materials are inherently good for buildings and the environment is challenged. Hands-on engagement with materials reveals that assuming that 'old' is 'good' and 'beautiful', whereas the 'new' is 'bad' and 'ugly' is an oversimplification of complex material processes and entanglements. Knowing and learning what is good or bad, or rather appropriate or inappropriate material for a building, is not straightforward and depends on material awareness that comes from skilled and mindful engagement with matter. In Barad's (2007) terms, the becoming of such a material awareness could be framed as a material-discursive process of intra-action with what Bennett (2010) calls vibrant and lively matter on the move.

Materials' capacities to be cared for come to the fore in building care stories focused on conservation-oriented modes of maintenance and repair. This trope tends to be imbued with critique. While maintenance, careful repair work and skill are considered essential to sustaining a building, keeping it going longer and retaining its value, its material affordances are equally important to consider.

We build 'maintenance free'. Nothing is maintenance free. There are simply things that can be maintained and those that can't. Maintenance free is just a definition of something that can't be maintained. This window can last for 200 years, if you maintain it well and repair it. There seems to be a lack of knowledge about renovations and buildings. Replacing the old with a new. Eyes get sore, pores left clogged. Unhealthy house that does not breathe.

Demolish and build new, tear everything out and renew seems to be the attitude. When things break, we throw them away. When it is 'time to replace' we throw things away.

Buildings are disposable. Like single-use plastic straws. Sustainable? We used to build houses that endured centuries. Now we build for 25 or 30 or 50 years at the most. Working in the building industry, it is a bit scary to see how quickly a new house is built. We could save resources if things were made to be repaired.

(Compiled excerpt 14)

The modern fairytale of maintenance-free materials is frequently discussed and debunked in *byggnadsvård* stories. The short, problematic lifespan of modern materials such as plastic is brought up again and again in this context. The juxtaposition of the then and now, the healthy and unhealthy, fast and slow also brings attention to the futurity of these fundamentally different approaches and materials, in terms of aesthetics and functionality. Read diffractively, these temporal contrasts bring into view the kinds of relation and responsibility that different materials invite, or interrupt. They operate as patterns of interference. Framed in this way, *byggnadsvård* has the potential to forge different material relations, shifting from a focus on how things are useful for us towards thinking about how one could be more "useful to the things we own" (Graziano and Trogal 2017: 643). Material breakdown actively shapes the intervention. What can be replaced by what, and how, is negotiated at the level of matter.

Multiple material histories and possible futures are topics for debate, with the negotiation of value continuously unfolding in relation to the wear and tear that happens

with or without humans. The future trajectories of building materials as functional building materials are, however, shaped through the ongoing and dynamic intra-action (Barad 2007) between humans, materials and more-than-human forces. Repair and maintenance are not simply something humans do to inert materials, sustaining them, carrying them on and saving resources. The notions of maintainability and repairability highlight human practices in relation to dynamic materials. In the discussions of environmental issues and the long-term health of buildings, plastic has emerged as a contested, persistent and highly political material.

New plastic windows are the worst option, they have a short lifespan. Plastic windows cannot be maintained and must be replaced after 25–35 years. They are disposable windows.

Plastic windows contain environmentally hazardous substances and materials. Complex in construction. Difficult to recycle. Their environmental burden is heavy, in production and the aftermath.

If there is anything we should forget, it's plastic paint, the rubbish produced by inventive whitecoats in a laboratory. Plastic paint! I consign you to the dustbin of history. While we ban plastic bags, we cover our houses in plastic paint, and they rot inside.

Plastic doesn't age well. Plastic is ugly. The oceans are drowning in plastic.

(Compiled excerpt 15)

Plastic is a material that has an affective charge in building care narratives and evokes strong feelings. It's a material that is repeatedly mentioned in the *#byggnadsvård* hashtag stream, especially in relation to window replacement, paint and insulation. Plastic is framed as a disposable, single-use building material that doesn't break down beautifully, cannot be repaired but simply breaks and is thrown away. Yet, once it becomes waste, it might last for centuries. The problems associated with the material are expressed in strong terms and depicted in images, for example, showing the difference between old (generally wooden) window frames and new plastic ones, and rotting wood because of plastic paint on wooden surfaces. Plastic is not only considered unsuitable for old buildings but also harmful to the environment, ugly and inappropriate. It emerges as an emblem of short-term thinking and modern modes of building and thinking, considered problematic for people, buildings and the planet.

In the context of building care entangled with sustainability, building materials are discussed in terms of capacities that shape their futurity and ability to withstand the test of time. A critical material awareness emerges through physical encounters with materials, or intra-action (Barad 2007) between building carers, the material assemblage of the building and the passing of time. By highlighting how technology and modern innovation do not simply bring about solutions but also large-scale problems, building care stories call for the gaze to be returned to old, simple, pre-industrial materials for alternative modes of building sustainable buildings. The negotiation between material capacities, compatibility, and the futurity of an old building is bundled with an environmental ethos and questions about waste, disposability, and the wise use of resources. The capacity to be maintained and repaired is continuously negotiated, materially and discursively. The sustain-ability of materials, or their ability to be carried on into the long-term future by practices of maintenance and repair, also emerges as a crucial feature for good housekeeping with resources. Emphasis on the like-for-like principle of

building conservation raises the value of knowing and understanding materials, how they behave, what can be replaced with what, and what has the propensity for repair and maintenance.

The empirical glimpses in this section also reflect what Barad (2007) describes as the indeterminacy of intra-action, as the boundaries between subject and object, cause and effect, are effectively blurred. Materials emerge as vibrant (Bennett 2010: viii) elements in human activity; they are “quasi agents or forces with trajectories, propensities, or tendencies of their own” that also have the capacity to hinder, restrict and impact human will and designs in a multitude of ways. In the building care stories discussed here, matter is agentic and participates in shaping social, political, and economic dynamics.

CONCLUSION

In this article, I have traced building care stories that circulate in the hashtag stream *#byggnadsvård* on Instagram as a field where the meanings and matters of heritage and sustainability intertwine in a vernacular context. I set out to explore how conservation principles and notions of sustainability are articulated and negotiated, and how materials and their properties participate in the renegotiation of the value of old buildings. In this context, building care emerges as an ordinary heritage practice that challenges prevailing attitudes to building renovation and mobilises the conservation regime of care while being shaped by everyday living, conflicting aesthetic aspirations, and environmental concerns.

Read through conservation principles, sustainability emerges as situated judgments about material choices in relation to the potential consequences of maintenance and repair. Across the four motifs developed in the analysis, the links between building care and sustainability are made legible in multiple, sometimes contradictory, ways. First, I traced the reframing of building care as sustainable from a resource perspective as good housekeeping. In this reframing, the value of material care and reuse emerges as a response to wasteful renovation cycles and fascination with novelty and renewal. Second, the prompt to ‘listen to the house’ foregrounded caution as a slow ethic grounded in attentive noticing, where time, observation and carefully considered interventions are framed as responsible care that ensures material continuity and slows down the urge to renovate quickly. Third, the ‘annual rings’ demonstrated how continuity and change are ethically and aesthetically negotiated as a temporal mix of layered materialities. In this framing, the principle of minimum intervention is mobilised to legitimise diversity and multiplicity accumulated in patchwork histories that do not conform to singular styles or periods. And fourth, the motif of sustainability shifts the terms of sustainability towards material fit and reparability, where appropriate material choices are evaluated through capacities, compatibility and the politics of what can be materially maintained over time.

Methodologically, I worked through layered and compiled empirical excerpts. This situated, fragmentary and diffractive analytical strategy traced how conservation ethics travel into vernacular settings and are reconfigured through encounters among materials, ethics, aesthetics, everyday constraints, and broader concerns. The findings are specific to the context of the Swedish concept of *byggnadsvård* and its circulation on Ins-

tagram. The point is not to make generalisable or representative claims, but to use this field as a lens through which to observe how sustainability and heritage entangle in an ordinary context through mundane materials and repair decisions.

Focusing on how material awareness, mindful attention and an ecological ethos emerge through close encounters and intra-action (Barad 2007) with the lively and vibrant materiality (Bennett 2010), the article focuses on maintenance and repair as performative modes of attention, and on materials as active participants in generating attention, practice, and alternative narratives. It furthermore contributes to knowledge of how a vernacular heritage practice at the margins of official heritage management becomes a site where the value of old buildings is renegotiated in relation to environmental concerns, lively materialities and time.

SOURCES

Compiled excerpt = the curated and condensed analytical renderings of the thematic accumulation of text and fieldnote descriptions of images collected from the #byggnadsvård hashtag stream on Instagram between 2017 and 2025. Materials are kept in the author's personal collection.

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