
Two trees and one stick

by Pablo Rodríguez Blanco

Brown stick

There is a small stick in the sink. It is a perfect and small dark line, almost black, which on another scale could be an elegant piece of furniture in a white room. It is small enough to be the debris of a larger stick used for something else, but large enough that it didn't blow in through the window. While I wash some buckets, I push it away violently, as if by moving it harder, it would go further. It's a generic, dark brown branch. It has an irregular shape because it was once part of the same section amongst other small branches, of the same big branch. I try to not touch it. I feel that touching it is a way of giving in and accepting its presence in the sink. I leave it in the sink because one of the people with whom I share my studio has left it there carelessly, and I think the person who left it there should be responsible for it. Whilst I finish in the kitchen, I imagine that this branch could be the clue to something else: an instrument to smoke, the trace of an animal, an unbridled fight.

Very quietly I ask my classmate if she knows where the stick came from. Instead of talking to me, she prefers to gesticulate. She first lifts her shoulders, while stretching her mouth a little and opening both hands (universal code to say "I have no idea") The second gesture is a mix of several actions; with her finger she points the studio of another classmate, then moves her index finger several times around the side of her head and then makes a quick movement with one hand, as if she were sweeping something invisible. I can easily interpret each gesture: It was not she who left the branch, it was another person.

The hostility reaches such a point that nobody comments on the stick. Little by little, it begins to develop its own comfort in the sink. Because the wood has absorbed water, one side is darker than the other; I think it's because the branch is losing colour or, more likely, because of coffee residues.

There are four of us sharing a studio, but after almost a year, the relationship has reduced to saying "hi" when we arrive. As a way to establish a difference in the relationship I have with them, I say to one "hi, how are you" and to other one just "hi".

One morning when I entered the kitchen, I noticed that someone had given the stick a place; it was tidy. Tidy is not necessarily the correct word, but it was neatly standing in a corner of the sink. The stick, like us, also had a routine, in the morning it looked cleaner and tidier and by the afternoon it had degraded into the mess I had initially encountered. At the same time, I understood the message that a classmate was trying to communicate through the stick: this is not mine.

After a few days, I began to think that the stick was useful. When putting the dishes or metal objects on the surface of the sink, the stick cushioned the contact between the surfaces. The dishes did not clatter. The metals did not scratch.

Only when the stick was gone did I notice that I had somehow given life to it- I miss it.



Sausal

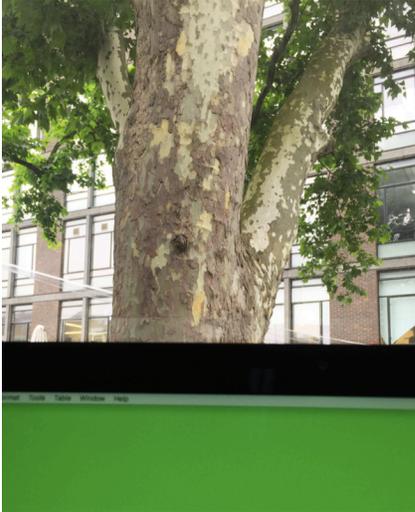
During my childhood I used to collect footballs that found their way into the backyard of my parent's house, which bordered with a wasteland that served as a large football pitch. The place was originally one of the most important football training facilities in Chile. "The Sausal" (willow plantation in Spanish) owed its name to a large weeping willow that grew beside a stream; just outside of the centre's gate. The training ground ended up becoming a plain of clay with thick and winding lines made with chalk. During weekends the field would turn into a place for celebrations and barbecues that usually ended in drunken brawls.

One year, a number of our neighbours were robbed inside their homes and people put the blame on the wasteland. They would say that it was not only a hiding place for thieves and drug addicts, but also an illegal landfill. The neighbourhood council decided to lift the surrounding wall a meter higher in order to prevent thieves from climbing over the wall. The new wall was very similar to the old one, but there was a tonal difference between the new and the old paint.

Currently, my parents still live in the same house, but now the dividing wall between their house and the Sausal is painted green. My mother says that now the backyard looks "nicer and more alive".



London plane



While I write this text, I am sitting in front of a window that looks out onto a large, leafy tree, a rather thick London plane tree with a trunk of about a meter in diameter. It is a peculiar trunk- the bark exhibits different patterns in the form of spots, similar to those of military camouflage: large irregular spots, medium irregular spots and small irregular spots.

If we have to agree on the trunk's colour, we would unanimously say green. However, the colour is actually a mix that includes almost three shades of reddish greys, a very light green (that turns into opaque white) and orange tones. One of the special features of the London plane tree is that as it ages, it loses its small, thin branches- the highest branches. So, as the tree gets older, its structure is reduced to a few large branches. The oldest trees are a kind of "Y", which begins to move and lose its rigid "Y" shape.

The tissue of the trunk grows from its deepest core to the outside. As this happens, the outer layer of the bark, not having enough flexibility, cracks, breaks and then falls, just to give way to a newer, innermost bark layer, of another colour. In the case of the London plane tree, it changes its bark heterogeneously, which causes its different layers to be exposed to light in different moments. The whole process causes the intermixing of colours, thus generating an almost perfect camouflage pattern. A green colour that turns into a complex surface, that secretly points out an impenetrable core.

We understand that things overlap inexhaustibly in different random events. In this way, things, like trunks, end up wearing away, losing their colour and form. We stop seeing small areas of bark and we only see a large green mass. We keep trying to separate each layer individually and put a name to each green: moss green, olive green, sap green. We understand that we are playing a game to keep things separate from each other: walls are rebuilt, trees are pruned, rules are improved.