



Sugar Water

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One of my most visceral storytelling experiences came from the 1995 film *Seven*, in which a lawyer is forced to carve out a pound of his own flesh as a penance for his own greed. This was one of the ways in which the antagonist carries out a series of crimes inspired by the seven deadly sins. I could picture the pain in the lawyer's face, and tried to think of the most logical places on the body to cut from, without fatally damaging oneself. No sufficient answer emerged.

I hadn't even seen the film.

These were relayed to me by a friend and my mind did the rest. We were in seventh grade, so his account of the story could have been grossly exaggerated, as is the case with young boys attempting to impress one another with their tolerance for violence. These sins could be thought of as moral parables hovering above us, but it is not far-fetched to say that they are actually common characteristics we confront on a daily basis, either with others, or within ourselves.

I still haven't seen the film in its entirety. My knowledge of its plot, and snippets of grotesque imagery have given me enough to understand. I don't need to see it played out for it to have an effect on me. I can recall going through each of the sins and the corresponding crimes. I wondered if my character would qualify *me* as a victim, were that cinematic world to suddenly be my reality. I was mostly good, I thought, as most of us do.

I am also reminded of the tattoos on pig stock, or the marking of cattle. Something about the equation of bodies to product value makes this connection. Branding permanently imposed onto skin decoupling its

autonomy. We do this quite literally with our food (and handbags) in brutally evident ways, yet the parallel to fellow human is a bit more subtle. We are accustomed to figuring out how to *flip* relationships into more profitable opportunities. Social capital turn our personalities into currency. When is our existence not run through a monetized filter? To learn, to dwell, to heal are valued at their proof of purchase, but what comes of life when supposed given rights are no longer affordable? For many of us, this is an abusive relationship we cannot leave. The spoils of choice are fueled by aspirational transactions.

The irony of personal debt is buying-in to render debt imperceptible. Image supplants the reality of a perilous situation. The ironies don't stop there. Maybe a precarious life of rich experiences is more interesting than what a job title and salary are supposed to deliver. Technology allows us to be better connected remotely than we are by proximity. This is fast improving (or worsening), but at what costs that are not numerical? In what ways are we indebted to each other? With whom and where do we live when our time is no longer livable? When is overdue truly too late? How tender is an embrace through a spacesuit?

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