

Paper Clips—Nonfiction by Bernard Grant

I wore paper clips. On my pants.

Navy blue Dickies,
cell phone pocket,
a pouch sewn into
the left knee.

Every pair lined with paper clips.

I'd invented a new style.

Lip pierced, I wore the same clothes every day like a cartoon character:

the Dickies,
black boots,
black watch
black t-shirts.

Band shirts,
of local and national hardcore bands.

Far From Breaking.
Gorilla Biscuits.
Crunch Time.

A departure from punk, hardcore seemed more organized, with more variations in speed and rhythm.

(There were clear physical distinctions. Punks wore leather, spiked and chained, and many wore dyed mohawks, while hardcore kids wore short, tight clothes, denim and cotton, refused mind-altering substances, and “danced” at shows. Punks raced around the mosh pit, shoving each other, while most hardcore kids balked at the idea of physical contact, though they kicked and punched the air and roller-skated in place. That's not to

say people weren't hurt at hardcore shows. I was once kicked in the lower abdomen so hard I pissed blood for several days.)

Though much of hardcore, I can admit now, sounds the same as punk.

Loud, fast, angry.

I couldn't admit this then, when I just wanted to fit in.

Into a subculture that claimed to be different.

So I mimicked them,

wore the same undersized band t-shirts,
practiced the same "dance" moves.

Figure skating in place.

Punching air.

Running in circles.

Hurling myself on and off the stage,
trying to grab the mic.

How I'd love to forget those claustrophobic dog piles,

swapping

sweat.

Yes. We were different.

I was different,

black in a subculture flooded with white kids.

Hyper-aware of myself—aware that the only other black kid was my brother.

Twins, we were born the same, a fact that made us different, and it was, perhaps, these differences, already standing out, that made it easy to rebel.

Straight-edge nonconformists, hardcore kids weren't supposed to drink or smoke or do drugs.

Since I caught stares as a black kid in a white subculture, or as a twin, or as a black twin—hard to tell which (possibly all three) (most likely all three)—I needed the relief of liquor (it's hard to be a black kid in a white subculture) and cigarettes (it's hard to be a black kid in a mob of angry white kids) and drugs (it's easy to be a black kid when I'm too high to care about different skin).

Not pot though.

Everyone, even some hardcore kids, smoked pot.

Not me.

I was terrified of pot.

Pot branched my consciousness into too many streams.

So of course I resisted when at a party at my apartment one night some potheads pestered me for a paper clip with which to scrape a resin ball out of their glass pipe.

When they claimed a paper clip was just a piece of twisted wire, I argued, clenching my one claim to individuality.

Forgetting that I was a black twin.

(Or deciding that there were other black twins. Somewhere.)

Assuming no one else wore paper clips.

But when I left that apartment, I left a black spot on the kitchen wall.

The stain of a resin ball.