

68. I always end up sitting next to some loony who just peed in his pants for the fourth time that day. Once, somebody sat next to me who was mumbling to himself and just crusty with urine and I'm just real sensitive to smell. I can't handle smelling dirty bodies and feces and urine, so I took my tray and got up and left. There was nowhere else to sit. And it's not just the smells you have to deal with. The other night, there were these two guys screaming at each other and apparently they're gonna go at it. One yells, "It's stupid we're fighting, we're both gonna go to jail," but he couldn't get the other guy to shut up. And then the police did come. Came and dragged them both away. I'm used to potential violence - it's a subcultural thing - because I'm a male and because I participate in a lot of the *frontiers of society* as it exists within an urban environment, but any perceived grievance can set off some of these guys 'cause their self-worth is at an all time low. Tonight was a creampuff situation, compared to a lot of times when the place is packed with people. First of all, just the proximity of other people would bother anybody, packed in a situation like that and you're waiting and you don't have any sense of your own control, your destiny, even for the next hour. When I'm there, I bury my face in a book so people don't come up and talk to me. I don't look around because in that context, I'm not looking for human contact. Quite frankly, I'm not really thinking about anybody else. It's a totally selfish act which I'm not happy about but, personally, I find those circumstances stressful enough that all I wanna do is eat and then get the fuck out of there. I talked to those guys tonight with you but in general I don't - even when the nice guys come up and go, "Hey, how ya doing?" We just end up sitting having small talk and if I don't wanna make small talk in my chosen society, why would I wanna do it when it's forced upon me? It's not interesting. I don't wanna sit there and go, "How ya doing," and force some laughter! Why the fuck would I want to do that? I am depressed and it makes me even more depressed to go there. They don't want to be there either. I'm glad that they try to be human about it but I'm not interested in much forced interaction. You also avoid trouble that way. Like that guy who was standing in line with us, "Bob, Boob and Bone," or whatever his "3 B's" said that were written in black marker on his jacket. When he turned around and looked at me, the first thing I'm nervous. You obviously felt kind of nervous too, or conspicuous anyway, and turned your head towards me. I just looked at him, and I was trying to think, "What's his problem?" Over the years, I'm out on the street in different neighborhoods and everything all the time, and I don't walk around with paranoia but I'm always conscious of everything around me, either by choice or by necessity. I see everybody's face, like on the El, even when I'm looking at a book. I have great peripheral vision and stuff and it's not because I'm sitting there trying to look at people, it's just automatic. I saw you looking at him so I looked right at him, and I had to do my five second evaluation: am I going to say something to him or am I just going to turn my head? In 30 seconds, if I can't figure out what somebody is about, then the thing to do is stay away from them. Then, from a distance, I take another 30 seconds to evaluate them. They might turn out not to be a threat but you have to think about these things. And you have to think really quickly. You turned your head and I turned mine but I was watching and you kept looking at him. Then he turned his head and you smiled at him! I wanted to choke you. You don't encourage situations like that, you can't do it. You should just, like turn and divert your eyes. That's what I wanted to do. To do otherwise is, like inviting unwanted discourse. I know it's sad but you also have to realize the reality of the situation: if the guy fucks with you, what are you gonna do about it? I'm gonna give you some unsolicited advice, in a situation like that the first thing you say to them is, "I'm writing a book about people in the neighborhood, can I ask you some questions?"