

waiting for teargas

The working idea was to move with the flow of protest, from dawn to 3 AM if need be, taking in the lulls, the waiting and the margins of events. The rule of thumb for this sort of anti-photojournalism: no flash, no telephoto zoom lens, no gas mask, no auto-focus, no press pass and no pressure to grab at all costs the one defining image of dramatic violence. Later, working at the light table, and reading the increasingly stereotypical descriptions of the new face of protest, I realized all the more that a simple descriptive physiognomy was warranted. The alliance on the streets was indeed stranger, more varied and inspired than could be conveyed by cute alliterative play with »teamsters« and »turtles«.

Describe the attitudes of people waiting, unarmed, sometimes deliberately naked in the winter chill, for the gas and the rubber bullets and the concussion grenades. There were moments of civic solemnity, of urban anxiety, and of carnival.

Again, something very simple is missed by descriptions of this as a movement founded in cyberspace: the human body asserts itself in the city streets, against the abstraction of global capital. There was a strong feminist dimension to this testimony, and there was also a dimension grounded in the experience of work. It was the men and women who work on the docks, after all, who shut down the flow of metal boxes from Asia, relying on individual knowledge that there is always another body on the other side of the sea doing the same work, that all this global trade is more than a matter of a mouse-click.

One fleeting hallucination could not be photographed. As the blast of stun grenades reverberated amidst the downtown skyscrapers, someone with a boom box thoughtfully provided a musical accompaniment: Jimi Hendrix's mock-hysterical rendition of the American national anthem. At that moment, Hendrix returned to the streets of Seattle, slyly caricaturing the pumped-up sovereignty of the world's only superpower.

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