

## 99%—The Occupy Wall Street Collaborative Film

Two weeks into the movement that called itself “Occupy Wall Street,” filmmaker Audrey Ewell found herself at home in Brooklyn working on promoting a film that was set to open in London while at the same time somewhat paying attention to a live internet stream covering the day-by-day activities of OWS in New York.

The peaceful march of about 1000 activists onto the Brooklyn Bridge earlier in the day hadn’t yet taken her away from her day-job chores until she noticed that the police who had initially escorted the protestors onto the structure had begun arresting them by the hundreds.

That got her attention! And, once the stream-coverage ended, she turned on television news to follow the story as it unfolded. But, alas, it was business as usual on the tube. The arrest of 740 people on the Brooklyn Bridge in broad daylight apparently wasn’t deemed newsworthy.

That night Ewell and her film partner Aaron Aites showed up down at the OWS encampment at Zucotti Park in lower Manhattan with cameras rolling. Although not part of the movement, it soon became apparent to them that the activities of the “99%,” as the participants had come to refer to themselves, had certainly become worthy of documentation. And, as no one else seemed to be paying attention, they felt it was up to them.

“The film was designed to be an unaffiliated parallel experiment - to test the processes of the Occupy movement in a real-world, goal oriented context,” according to Ewell.

“Aaron Aites and I started the film with just three rules: 1) Anyone and everyone was welcome to make the film with us. 2) As more experienced filmmakers, we would guide the process and handle big-picture stuff. 3) This film would not be propaganda but would instead give context to the movement and the environment from which it sprang.”

Putting out a call for collaborators, in short order they received over 100 responses. The email list they set up “quickly devolved into chaos” according to Ewell, “well meaning but clutter-inducing chatter.”

“Collaborator turnover in the first few weeks was high. But, knowing from the outset that we were experimenting with an untested collaborative production process, we also knew that we’d have to adjust as we went along.

“We also realized that collaboration and hierarchy were not mutually exclusive and in fact, that combination was what allowed us to progress quickly and deal with issues as they arose in an organized and effective manner.”

What became “99% - *The Occupy Wall Street Collaborative Film*” features an unprecedented diversity of thought with many contributing voices, not just those who conceived the project.

That they ended up with a film whose many parts cohered so successfully is due in large part to the massive effort put forth by the armies of volunteer filmmakers and editors who invested such an immense amount of time and energy into a project and a

story they felt needed to be told. Not to mention Ewell and Aites, who put in an untold number of 100-hour weeks to see the project through to its conclusion.

Or as Ewell put it, “Our aim, first and foremost, was to produce a cohesive, well-shot yet diverse and inclusive portrait of the movement and an examination of the issues raised by it. By mirroring and testing the Occupy movement’s processes, we were able to gain greater insight into what may have worked, and what worked in theory, for the fledgling movement.

“This film wouldn’t and couldn’t have been made without so many people contributing a great deal of work and love to make it happen.”