At five o'clock on Sunday, November 27, a group of occupiers sat down in Dilworth Plaza facing west on Market Street. On Saturday, Mayor Nutter had stated that eviction would proceed in the 48 hours following five o'clock on Sunday. The occupiers linked arms, surrounded by a crowd so large it required a double human mic. A group of police stood in the street facing the occupiers. Tension built as helicopters hovered lower, television news crews illuminated the scene with Hollywood action lighting, and the police shifted from foot to foot. By Monday night, the police still had not moved in, and Occupy Philly was able to hold a General Assembly as usual.

But there has been nothing usual about the occupation, in Philly or elsewhere. From the second planning meeting at Arch Methodist, which was attended by seven hundred more than attended the first, the Occupation has been an ever-rotating group. I met new people at each General Assembly I went to, and there were many new faces at Dilworth on Sunday. We have had no roadmap, no idea what will happen; we have pushed on by affirming in each other that anything can happen. We have held Dilworth since October. We have fed each other, taken care of each other. We have formed a community.

Our ideas alone will not carry us beyond Dilworth. Our strength will be the bonds we have built, the organizations we have formed. This is not the end of Occupy, but neither is it a grand beginning. We have joined together, we have learned, we have shared history, and now we will go forward together.

We present this third issue of Occupy Philly: Machete in two parts. The first is a snapshot of Dilworth; the second concerns Occupy beyond Dilworth. We also include in this issue the first in a two-part series about the human mic. The second part will be in Issue Four. We do not know where things will stand then, but we'll be there. Join us.

-Sid Rothstein
repetition which prepare us to do it all over again. Our consumption, too, is ceremonial. With the arrival of the holiday season, annual rituals of buying like Black Friday, Cyber Monday, and the entire Christmas season arrive once more. The endless repetitions of making, selling and buying don’t end after Christmas but structure our lives by keeping money and goods and people flowing smoothly towards the maximization of profit.

Of course, these two ritualized times are not really distinct. They work together both locally and nationally. Locally, the problem that OP poses to City Hall is that it threatens not only to disrupt the normal political ritual-time by acting outside the voting booth, but it also houses a possibility for rupturing normal economic functions (like the project at Dilworth Plaza). Nutter’s politics is designed to put down whatever could rupture the normal flow of money and goods through this city, and nationally, the Citizens United ruling ensures that unlimited corporate money can flow into political campaigns. The deregulation of finance since the 1970’s has made it so that profits are increasingly private and risks are increasingly public, i.e., corporate losses are eventually bailed out by the people. (David Harvey calls this “neoliberalism.”) In other words, our current politics and economics are rituals that work together to hold the status quo in place. Through them we’re supposed to faithfully perform the same actions again and again without question.

Such ritual time paves over any real “present” in which new, transformative action could occur. Politics and the economy, we’re told, are established, determined processes. The job of the people is simply to participate in the established ceremonies: voting, buying, working, selling.

OP necessarily began within these ritualistic processes. Procuring a permit, and so beginning within the limits of Philadelphia politics, allowed it room to grow and establish itself. But its subsequent attempts at transgression have often remained almost ceremonial. The arrests beginning on October 24th were highly planned, pre-announced, and by definition temporary and limited appropriations of space. As a result, only slight modifications were needed by the city’s political and legal machinery to plug these events into a “normal” flow. The process has gone like this: the police escort the protesters to their destination; then, the police cordon off those planning to be arrested; and after a prescribed period of time the arrests begin. The whole process looks a lot like going to confession; waiting for one’s turn to meet with the absolving priest; and then entering the confessional to receive the necessary penance.

The contradiction between OP’s transgressiveness and its obedience comes from its restless attempts to distinguish itself from the political and economic rituals from which it arose, but the nature of which it hasn’t really confronted yet. But eviction opens OP to a possible new horizon. First, an opportunity arises not simply to maintain or multiply the occupation but also to begin making it a rupture in the rituals of politics and economics in Philadelphia. This is the chance to occupy not only space but also the processes and flows of the city in ways capable of disrupting and rearing them. Occupy Oakland attempted something like this in its general strike, an act of occupation that rerouted some of the ritual movements of bodies and goods through the city. This tendency has already emerged in Philadelphia in budding attempts to prevent the foreclosure of a home in North-West Philly. These examples represent different, more disruptive and creative kinds of occupation that don’t simply take over and maintain a certain space, but also jar loose the deadening, ritualistic processes into which we’ve been locked.

Second, it’s possible the eviction can open the movement to a deeper understanding of the systemic nature of the problems it’s confronting. It’s becoming more and more obvious that politics and economics are processes that reinforce one another at a systemic level: both in the recent coordination of mayors around the country to evict those protesting the political-economic situation, and in Nutter’s politics aimed at forcefully plugging the movement back into the normal economic functioning of the city and country.

With the crisis of eviction, then, comes a chance to move past the occupation’s contradictory relation to the city and beyond those strategies that have already been neutralized. This is a chance for Occupy Philly to accelerate and intensify its ruptures with the deadening political and economic ceremonies that hold the status quo so firmly in place.

-John Schultz