

## Jesus' "Triumphal Entry" as Flash Mob Event

### Molecular "r"evolution in Mark 11:1-11

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#### Abstract

The so-called triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem in Mark 11:1-11 mimics Greco-Roman and Jewish political and military processions, celebratory welcomes, and/or the Parousia except for the finale (grand ritual or sacrifice in the city's temple, expulsion of former vestiges of power, and/or festive banquet). The finale of this triumphal entry has Jesus enter Jerusalem, look around, and dismiss himself back to his lodgings at Bethany because it was late in the evening. This anticlimactic finale (or the lack thereof) has led various scholars to hypothesize its divergence from traditional formulas. Responding to this inconsistency, I argue that the divergence is intentional—part of a molecularly revolutionary scheme. To elaborate, my conceptual foundation is Félix Guattari's term "molecular 'r'evolution," which is a term for decentred, originary, and subversive activities that occur in random moments. The small letter "r" represents Guattari's preference for molecular or decentred micro-political social transformations and revolutions over transcendental revolution or totalitarian machinations. Guattari lists the various examples of modern-day molecular revolutions. One of the them is the flash mob. In this article, I therefore tap into flash mob founder Bill Wasik's understanding of a flash mob (inside job, undeclared location, and temporally transitory event) as a way to re-interpret Mark 11:1-11. I argue that the perceived lack of finale is part of the transitory or molecularly revolutionary nature of this triumphal event: the participants of the flash mob disperse immediately to avoid any trace or remnants of their subversive ways. Following the subversive spirit of Wasik's intent with the creation of a flash mob, such divergence from the traditional procedure of a triumphal entry is a deliberate part of the molecularly revolutionary scheme that empowers local communities to work together and express themselves against the oppressors and subvert institutional and normative restraints.

#### Key Words

Triumphal entry; molecular revolution; Félix Guattari; flash mob; Bill Wasik

Every Palm Sunday (pending weather conditions), my church processes with palm branches, singing hymns while circumambulating the perimeters of our church block. For me, the procession seems like a flash mob. We gather and organize at the church's entrance at the appointed time with the full intent of waving our palm branches and declaring with songs that today is Palm Sunday. Like a flash mob, this procession only lasts ten minutes. Although it happens every year, the date of Palm Sunday changes every year because it follows the liturgical calendar. Thus, like a

flash mob, the event may be anticipated but is hard to predict. A point of this Palm Sunday procession is to create enough affective presence for the community to re-experience and remember that today is the day that—like the throng of Mark 11:1-11—we welcome Jesus into our community. Some onlookers are disrupted by the procession; others are not fazed at all. Either way, this flash mob-like annual event is a common church practice of performing a version of molecular revolution.

My church's Palm Sunday activities inspired me to re-read Mark 11:1-11 through the lens of molecular revolution in the form of a flash mob. Of course, my rector would not have conceived the liturgy in the frame of a molecular revolution, let alone a flash mob, when she planned the event. And yet, as a participant, I could not help but connect the dots and feel the disruptive presence we had while we processed through the busy streets of our city's downtown. We were suddenly there but we quickly disappeared as if nothing had happened. The procession was organized but unannounced, as the rector probably did not seek permission for our procession from city officials or announce it to the downtown stores and residents. The sudden and unannounced performance on the busy streets that led to Jerusalem in Mark 11:1-11 also reminds me of a flash mob—not that flash mobs per se existed during the time of Mark; nevertheless, as I will explain below, the elements that constitute a flash mob (inside job, undeclared location, and transitory event) are all found in Mark 11:1-11.

### **Contextualizing Ancient Triumphal Entries**

Taking a step back, the factor that opens the way for a molecularly revolutionary reading of Mark 11:1-11 is the lack of finale in this supposedly triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem. Here, I compare the ingredients of this entry with the royal, imperial, political, and messianic triumphal processions often said to resonate with Mark's depiction (see e.g. Brandon 1967, 349-50; Reimarus 1970, 92; Belo 1981, 178-79; Myers 1988, 290-7; Duff 1992, 55-71; Horsley 2001, 109-10). Leander (2013), Duff (1992), and Kinman (2005) marshalled in detail the prevalence of this "triumphal entry, celebratory welcome, and/or Parousia ... in Greek, Roman, and Jewish accounts."<sup>1</sup> An important point of contention, however, is the procession's lack of anticipated finale in Mark's version. Triumphal entries usually concluded with a grand ritual or sacrifice in the city's temple, expulsion of former vestiges of power, and/or a festive banquet.<sup>2</sup> Josephus describes Alexander the Great's entrance into Jerusalem as follows: "Then all the Jews together greeted Alexander with one voice and surrounded him ... [Then] he gave his hand to the high priest and, with the Jews running beside him, entered into the city. Then he went up to the temple where he sacrificed to God under the direction of the high priest" (*Jewish Antiquities* 11.332-36).<sup>3</sup> Although the idea that the great Macedonian would actually sacrifice to YHWH is unrealistic (Duff 1992, 58), Josephus' fictional political propaganda still maintains the crucial ingredient of sacrifice at the end of a procession or triumphal entry.

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<sup>1</sup> Leander also summarized the innocuous or non-political readings of Mark 11:1-11 (2013, 255-56). Also see Gould (1896, 205-206); Taylor (1952, 451-8); Cranfield (1959, 369-72); Catchpole (1984, 322-23); Gundry (1993, 692-700); Roskam (2004, 159-61).

<sup>2</sup> For detailed discussions on Roman triumphal entries, see Cagnet (1912, 488-91); Scullard (1969, 213-18); Warren (1970, 49-66).

<sup>3</sup> All references to Josephus's *Antiquities* are from Marcus's (1951) translation.

Mark 11:1-11 dramatically strays from the final part of the pattern. In verse 11, the passage ends anticlimactically: “Then [Jesus] entered Jerusalem and went into the temple; and when he had looked around at everything as it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the twelve.”<sup>4</sup> Various scholars have tried to interpret this questionable ending with three approaches. First, it is read as a frustrated or deliberately incomplete entry due to Mark’s description of messiahship as one of suffering, death, and resurrection (Yarbro Collins 2007, 516-21). Second, it is an act of appropriation fulfilled on the following day with Jesus’ disruptive action in the temple (Duff 1992, 55-71). Third, it is a manifestation of postcolonial ambivalence, a third space between mimicking the empire while subtly subverting the empire through the triumphal entry (Leander 2013, 264-65).

Following Leander’s postcolonial reading of this diversion from the standard pattern as a third space or “almost the same but not quite an imperial triumph” (2013, 259), this article re-reads Mark 11:1-11 with Félix Guattari’s concept of molecular revolution—simply put, a revolutionary act with unorthodox strategy and expectation. This molecular revolution is manifested through the clandestine preparation and “flash mob-like” performance with the assemblage of a colt, cloaks, leafy branches, and human actants<sup>5</sup> shouting Ps. 118:25-26.

Re-reading Mark 11:1-11 as a flash mob is also inspired by Ched Myer’s depiction of this text as street theatre:

The popular title usually given to this episode (the “triumphal entry”) is a misnomer, for the procession is neither unambiguously “triumphal” nor does it actually enter Jerusalem (until the anticlimactic 11:11). The episode, resembling carefully choreographed street theater, is designed to give intentionally conflicting messianic signals. (1988, 294)

Paul Brooks Duff echoes Myer’s “conflicting messianic signals” by describing the abrupt and anticlimactic ending of Jesus’ so-called triumphal entry into Jerusalem as “ironic and disqualifying” (1992, 70-71). According to Duff, Mark 11:1-11 is ironic because it was supposed to mimic the march of the divine warrior mentioned in Zechariah 14 and the Greco-Roman triumphal entries, as mentioned above. And yet, it failed to do so because Jesus did not appropriate anything; rather, the action (or the lack thereof) of Jesus “disqualifies” not just the assumed sequence of a typical entry but also the nature of the messiahship and kin(g)dom or empire that Jesus proclaims. This disqualification subverts the expected ordinary.

This article is also indebted to Matthew Valdez and Kendra Haloviak Valentine’s (2017) essay “The End of the Road: Jesus, Donkeys, and Galilean Subsistence Farmers.” Valdez and Valentine have suggested that the humans who participated in the triumphal entry into Jerusalem are the peasant farmers who were opposing the oppressive land taxation and systemic manipulation of labourers and tenant farmers by both the Roman Empire and their rich local collaborators (2017, 219-22). Through the lenses of ecotheology, narrative, and socio-scientific criticisms, Valdez and Valentine read Mark 11:1-11 as a subversive march organized

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<sup>4</sup> This article works with the English translation of the New Revised Standard Version.

<sup>5</sup> Actants or actancy, as defined by Bruno Latour are “sources of affects and effects, actions and reactions, something that modifies another entity in a trial ... [whose] competence is deduced from its performance and not from presumptions” (Latour 2004, 237; see also Latour 2005, 10-11).

by peasant subsistence farmers with the protagonist (Jesus) on their side. Jesus is on the side of those who are in “the periphery, the poor, the animals, and the land” (226). Reflecting the intricacies manifested in intersectional reading of biblical texts, Valdez and Valentine add a caveat on the ethical ambiguity of using an unriden donkey (colt) in the triumphal entry. On the one hand, the donkey symbolizes the oppressed peasant class; on the other hand, the donkey is not part of those who will be liberated because the donkey is still relegated as a commodity in Mark 11:1-11 (225).

Although Valdez and Valentine do not mention molecular revolution (let alone flash mob), their discussion resonates with the possibility that this event is “choreographed” (Jesus riding on an untrained colt) and “staged” (as a procession) (2017, 224). This article taps into Valdez and Valentine’s subversive political reading by suggesting an imaginative possibility in which Mark 11:1-11 could have been a molecular revolution in the form of “flash mob.”

### **Defining Molecular “r”evolution**

Molecular “r”evolution is a Guattarian term for decentred, originary, and subversive activities that occur in random moments. Intentionally lowercasing the letter “r” represents Guattari’s preference for molecular or decentred micro-political social transformations and revolutions against the idea that revolution has to be transcendental or that it requires totalitarian machinations (Guattari and Rolnik 2007, 261). Previous revolutions centred upon an ideology, a person, or an institution for them to work or be sustained (Guattari 2008, 47-48). This form of revolution is problematic because it forces individuals and communities to adopt the “programmatic logic” (Guattari and Rolnik 2007, 236) of a certain ideology without considering situational necessities and differences. For example, according to Guattari, the French Revolution stopped being “revolutionary” because it forced its citizens to learn the declaration of human rights by heart. They placed signs containing this declaration in town halls, schools, and other places. Revolution should be processual, or else it is not revolution (Guattari 2008, 260). If revolution is forcefully applied without considering the mutations of desires, then that revolution is not molecular. As Guattari argues, “a [molecular] revolution is something of the nature of a process, a change that makes it impossible to go back to the same point. revolution is, rather, ‘*a repetition that changes something, a repetition that brings about the irreversible*’” (Guattari and Rolnik 2007, 258; original italics). Molecular revolution constantly changes; it is “processual” (Guattari and Rolnik 2007, 260) because revolution mutates in order to avoid the molarization<sup>6</sup> of change or “the delimitation of representations of actants in their systems of referentiality” (Guattari 1984, 289). By doing so, it rejects singularization of one’s subjectivity (Guattari and Rolnik 2007, 61). Each molecular revolution becomes its own emergence, depending upon its environment. These molecular revolutions are not just brought about by human-male-adult actants. Rather, they are created by

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<sup>6</sup> The opposite of molecularization, molarization or molar (order) is Deleuze and Guattari’s term for the solidification or organization of entities at a certain period and place. Inasmuch as molarization can be diffused, molarization represents stagnation and even oppressive structures that limit possibilities/representations.

assemblages<sup>7</sup> of humans (women, children, trans-persons, differently abled persons, and other human actants) and nonhumans (machines, animals, inanimate objects, and other nonhuman actants).

In addressing Valdez and Valentine's concern about the commodification of the donkey/colt in the "triumphal entry" narrative, reading Mark 11:1-11 as a molecular revolution provides a nuanced reading of the role of the colt besides its relegated status. A molecular revolutionary reading claims that Jesus, the colt, and the cloak are in an assemblage. Their assemblage transgresses the presumed ontological primacy of Jesus as he rides, smells, and touches the colt and the cloak. Jesus might have been a healer and exorcist before this scene, but in the narrative, the assemblage he forms with the colt and the cloak has reconfigured, or re-assembled, with his identity so that it is now bound up with the plight of the colt or those who are animalized. Jesus is now, at least in this scene, a colt-man (colt-messiah), a cloak-man (cloak-messiah). This assemblage in a certain sense reconfigures, even if only for a fleeting moment, the commodified role of a colt into an actant who (re)defines the being of the messiah.

Moreover, this molecular revolutionary interpretation of Mark 11:1-11 also echoes Valdez and Valentine's (2017) association of the humans who participated in the "triumphal entry" with the peasant/tenant farmers by showing how molecular revolution "inserts itself into local power relations, making and unmaking alliances" (Guattari and Rolnik 2007, 62). Since molecular revolutions communicate with the wider world without compromising their originary and decentred stance, the molecular revolution of Mark 11:1-11 in the form of a flash mob inserts itself into the local power relations: that is, the power struggle between the Roman Empire and its rich local collaborators on the one hand, and the Galilean peasant farmers and labourers on the other. The alliance between the latter and Jesus (and his followers) results in the "embodiment of life for both the collective and the individual materially and subjectively" (Guattari and Rolnik 2007, 63). Mark 11:1-11 translates this embodiment of life by creating a space and time in which the oppressed can express their frustrations against the Roman Empire while looking forward to the coming Empire of God.

And yet, this space and time of revolution is transitory (fleeting, momentary) because molecular revolution is "neither utopian nor idealistic" (Guattari and Rolnik 2007, 261). Molecular revolution is about possibilities for constant mutation for varying approaches to different issues in life. It prevents phallogocentric molarity, or the reproduction of "dominant modes of subjectivation" (Guattari and Rolnik 2007, 187) that limits possibilities for other revolutions to emerge. The constant

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<sup>7</sup> Manuel DeLanda defines this Deleuzoguattarian term, assemblage or *agencement*, as "the action of matching or fitting together a set of components (*agencer*), as well as to the result of such an action: an ensemble of parts that mesh together well" (2016, 1). Moreover, DeLanda's own definition of assemblage may be found in *Dialogue II*: "It is a multiplicity which is made up of many heterogeneous terms and which establishes liaisons, relations between them, across sexes and reigns – different natures. Thus, the assemblage's only unity is that of a co-functioning: it is a symbiosis, a 'sympathy.' It is never filiations which are important, but alliances, alloys; these are not successions, lines of descent, but contagions, epidemics, the wind" (Deleuze and Parnet 2002, 69). Jane Bennett defines assemblage(s) as "ad hoc groupings of diverse elements, of vibrant matters of all sorts. Assemblages are emerging confederations that are able to function despite the persistent presence of energies that confound them from within ... Assemblages are not governed by any central head ... An assemblage thus not only has a distinctive history of formation but a finite life span" (2010, 24).

burgeoning of new revolutions and the promise of their withering prevent stagnation of ideas or approaches in fighting oppressive systems. As the matrix of oppression mutates through time and contexts, molecular revolution seeks to mirror the shifting movement, the evolution, of oppressive states. It thrives in its creativity for social transformation. As Guattari argues, “the lines of escape combine with the objective lines of de-territorialization of the system to create an irrepressible aspiration for new areas of freedom” (1984, 269). The participants in molecular revolution, therefore, should not idealize the (emerging) events, which include flash mobs. Rather, they should be prepared for their own mutation when the time comes, since molecular revolution in itself already constitutes the repetitive possibilities for de-territorialization or wariness toward authoritarianism.

Molecular revolution is neither an institutionalized programme nor a propaganda slogan. Rather, it enlivens, as Frantz Fanon would put it, a form of collective catharsis: “In every society, in every community, there exists, must exist, a channel, an outlet whereby the energy accumulated in the form of aggressiveness can be released” (2008, 124). Molecular revolution is micropolitical because it finds its intensities in the conscious and unconscious of individuals as well as communities. But it is also political because it is open to new ways of subverting hegemonic power structures, especially in ways that are deemed irrelevant. Guattari argues that radio broadcasting through small radio transmitters which any amateur could assemble and operate was a good example of molecular revolution during the 1970s (1984, 269). Modern day examples of molecular revolutions are anti-capitalist and anti-racist protests and acts of civil disobedience (such as the Occupy movements, Black Lives Matter, and #MeToo), the organization of people and transmission of information through social media (such as vlog, Twitter, Facebook, and Snapchat), certain fashion trends, and even “smart” flash mobs that depend on social media and smartphones.

### **Performing Flash Mob**

Bill Wasik, the founder of the flash mob concept, finds the Oxford English Dictionary’s definition of flash mob acceptable: “A public gathering of complete strangers, organized via the Internet or mobile phone, who perform a pointless act and then disperse again” (Shea 2011; see also Rheingold 2003). But a flash mob is also more than just singing and dancing on the streets unannounced. Rather, as Wasik states, some flash mobs are political in the sense that they have “a vague and dark thing, a purely chaotic impulse ... [They find] joy at seeing society overtaken, order stymied; at silently infiltrating this pseudopublic space, this corporate space, these chain stores and shopping malls, and then rising at once to overrun them” (2006, 65). From the perspective of molecular revolution, Mark 11:1-11 is an ancient version of a flash mob (a proto-flash mob of some sort). The human and nonhuman assemblage of the “triumphal entry,” which is comprised of Jesus, followers of Jesus, a miscellaneous crowd, a colt, leafy branches, cloaks, and the shouting of Ps. 118:25-26, exudes a political exuberance. It performs a mob-like procession declaring the arrival of a new, altogether unlikely ruler who, against all the odds—impossibly but inevitably—will overthrow the old ruler or the Roman Empire.

This flashy so-called triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem could have incurred the wrath of the Roman authorities for inciting a mob-like gathering that announces the Parousia or arrival of a new king. Wasik’s own first attempt at a flash

mob was considered a failure because police officers with their police vehicles barred the entrance to the store where the performance was scheduled to occur (Wasik, 2006, 57). Nevertheless, Wasik found alternative outlets, and continued to perform flash mobs even when he was critiqued for creating a hipster fad or accused of causing chaos and disruption (since some flash mobs were formed only to rob and destroy property). Wasik's social experiment was designed to prove the "*joining urge, a drive toward deindividuation...*" (58; original italics). Quoting Festinger, Pepitone, and Newcomb's research (1952, 382-9), Wasik argues that events such as a flash mob create a "state of affairs in a group where members do not pay attention to other individuals qua individuals ... [and in which the members] will sometimes exhibit an almost alarming lack of restraint" (2006, 56).<sup>8</sup> This deindividuation comes out of the affect in which one feels like one does not stand out due to the clout of being part of a group, or mob. Applying deindividuation to Mark 11:1-11, this human-nonhuman mob-like assemblage would be impossible if it were performed only by Jesus and his disciples. It was possible only because a group of people, reportedly out of nowhere, assembled suddenly at one of the gates of Jerusalem, performing the "triumphal entry" of a conquering king for a brief period of time, only to disperse after the performance is over. The combined sense of anonymity and unanimity seems to be the driving force that encourages the flash mob participants of Mark 11:1-11 to be enthusiastic in "almost ecstatic fashion" (Wasik 2006, 62).

The irony of molecular revolution is how it dismantles the very authority it seems to create. The triumphal entry (which supposedly glorifies Jesus) is performed in a way that is anti-authoritative. It reconfigures the image of the messiah not as a replica of the emperor but of someone, or something, that represents weakness, subjugation, or even failure. Wasik describes the irony of flash mobs: "I had meant them as an authority experiment, in the Milgramite style, but was not their promise instead to have been the mirror image—an anti-authority experiment, a play at revolution, an acting-out of the human choice to thwart order?" (Wasik 2006, 66). Borrowing Judith (Jack) Halberstam's argument in his book *The Queer Art of Failure*, the molecular revolution of Mark 11:1-11 may be said to manifest queer authority or "alternative ways of knowing and being that are not unduly optimistic, but nor are they mired in nihilistic critical dead ends. It is ... about failing well, failing often, and learning, in the words of Samuel Beckett, how to fail better" (2011, 24). The triumphal entry of Jesus is not intended to enthrone Jesus. It is rather meant to "fail well" or to perform a subversive narrative of what could be, but is extinguished quickly enough to avoid the ire of the authorities. It is meant to irritate by releasing its unforeseen intensities while discombobulating the audience by making them want for more—yet another reason why Jesus' action in the temple does not immediately follow Jesus' entry into Jerusalem in Mark.

Wasik saw in flash mobs a queerly failed social experiment: "The idea seemed to be that flash mobs could be made to convey a message, but for a number of reasons this dream was destined to run aground" (2006, 64). Unfortunately, many of his admirers and imitators forgot the "failing" aspect of a flash mob. When Wasik began his first flash mob on May 27, 2013, he did not design it to last. The failure to maintain brevity of existence resulted in a mutation, contrary to Wasik's plan, into

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<sup>8</sup> See also Diener, Fraser, Beaman, and Kelem (1976); Diener (1979); Zimbardo (1969).

something molar or essentialized. Some morphed into social events (singing and dancing flash mobs), some performances became tools for vacuous profiteering and commercialization (Wasik 2006, 66). And yet, flash mobs, as envisioned by Wasik, *should* fail in three ways: limited participation, unannounced performance, and ephemeral temporality.

### **First Failure: Limited Participation and Knowledge**

Mark 11:1-11 queerly fails in three ways. The first failure lies in limiting participation and knowledge to its insiders. As Wasik argues:

Flash mobs were gatherings of *insiders*, and as such could hardly communicate to those who did not already belong. They were intramural play; they drew their energy not from impressing outsiders or freaking them out but from showing them utter disregard, from using the outside world as merely a terrain for private games. (2006, 64-5)

Mark 11:1-11 is an insider job. The ambiguity of the gathering place specified in v.11 (“When they were approaching Jerusalem, at Bethphage and Bethany, near the Mount of Olives”), its unlocatability as headquarters which would symbolize institutional molarization (Young, Genosko, and Watson 2013, 200) resonates with the surreptitious nature of a flash mob. Jesus and his followers are represented as approaching Jerusalem from multiple vantage points. Although they are near to each other, mentioning these various places of origin insinuates a desire not to divulge the point of origin of this flash mob in order to prevent unwanted participation. The Markan narrative limits participation to the point of even leaving the readers or listeners in the dark by specifying three possible places where this group of rabble-rousers might be coming from. The Gospel of Matthew amends this confusion by redacting Bethany out of the narrative (Matt. 21:1). The Gospel of Luke retains Bethany but specifies the event’s final location to be “at the place called Mount of Olives” (Luke 19:29). The Gospel of John does not even mention this preparatory stage at all (John 12:12ff).

The surreptitious nature of the Markan passage does not end here. Mark 11:2a (“Go into the village ahead of you”) premises a greater scheme that the molecularly revolutionary proto-flash mob organizers will implement. In v.2b, Jesus seems to know exactly where a colt is tied, that the colt has never been ridden, and it is permissible for them to untie and bring it back without asking anyone’s permission. If anyone questions the two disciples for untying the colt, then v.3 reveals to us the secret code phrase they have to say in order for the plan to continue: “The Lord needs it and will send it back here immediately.” Rather than implying Jesus’ omniscience, what if this passage reveals an on-going scheme—like magicians showing how their tricks work? Wasik would inform his flash mob participants of the exact time they should congregate and disperse, places where the participants should stand or perform, and the step-by-step procedure of the organization and performance of the flash mob event (Wasik 2006, 57). So, when the two disciples do exactly what Jesus told them, they do not meet any resistance. The people actually allowed them to take the colt (11:6).

Some scholars read Mark 11:2-6 with the concept called ἀγγαρεία (*angareia*) or forced labour in which a local population is co-opted to supply horses, mules, and even humans to assist the Roman military (Derrett 1971). Epictetus writes: “But if

there be a press [ἀγγαρεία], and a soldier should lay hold of it [your ass], let it go, do not resist, nor murmur; if you do, you will receive blows, and nevertheless you will also lose the ass” (*Discourses of Epictetus*, 4.1.79).<sup>9</sup> This allusion, arguably at least, is not far-fetched because the Markan pericope portrays Jesus taking someone else’s colt without any challenge. This forceful co-optation, ἀγγαρεία, features in other synoptic passages as well. In Mark 15:21, Simon the Cyrene is forced to carry Jesus’ cross (see also Matt. 27:32). In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus teaches his co-conspirators how to respond to ἀγγαρεία: “If anyone forces [ἀγγαρεύουσαι] you to go one mile, go also the second mile” (Matt. 5:41). In the Sermon on the Plain, the Lukan Jesus enjoins his audience to give their tunic when someone takes their cloak (Luke 6:29).

However, I follow Hans Leander’s critique of the viability of having Jesus and his disciples order an ἀγγαρεία to exact a colt for their use in Mark 11:1-11. The Markan Jesus and his disciples would not have garnered the capacity to order local communities at their whim. If local communities already hated this imperial edict, then a wandering Galilean peasant and his cohort would never have been able to implement such an order. On the contrary, the Markan Jesus and his disciples are the ones who would be co-opted by the imperial soldiers to carry their burdens. Thus, for Leander, this passage is a mimicry and mockery of ἀγγαρεία: “Due to the story’s low verisimilitude, the depiction appears miraculous and humorous” (2013, 262).

What if Mark 11:1-11 is a mimicry but in a molecularly revolutionary way? What if the insiders of this flash mob are not only the Markan Jesus and his disciples but also select persons from the local community? What if these select persons decide to participate in this performance not just to mock the Roman Empire but also to co-create with the Markan Jesus and his disciples a momentary chaos and confusion that will disrupt the political order of the empire? As molecular revolution (in the form of a flash mob) “inserts itself into local power relations, making and unmaking alliances” (Guattari and Rolnik 2007, 62), the Markan Jesus and his disciples pre-arrange the borrowing of the colt from a certain person in the local community. It has to be surreptitious so that the Roman officials will not know about this flash mob. The Markan Jesus gives the local community a code phrase to trigger the event: “The Lord needs it and will send it back here immediately” (v.3). In that way, the local community will know that it is from Jesus and is not an actual ἀγγαρεία because the colt will be returned soon. When the local community hears the secret phrase, they allow the colt to be taken, perhaps with a secret nod, a smirk, and they proceed to their designated locations with cloaks and leafy branches.

## **Second Failure: Unannounced Performance**

The second way Mark 11:1-11 queerly fails is that the passage does not tell us where and when exactly the flash mob occurs. Presumably, the Markan Jesus, his disciples, and the local community have found a space that would have ensured maximum impact without having to pay the price of punishment from the imperial authorities. If one could assume based on Mark 11:1-11 that the place of this flash mob was one of the primary roads leading to Jerusalem, and since it would be Passover soon, the streets would have been filled with the seasonal influx of pilgrims coming to join

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<sup>9</sup> All references to *Discourses of Epictetus* are from Long’s (1904) translation.

local celebrants. This crowded space was thus a prime location for a flash mob because as Wasik states, “Flash mobs relied on constraints to create an illusion of superior strength ... Only in enclosed spaces could the mob generate the necessary self-awe; to allow the mob to feel small would have been to destroy it” (2006, 65).

When Jesus arrives at the designated location, everyone involved knows their roles. The synchronization of the performance is of utmost importance: “The unadorned audacity of it, a small crowd in simple unison bucking the city’s flow” (Wasik 2006, 60). Mark 11:1-11 has three stages, or stations, in which its triumphal entry flash mob event is to be performed.

### *First Station*

The first station is revealed in Mark 11:7. Out of nowhere, flash mobbers bring the colt to Jesus, and drape their cloaks on the colt. Jesus then sits on the colt. We can imagine ambivalent emotions running through the onlookers as they watched the Jesus-colt-cloak assemblage take form.<sup>10</sup> This ambivalence is probably triggered by the affective power of this assemblage. The Markan Jesus is becoming-colt and becoming-cloak in a way that reminds the onlookers of an imperial triumphal entry, while simultaneously forming a ridiculous image of a man riding an untrained colt. In this assemblage, Jesus is being affected by the colt and cloak (and vice versa) in such a way that there seems to be a “crossing over into the zone of indiscernibility [between Jesus, colt, and cloak] in a series of de- and re-territorializations” (Roffe and Stark 2015, 1). This becoming is not just imitation or identification. Rather, becoming Jesus-colt-cloak “involves a passage ‘between’ identities. It takes place ‘before’ individuals and ‘beneath’ subjective forms” (Bignall 2015, 129).<sup>11</sup> The onlookers see one assemblage, but the affect produced by this assemblage is variegated.

On the one hand, the Jesus-colt-cloak assemblage reminds some of the onlookers of the promise of the coming messiah as it is written in Zech. 9:9 (see also Gen. 49:11).<sup>12</sup> For the first-century audience of the Gospel of Mark and even those who read this gospel centuries later, the Jesus-colt-cloak assemblage might have generated *virtual shadows* of the past. Invoking Arun Saldanha, assemblages are defined by their “*virtual shadows* or the capacities, latencies, regularities [they have] developed over time” (2015, 207; original italics). The virtual shadow of Mark 11:1-11 beyond the temporality of Jesus, the way this event/revolution mutated and was remembered, is manifested through early Christian art.

In his study of the reception history of biblical narrative through early Christian art during the third to sixth centuries, Thomas F. Mathews analysed

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<sup>10</sup> See Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s statement: “What the nomads invented was the man-animal-weapon, man-horse-bow assemblage (1987, 399, 404).” Although cloak per se is not a weapon, Mark’s deliberate choice to form this assemblage and to have cloak instead of a weapon, turning a state apparatus (triumphal entry) into a nomadic war machine, speaks of his radical/revolutionary way. Manuel DeLanda highlights this assemblage as the “best-known example of an assemblage of heterogeneous elements, cutting as it does across entirely different realms of reality: the personal, the biological, and the technological.” (2016, 68).

<sup>11</sup> Bignall quotes Deleuze and Guattari (1987, 239).

<sup>12</sup> Zech. 9:9: “Rejoice greatly, oh daughter Zion! Shout aloud, oh daughter Jerusalem! Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.” Gen. 49:11: “Binding his foal to the vine and his donkey’s colt to the choice vine, he washed his garments in wine and his robe in the blood of grapes.”

twenty-eight sarcophagi that have carvings of the triumphal entry of Jesus. Most of them, according to Mathews, illustrate Jesus as:

[the] image of extraordinary power ... In assuming the garb and teaching gesture of a Roman philosopher he asserts the adequacy of his philosophy to move kings and kingdoms without touching a weapon. The power of the Philosopher-God is a central theme of Early Christian art. But the power also derives from his insignificant and ridiculous mounting of the ass. (1993, 45)

According to Mathews, since upper-class persons commissioned these sarcophagi, they reflected their social aspirations or a projection of themselves onto Jesus, thereby depicting Jesus as philosopher-gentleman (1993, 28-38). Thus, Mark 11:1-11's enduring influence, its "virtual shadows," for the early Christians emerged in concrete, but complex, manifestations: both as naked desire for social power and as a comedic undercutting of that desire.

On the other hand, the Jesus-colt-cloak assemblage could reflect parodic or comic performance because it employs an untrained and/or unriden colt. Wasik argues that in flash mob, "self-ridicule [is] made explicit" (2006, 62). One can just imagine the difficulty Jesus has in riding this untrained colt. According to Charlie Hicks, it takes at least two years of rigorous training for humans to even consider riding a colt/donkey (2012; see also Way 2011). Contrary to interpretations that imagine Jesus having "a calming influence, perhaps even the magic of a super tamer" (Loader 2013, 37-8), the wobbly and unruly procession would presumably have been a cause of laughter and uneasiness for many bystanders on the road. Whatever messianic image Zech. 9:9 might have portrayed has been diminished into laughter or mockery as Jesus barely holds on to the colt—that is, if he is even able to ride the colt.



The Alexamenos Graffito

demon." Since the Circus Maximus (the place for horse races) was not that far from

The Jesus-colt-cloak assemblage also casts a negative virtual shadow. In the Paedagogium of the imperial palace on the Palatine in Rome, a graffito on a wall, which was carved around the second or third century CE, shows a man with his arm raised on the left side (The Alexamenos Graffito).<sup>13</sup> On the right side is a crucified person with the head of an ass. Below is an inscription that translates: "Alexamenos worships his god." Scholars are divided on the meaning of this image. Is it meant to be a joke, Alexamenos' actual confession of his faith, or a taunt by somebody who is against Christians? Ingvild Gilhus (2006) provides another possibility: it is a depiction of a man who worships a "race demon." Since the Circus Maximus (the place for horse races) was not that far from

<sup>13</sup> This image can be found at <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Alexorig.jpg>. For more information on the image, see discussion by Brent Nongbri <https://brentnongbri.com/2018/06/25/the-palatine-alexamenos-graffito/>.

Palatine, Gilhus argues that this image could have been one of those spells or dedications designed to ensure victory for his bet (232).

This human-ass hybrid, or *asiocephalus*, reverberated even with two Christian apologists: Tertullian (*Apology* 16.5-13)<sup>14</sup> and Minucius Felix (*Octavius* 7, 8, 9).<sup>15</sup> These apologists narrate how Christians were maligned by being compared with animals, accused of worshiping the genitalia of their priests, for participating in killing children, and promoting incest (Gilhus 2006, 232). Tertullian in *Apology* 16.12 writes how a vile man mocked Christians by exhibiting an inscription: “The God of the Christians, born of an ass” (*deus christianorum oniokoites*). The inscription was accompanied with an image of a person who has the ears of an ass, one foot that is a hoof, and is carrying a book and wearing a toga. Tertullian retorted rhetorically by turning the mockery back on the accusers, first by saying that they are the very ones who worship animals such as gods with “dog-head, lion-head, with horn of buck and ram, goat-like loins, serpent legs, with wings sprouting from back or foot” (*Apology* 16.12). Tertullian traces this misconception of Christians as animal worshippers from the mockery against Judaism in which Jews were also labelled as worshippers of the ass (for other ancient references that discuss the accusation of calling Christians animal worshippers, see *Against Apion*, 2.112-4, 80, 9; *Moralia* 31.363D; also Bar-Kochva 1996).<sup>16</sup> Thus, such mockery of Christ-donkey hybrids that later crop up in anti-Christian polemics are actualizations of the virtuality inherent in the Jesus-colt-cloak assemblage of Mark 11:1-11. It is the parody abstracted from the pomp and power of the “triumphal entry” and allowed to run wild.

### **Second Station**

Returning to Mark 11:1-11, at the second station of the procession, the “many people” (πολλοὶ, *polloi*) in v.8 know exactly when and where Jesus and his followers will come from. Not only that, these insiders are ready with their garments or cloaks (ἱμάτια, *himatia*) and leafy branches (στιβάδας, *stibadas*), which they will spread on the road. The spreading of these props (cloaks and leafy branches) added a disruptive tone to their flash mob.<sup>17</sup> In a certain sense, the laying of cloaks or garments on the road might have implied the co-optation of power in Jerusalem because of its allusion to 2 Kgs 9:1-13. In this passage, Jehu is hastily given a kingly reception by his men and Elisha, who spread their cloaks in front of him. In a certain sense, Jesus too is given a reception, although the “kingly” aspect of it is questionable. Such doubt comes from the opposition presented by various leaders against Jesus. In Mark 11:18, the chief priests and scribes keep on looking for a way to kill Jesus because they are afraid of him and the whole crowd is “spellbound” by his teaching. Not long after, the chief priests, scribes, and the elders question Jesus’ authority

<sup>14</sup> All references to *Apology* are taken from the Glover (1966) translation.

<sup>15</sup> All references to *Octavius* are taken from the Rendall (1966) translation.

<sup>16</sup> References to Plutarch’s *Moralia* are taken from the Babbitt (1936) translation; references to Josephus’s *Against Apion* are from the Thackeray (1926) translation.

<sup>17</sup> The Gospel of John redacts his version of disruption by mentioning palm branches instead of leafy branches. John also has the participants of the triumphal entry wave the palm branches. The waving of palm branches symbolized victorious celebrations particularly during Judea’s short-lived independence during the Maccabean era (1 Macc. 13:51). The waving of leafy branches is part of Sukkot, which is held during the Fall season. Thus, John changed the festival of the triumphal entry from Passover to Sukkot.

again (11:27-33). In other words, the would-be disruption was impactful for its short duration; but the triumphal entry did not produce its desired effect on many of the leaders, perhaps “failing” even for many of those who have seen it.

From an ecological perspective, the disruption probably has to do with the cutting of young, barely leafy branches by the flash mobbers. Since Passover falls in the spring season, the flash mobbers are cutting down growing, or barely budding, leafy branches without thinking about the consequences of their action. Ancient flash mobs, like modern flash mobs, could produce negative disruptions. The farmers and planters were probably angry at this procession for cutting the young leafy branches before they could fully blossom. Furthermore, the owners or managers who held businesses in the location of the flash mob performance were probably not as exuberant as the performers. The disruptive performance would have gathered excessive crowds and hindered the flow of commerce, resulting in loss of business and damage to property.

### *Third Station*

As Jesus on a colt arrives at the third station of the procession, the awaiting flash mobbers cue the signal and shout: “Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David! Hosanna in the highest heaven!” (Mark 11:9b-10). The flash mobbers shout Ps. 118:25-6,<sup>18</sup> a psalm of thanksgiving, which was sung during Passover in order to commemorate Israel’s victory over its enemies. Since *hosanna* means “save us,” this chant could have been political since it has the capacity to be a taunt against the Roman Empire. And yet, inasmuch as the chant is associated with the re-cleansing of the temple by Judas Maccabaeus in 165 BCE, D. E. Nineham argues that the insufficiency of the followers in this triumphal entry indicates that the chant should be considered “liturgical” and not a politically charged acclamation of Jesus as messiah as he enters Jerusalem (1963, 293-4). Leander sees the performance of this chant as a “performative enunciation of a national memory ... [that is] less confrontational but more ambivalent and subtly subversive” (2013, 263-4). As Nineham argued, many would have noticed this performance but it did not warrant much response. In contrast to the Gospel of Luke that has the Pharisees become angered by the shouting (see Luke 19:39-40),<sup>19</sup> the Gospel of Mark does not mention the reaction of the bystanders, thus evoking an event that dies out as quickly as it started. It could also have been that this molecular revolution was just too small and different from typical revolutionary expressions. E. P. Sanders has estimated that there were 300,000 to 600,000 pilgrims in Jerusalem during Passover (1992, 125-8). Brent Kinman asserts that with the multitudes arriving in Jerusalem for Passover, unless the crowd that accompanied Jesus was enormous, this mini-triumphal entry and “the laying of branches under Jesus’ feet may well have been beyond the Roman soldiers’ ability to see” (2005, 252). Moreover, Kinman rightfully questions the ability of the Roman soldiers to understand the *hallel* chant. Even if the soldiers are from Samaria and the lands of other nearby colonized *ethnē* such as Caesareans and Sebastenes, they would have to be “bi or trilingual, understanding the import of the

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<sup>18</sup> Ps. 118:25-6: “Save us, we beseech you, Oh Lord! Oh Lord, we beseech you, give us success! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord. We bless you from the house of the Lord.”

<sup>19</sup> Luke 19:39-40: “Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, ‘Teacher, order your disciples to stop.’ He answered, ‘I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would should out.’”

Hebrew or Aramaic chant by Jesus' followers" (Kinman 2005, 253, quoting Schürer 1973, 362-5). Thus, this procession/flash mob queerly fails because the insiders know and are jubilantly participating in this event; however, the outsiders are probably bewildered with the chant.

### **Third Failure: Ephemeral Temporality**

As soon as the shouting is over, the flash mob suddenly ceases as presumably predetermined. The third way Mark 11:1-11 queerly fails, then, is in its ephemeral temporality. Wasik reminds the flash mob organizers that "flash mobs [are] by definition *transitory*, ten minutes or less, and thereby not exactly suited to standing their ground and testifying" (2006, 65). One cannot technically know how long Mark 11:1-11's flash mob lasts. But v.11 seems to align with how most flash mobs fade out suddenly and anticlimactically. Right after the shouting ends, the participants disappear; Mark does not mention them anymore. They do not join Jesus when Jesus enters Jerusalem. Verse 11 only depicts Jesus roaming the space of Jerusalem and the temple. This resonates with the behaviour of many flash mobs who, after their performance, act like nothing has transpired, go on with their chores, and leave the disrupted bystanders in the lingering affect of this sudden burst of performance. Wasik made sure that his flash mob would disperse at a designated time: "The gathering was to last for precisely seven minutes, until 7:30 at which time all would disperse. 'NO ONE,' the email cautioned, 'SHOULD REMAIN AT THE SITE AFTER 7:33'" (2006, 57). Not inappropriately, then, Mark 11:11 seems to ascribe a post-flash-mob anonymity to Jesus, aligning him with the persona of a tourist in Jerusalem for the first time, checking the touristy spots, and ending the day by retiring to his lodgings (in Jesus's case, in Bethany).

In one sense, Jesus' so-called triumphal entry seems vacuous. Like a flash mob, the pointless aggregation and then immediate dispersal makes one wonder if it facilitated any subversive change in the lives of Judeans living under the Roman Empire. Wasik at first critiqued his own creation as a "metaphor for the hollow hipster culture" (2006, 57). Luke's version (Luke 19:28-38) of Jesus' "triumphal entry," however, does not have it suddenly die out. Some of the Pharisees ordered Jesus to keep his followers in check (Luke 19:38-40), and Jesus responds by evoking nonhuman agency: "I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out" (Luke 19:40). This seems to be a promising nonhuman reading of this Lukan pericope that will have to be deferred for now. Going back to the synoptic differences, instead of simply having Pharisees ordering Jesus to silence his followers, Matthew has the whole city in turmoil because of Jesus and his triumphal entry, and people asking amongst themselves the identity of Jesus (Matt. 21:10-11). When Jesus enters Jerusalem in Luke, moreover, he immediately prophesies about the demise of the city (Luke 19:41-4). And on the same day of the triumphal entry in both Luke and Matthew, Jesus drives the merchants out of the Jerusalem temple (Luke 19:45-8; Matt. 21:12-13). Matthew adds that Jesus even healed the blind and the lame (Matt. 21:14). Moreover, Matthew narrates the anger of the chief priests and scribes as they witness the amazing things that Jesus does, and as they hear children cry out in the temple, "Hosanna to the Son of David" (21:15). Jesus retorts to their rage with a quote from Ps. 8:2: "Out of the mouths of infants and nursing babies you have prepared praise for yourself" (Matt. 21:16). All of these events happened in Luke and Matthew right after Jesus' entry into Jerusalem in order to

signify an apt conclusion to, and weighty consequences for, this triumphal entry. Mark also has Jesus confronting merchants in the Jerusalem temple and the chief priests and scribes (Mark 11:15-18). However, these confrontations happen the next day, giving the impression that, for the author of Mark, these events are not concluding a typical triumphal entry, but are more like a separate sequence of events.

### **De-Territorializing a revolution**

A flash mob dies out instantaneously because it is a molecular revolution that awaits its mutation. The first official flash mob happened during the Spring of 2003 in New York City. Its choreographed spontaneity died as quickly as it rose. As mentioned earlier, flash mobs sprout instantaneously, sometimes with singing and dancing. Even those with political and/or religious expressions mutate contextually and intersectionally. Flash mobs repeat with a difference: they are not re-enacted with the same content, space, time, or agency. Their variegated emergences define their identity as molecular revolutions. They empower local communities to express themselves and subvert institutional and normative restraints that choke avenues for political expressions. Sometimes, flash mobs disrupt the normative pressure to constantly produce by simply performing in ways that are entertaining. The singularity of the given next flash mob with its own mutations and assemblages of humans and nonhumans (not just animals, but the buildings, rooms, tables, chairs, even cloaks) is what makes it molecularly revolutionary.

Mark 11:1-11 is an example of molecular revolution because it captures various identifying markers of this revolution, as summarized above. And yet, Mark does not construct a Jesus who gets away with this kind of revolutionary tactic all the time. Like modern day flash mobs, Jesus did get noticed by the powers that be. Unlike Matthew and Luke, Mark does not mention whether authoritative figures took offense at the “triumphal entry” flash mob. One cannot know from the text whether the Roman or local authorities noticed this subversive act. Even if they had sent enforcers to stop the event, they probably could not because of its short duration. Wasik tells of a close call with one of his own flash mobs: “After five minutes of staring, the ring erupted into precisely fifteen seconds of tumultuous applause—for itself—after which it scattered back downstairs and out the door, just as the police cruisers were rolling up, flashers on” (2006, 58). Even though Jesus survives the close call that is Mark 11:1-11, he does not remain invisible to the authorities for long. Jesus and his disciples might have dispersed to Bethany, but Jesus stages a further disruptive performance at the Jerusalem temple the next day (Mark 11:15-18, 27-33; 12:1-40). In the end, his revolutionary ways catch up with him at the cross, his final performance in Mark.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> My deepest appreciation to Stephen D. Moore for his comments and guidance in the formation of this article.

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