

**Between kindness and competition: an ethnography of Cardiff City Centre.**

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*Preamble: The notes that follow draw on fieldwork research in the city of Cardiff, but I start out in Manchester because Manchester is where we met for the third of the Rethinking Economies Seminar Series: Manchester University, December 15<sup>th</sup> 2006. It was the second time I had been to Manchester that year. Earlier, in June, I had travelled to the city to attend an event organised by the national housing and homelessness campaign organisation Shelter.*

*The June event was held at the Potato Wharf YHA, in Castlefield, by the Bridgewater Canal. Castlefield is a heritage site these days, Britain's first Urban Heritage Park: another first for Manchester. The wry tone is borrowed from the man who stood up and welcomed attendees on that morning back in June; I think he may have been the manager of the YHA. Before running through the usual housekeeping items about toilets, and coffee and parking and fire exits, he had this to say: 'Welcome to Manchester, home of urban renaissance. And if you don't like the sound of that, the city authorities will be very pleased to give you an ASBO.' This comic/sardonic observation stayed with me and I used it in my opening remarks at the December seminar – because I was in Manchester again, and urban redevelopment and the ordering of behaviour were aspects of what I wanted to talk about. In order to talk about those things I gave a paper about soup kitchens and other voluntary kindnesses. Here too I was harking back to the Shelter event in June, where soup kitchens and kindness were also on the agenda. Shelter had called the conference to field responses to recent public criticism of such benevolent practices, as potentially damaging, not only to the recipients of that kindness but to the city itself, its quality of life and economy. The following notes sketch out my argument, which was a (circuitous) response to the invitation to consider the relationship and relative positioning of the three key terms: market, state and third sector.*

**Each against all**

The 'urban heritage' commemorated at Potato Wharf in Castlefield is one of industry and commerce, and also competition. And this is where I begin: with competition. I start with the commonplace observation that the city and competition go together. The one is the seat of the other in a fairly obvious and elementary sense, and certainly so in the development of that configuration of economic competition we call capitalism. The story of capitalism — its naissance, growth and ascendancy — is very much a story of cities, and as it happens it is a story in which Manchester plays a big part. As the 'shock city' of the nineteenth century, Manchester was, in the words of Patrick Joyce, 'the epicentre of a new system of unbridled competition' (2003: 150), the tremors from which were rolling across the globe. This unchecked economic competition was matched by other forms of rivalry, energy and antagonism, all of these closely associated with metropolitan life:

political unrest (see Hobsbawm, 1973); crime and misconduct (see McLaughlin, 2000); and the self-seeking indifference of the anonymous passer-by. The latter — the selfish crush and scramble of the city streets — is an especially common trope of urban description. Thus Engels, Manchester's first ethnographer, shrinks from the 'narrow self seeking ... nowhere so shamelessly barefaced, so self conscious as just here in the crowding of the great city';<sup>1</sup> he continues: 'the war of each against all is here openly declared ... each exploits the other, and the end of it all is, that the stronger treads the weaker underfoot' (1993; 37; originally 1845).

The war of each against all, the stronger and the weaker. This is close to a language of natural selection, if not yet Darwinian then certainly Malthusian: a struggle for existence.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, Gareth Stedman Jones has pointed to the significant influence of Malthus on Marx's depiction of the economy, suggesting that 'Marx's redescription of Hegel's conception of civil society, what he called "the capitalist mode of production", ... drew more upon Malthus than upon Smith and Hegel' (2004: 7). He goes on to cite a letter written by Marx to Engels in 1862 in which Marx discusses Darwin's *The Origins of Species*:

It is remarkable how Darwin rediscovers, among the beasts and plants, the society of England with its division of labour, competition ... and Malthusian "struggle for existence". It is Hobbes' bellum omnium contra omnes [the struggle of all against all] ... in Darwin, the animal kingdom figures as civil society

(Marx to Engels, 18 June 1862, in Jones, 2004: 7)<sup>3</sup>

Animal kingdom as civil society. Over one hundred years on, in the opening pages of his bestseller *The Selfish Gene*, Stephen Dawkins, Darwin's fiercest contemporary advocate and exponent, employs the same analogy, only stood on its head: his first illustration of the logic of 'natural' selection is drawn not from nature but from the industrial city – Chicago, as it happens, not Manchester.<sup>4</sup>

If we were told that a man had lived a long and prosperous in the world of Chicago gangsters, we would be entitled to make some guesses as to the sort of man he was. We might expect that he would have qualities such as toughness, a quick trigger finger, and the ability to attract loyal friends. These would not be infallible deductions, but you can make some inferences about a man's character if you know something about the conditions in which he has survived and prospered.

(Dawkins, 2006: 2)

Civil society as animal kingdom. The city, then, is the domain and epicentre of an undomesticated competition, the setting for 'the completest expression of the battle of all against all which rules in modern civil society' (Engels, 1993: 86). And more than a setting, the city also bears the impress and some of the brunt of the selfish competition it hosts. Engels' Manchester was a *raw* place, created *de novo* for all its earlier history (Joyce, 2003: 9); its streets and structures were ruthlessly dug up and worked over, its old quarters periodically 'torn away and rebuilt' (Engels, 1993: 62). From which painful growth emerged a design and layout that partook of and cemented the

unkindness of a capitalist mode of production: a new, hypocritical topography segregating winners and losers. The long reach of this depiction – the city hardened by competition and unloving – fingers the city today. Think Los Angeles of Mike Davis' reckoning (1990), its streets prickling with mistrust and unconcern

### **An everyday kindness**

Alongside this image of the city as an arena of selfish competition I want to set another: that of the city as a space in and through which care can be shown and shared, between strangers. I take my lead from Nigel Thrift, by way of one last word from Engels. Here is the latter, daunted by the crowding city street: 'one shrinks before the consequences of our social state as they manifest themselves here undisguised, and can only wonder that the whole crazy fabric still hangs together' (Engels, 1993: 37; originally 1845). If that is the question, 'How does the whole crazy fabric hang together?', then Thrift has some (modest) answers, at least as far as the physical fabric of the city goes. In a recent article addressed both to the deep-seated misanthropy of city life and to some of the lighter-touch countervailing possibilities for urban compassion, Thrift (2005) draws particular attention to the routine activities of upkeep and repair which, for all their seemingly triviality, constitute the very possibility of the city:

'various kinds of cleaning, all forms of building maintenance, the constant fight to keep the urban fabric – from pavements and roads to lighting and power – going, emergency call-out to all manner of situations, the repair of all manner of electrical goods, roadside and collision repair of cars, and so on'

(Thrift, 2005: 135)

These activities are a part of an unobtrusive infrastructure of kindness in the city; part of an urban everyday that escapes conscious attention even as it constitutes our experience of the city.

All we can say at the moment is that modern urban dwellers are surrounded by the hum of continuous repair and maintenance and that, furthermore, some of the quintessential everyday urban experiences are generated by them, from the noise of pneumatic drills boring into roads to the knock or ring of a repairman come to mend a broken down this or that' [136] ... 'Again, the sight and sound of these services is a quintessential everyday urban experience

(Thrift, 2005: 136)

Thrift highlights this work of care and repair as a counter to the familiar trope of urban catastrophe – the (capitalist) city in crisis, doomed, 'heading for a fall' (2005: 133). And if the activities he lists appear marginal and piecemeal – trifling, in the face some of the grand, global risks which are said to menace the contemporary city – then here also lies their strength: they provide an improvisational response to the unforeseen, giving the city a flexible resilience 'when things do not play out exactly as it is intended that they should' (Thrift, 2005: 137).

Thrift's article has lots of interest, and pace and range to spare – urban trauma, road-rage, romance, performance art, psycho-geography – but what interests me here is the opening gambit, this recognition of the ordinary and un-remarked endeavour of urban repair. For Thrift, this is a labour which sees the *physical* fabric of the city – buildings, roads, a broken down this or that – maintained; accomplishing 'the systematic replacement of place' (2005: 135). But to this we can surely add that the *social* fabric of the city is similarly maintained, by similarly routine and work-a-day ministrations. Thrift gives this only scant attention,<sup>5</sup> yet this is another crucial infrastructure of kindness underwriting the possibility of the city: volunteers and good Samaritans and myriad carers criss-crossing urban space, patching things up and keeping things – keeping us all – going. I want to give an extended example of this sort of thing, by turning to Cardiff, which is where I'm coming from, so to speak. I've been spending time in Cardiff's city centre over the last 12 months and more, mixing it with 'street' carers and helpers of different stripes and the also the recipients of some of that care and help: the city's assorted 'street population'.

### **Charles Street, Cardiff**

At the top end of Charles Street in central Cardiff at eight o'clock in the evening, every evening throughout the year, volunteers arrive by car to unload and unfold trestle tables, set out canteens and boxes, and, for the next half an hour or so, give away hot drinks, food and clothing to the assembled poor and needy. The gifts are free;<sup>6</sup> and all are welcome – no one is turned away. This is the Rainbow Soup Run, organised through and supported by local church congregations. The Run attracts a regular crowd of the city's homeless and rough sleepers and assorted others, of various shades of vulnerability and need: at least twenty souls most evenings and sometimes as many as twice that. It is a fiercely independent set up, in receipt of no local authority grant funding or business sponsorship and operating without coordination with other of the city's care services, whether statutory or voluntary. If anything, it is rather proud of this fact. The Run is an exercise in Christian care and practical witness. It is also an exercise in the right to the city: the right to enter central, public urban space – without asking – so as meet, reach out to and mix with others.

Whether or not it sees itself as doing so, the Rainbow Soup Run contributes, in a small way, to a much larger and elaborate mixed economy of care along with any number of other voluntary, charitable, community non-profit and third-sector organisations and initiatives active in the city. Kindred projects, to give a very few examples, include the Wallich Clifford Community, an all-Wales homelessness charity based in Cardiff, which provides a range of night-shelter, hostel, support and advice services to single people in acute housing difficulties as well as a daily Breakfast Run delivering hot rolls, tea and a boiled egg to rough sleepers in and around the city centre, 365 days a year; the Bus Project, a mobile drop-in centre for rough sleepers providing toasted sandwiches, sleeping bags and occasional chiropody, staffed by the Salvation Army; and Streetlife Cardiff, a budding support service for sex-workers, whose volunteers undertake street-based work distributing condoms, coffee and advice through the early evening in Cardiff's red-light district. These projects, and many more, contribute to an

aggregate and generally unacknowledged labour of social care and repair that helps to keep the city going.

The majority of those who live, work and shop in Cardiff's city centre are probably unaware of the existence of the Rainbow Soup Run. It is, after all, a fairly low-key and crepuscular intervention – sandwiches, blankets and a little hot soup at nightfall. Of those who are aware, some esteem it. The occasional passer by, surprised and pleased at what they see, stops to congratulate the volunteers on their good work and kindness; Cardiff Rotary club supports the Run, donating tinned foods and toiletries for distribution. Others, though, are less impressed. Among these latter are those with a stake in the ongoing commercial regeneration of Cardiff's city centre, who see the Run as an unwelcome and unconsidered presence in the city centre. Cardiff's City Centre Management Team (CCM), recently nominated in several categories for the Association of Town Centre Managers Awards 2007,<sup>7</sup> is not, for example, generally sympathetic to the Run. Roy, the CCM Operations Manager, considers the Run an eyesore, detrimental to Cardiff's retail and commercial potential; a magnet for undesirables, and, with its volatile mix of the aggrieved and troublesome and vulnerable, a nightly potential trouble spot. And there is truth in this too. With its rag tag assembly of drunks, dogs, addicts, OAPs, kids on bikes, rough sleepers and the assorted odd and angry, the Run can be a bit of a tetchy and tense occasion. Some volunteers rise to this challenge – the matronly Margaret, who cheerily takes charge and lets no one near the food until she has personally handed out a square meal to everyone. 'Who hasn't had any chocolate? No, you've had some already and I want to make sure it goes round. Excuse me, but you will have to wait. Don't push! Now, put your hand up if you haven't had any chocolate' – but others are soon overwhelmed and stand aside impotently until the free-for-all subsides and the crowd disperses leaving a scurf of rummaged clothing, crisp packets and polystyrene cups in its wake. The Run is a generally anarchic affair; sometimes benignly so and sometimes not. The atmosphere can be tense; there are occasional fights and fallings out; I have seen drinks and punches thrown and passers-by pestered and intimidated. For all the kindness shown, it is not such a nice place to be, the top end of Charles Street in central Cardiff at eight o'clock in the evening.

Also present on Charles Street most weekday evenings will be two outreach workers from Cardiff's City Centre Team. These two are nothing to do with the run itself, but regularly stop by on their rounds, to work the crowd and keep an eye on things. Nor are they volunteers. The City Centre Team (CCT) – not to be confused with City Centre Management (CCM), with whom their work intersects – is a statutory service provided by Cardiff County Council. Members of the team – outreach workers, qualified social work staff of varying seniority and specialism, and an NHS nurse funded to work with rough sleepers – work in and around the civic and commercial centre of the city with some of the most hard-to-reach yet contrarily visible occupants of that space. Potential clients are those whose needs, behaviour, addictions, financial, family and other circumstances have brought them into some sort of a relationship with the city centre; people who have been undone by, or come unstuck in the middle of things. This includes street drinkers, beggars, prostitutes, drug users, and, more than any other group, the homeless – particularly rough sleepers. Given which, it is no surprise to find CCT outreach workers hanging out at the Run: they already know and have

worked with most of the people there (added to which, new faces in town always show up here before too long, making it a good place to meet and enrol fresh clients). Rainbow Soup Run volunteers and professional outreach workers for the CCT have this in common: they are all of them engaged in frontline street-based care; kindness is their business. Even so, the CCT (like the CCM) has its reservations and considers the Run a generally outmoded and inexperienced response to social problems.

'We're not a fan of soup runs,' says Jeff. It is an October evening and he and I are stood together in the rain watching volunteers load their trestle tables with tea-urns and cling-filmed sandwiches. 'It's like something out of the Victorian Times. It's like medieval times.'

'There are good sides to it, mind,' says Nicy, breaking off from another conversation to join us. 'There's a social side to it, and for some of them if they weren't here they'd be just sat at home or wherever, doing nothing, bored. It's a chance to get out and meet some people.'

Jeff and Nicy are CCT outreach workers. Having patrolled the city centre for the last two hours they are finishing their shift, as usual, here on Charles Street at eight o'clock in the evening. Across the road the Run is descending into a bit of a scrum as black bin liners of donated clothing are unloaded from the boot of a car: competitive foraging. A group of teens shoves aside a skinny old man in cloth cap and coat, who gesticulates wildly and shrieks back at them. 'Leave him alone,' shouts someone else. 'Look at him, he's only three stone'. Nothing comes of it. People are streaming away from the crowded trestle tables with (two or three) carrier bags full of sandwiches and crisps.

'The thing is,' says Nicy, 'it's no good just to give and give and give – that's not helping anyone in the end.'

Even those making off with the carrier bags of food – some of them, some of the time – have their doubts about indiscriminate giving; but here the allegation is not so much against the donors as against those in receipt: 'others' using the Run – not themselves, never themselves – are said to do so greedily. 'People taking stuff they don't need'; 'people taking sleeping bags one night and then selling them on the market the next day'; 'people taking a liberty ... taking the piss.' This can be a particular bone of contention between those who consider themselves 'really' homeless and those who are demonstrably not – especially the gangs of teens who make getting together at the Run a part of their city centre 'scene' from time to time.

A November evening and I am stood in the cold with Dennis, another outreach worker from the CCT, watching the volunteers set up their tables. It is a Thursday – late night shopping – so Charles Street is busier than usual, and this is only adding to an already rather fraught atmosphere. A bunch of teenage girls has arrived tonight and are dominant: bright sportswear, bad language, sniggers and cigarettes. They have jumped the unruly queue for hot drinks and don't care who knows it.

Marco comes away from the tables, raises an eyebrow at Dennis and I and walks over. A hostile and compelling character, known to the CCT for years now and sleeping rough tonight on the bounce from a spell in prison, he radiates, as ever, the possibility of sudden affront and violence.

'I might just kick off now,' he says. 'Watch this, I might just kick off.'

'Don't do that,' says Dennis.

'Why the fuck not?'

'Not a good idea.'

I don't fucking care if it's a good idea.'

'We need to do something, I know,' says Dennis, watching the turmoil around the trestle tables.

'Well fucking do something, cos I am this close ...'

'It's not down to us though – the Soup Run isn't us.'

'I am going to fucking start it now. Kick some of these fucking cunts up the cunt.'

'Nooooo, don't do that,' says Dennis, shaking his head.

Marco is holding two cups of tea, and Dennis nods towards these. The implication – a diversion really, an attempt to cool Marco out – is that Marco too has taken a liberty, taken more than he needs. Marco grins, but responds: 'I've got two cups here, but one is for me and one is for my boy, over there'

'Who's your boy then?' asks Dennis.

'Sean Cousins'

'Right,' Dennis nods (wishing he hadn't asked: Sean is another troublemaker).

'So ... shall I start it then?'

'No Marco, that's not the way to sort it. What we need is some sort of a system.'

'A system?' Marco's eyebrow is raised again.

'Yes.'

### **City of gifts**

So we have tea and soup but also trouble brewing on Charles Street, Cardiff of a winter's evening. And, as I will propose, the trouble arises at a point of (physical and ideological) intersection of just those 'sectors' we are concerned with today: market, third (or voluntary) and state. If this intersection of sectors is to be framed as an intersection of motives or values then it will be clear, I hope, where I am headed with this: market sector and third sector are coupled, in my schema, with competition and kindness respectively. CCT outreach worker Dennis' comments about the need for 'some sort of system' hint at where I want to go with the (local) state.

My theme is the balancing of competition and kindness in the city. Engels gives us the selfish city, a place of rivalry, struggle and exploitation. Against or alongside this, by way of Nigel Thrift, I have set a city of gifts and consideration, or at least a city in which such consideration can show (and maybe accomplish more than is obvious). The Rainbow Soup Run may be no more than a fleck of compassion ... but the kindness of (and towards) strangers can be considered as much a part of the city as individual self-seeking, each of these a human response to modern urban freedoms.<sup>9</sup> Here is Richard Sennett making just that case and pushing the argument back to its point of origin, writing about Christian communities of care in the medieval city, and about the balance of kindness and self-seeking, that such a city had begun to make space for.

In ordinary usage, "community" denotes the place in which people care about people they know well or immediate neighbours ... [but] urban growth gave "community" ... a somewhat different meaning. The almshouses, the hospitals, and the convents of the city opened their doors more freely to strangers than in the countryside, taking in

travellers, homeless people ... the unknown sick ... The religious community did not comprehend the whole city, but served rather as a place of moral reference [setting] standards against which to measure behaviour in other parts of the city ... Thus, though Paris had filled with large crowds of strangers, its streets were rampant with gratuitous violence, its economy shuffled human beings from town to town as well as goods, the city could nonetheless be shaped into a moral geography. ... Medieval economic and religious developments pushed the sense of place in opposite directions, a dissonance which echoes down in our own times. The economy of the city gave people a freedom of individual action they could not have in other places; the religion of the city made places where people cared about each other. "Stadt Luft macht frei" opposed "the Imitation of Christ". The great tension between economy and religion produced the first signs of the duality which marks the modern city: on the one side, the desire to cut free of communal bonds in the name of individual liberty; on the other side, the desire to find a place in which people cared about each other.

(Sennett, 2002: 158-9)

Sennett maps countervailing tendencies with a common root and in this way twinned, if uneasily. There is dissonance, but also duality; a balance of dispositions; give and take. And the dissonance does echo down in our own times. The top end of Charles Street is flanked by commercial interests, shuffling things and people in pursuit of profit: on the one side a large NEXT store and Burger King franchise, on the other Marks and Spencer and the St David's Shopping Centre with its annual retail spend of £2.4 billion.<sup>10</sup> Yet, in the gap between the two, the lay almoners of the Rainbow Soup Run trade in kindness and make for a city of gifts. Dissonance requires combination, of course; values do not manifestly clash until they come into contact. And the city is a great place for combination<sup>11</sup> because also a place of concentration. Space is what matters here. Cities are spatial forms – imaginaries also,<sup>12</sup> but decisively spatial – and if care and competition are in sometimes dissonant juxtaposition in the city this is because they abut in (concentrated) space. I will return to this in a moment.

I have used the word gifts, and we all know the work that gifts can do. Gifts make friends (and sometimes rivals); gifts across a border of inequality can also wound (see Sennett, 2004; also Douglas, 1990).<sup>13</sup> Soup runs generally intend their gifts to be free,<sup>14</sup> or rather no gift at all: no transfer of goods between parties, no obligation over time, but an act of sharing through which something like community might flicker into life.

'It is an act of sharing in which the presence of us, the soup runners, is basically more important than the soup, bread or clothes which we bring. Thus, in the old days of the original soup runs it was as important for us to take soup with those who clustered around the van as it was to distribute the soup. Many we knew may not have eaten and for them the soup was a real necessity. Others, equally, had conned well or had collected benefit, but the most important thing was to bring people together for the time the van was operating. It is this mutual association which breaks the awful apathy and isolation of being outside'

(Wallich-Clifford, 1976: 108)

This is Anton Wallich-Clifford, trailblazing campaigner for the homeless and (by his own account) instigator of the first ever soup run.<sup>15</sup> He positions soup running, done right, as an occasion not to give so much as to *share* – to share substance with those remaindered and outcast from the urban economy and society; an opportunity to be *kind* in both senses of the word: to show consideration and to come together (with others) as one.<sup>16</sup> The text is taken from *Caring on Skid Row*, Wallich-Clifford's guide to the principals and practice of working with the homeless and society's 'forgotten fringe'. An earlier publication titled *No Fixed Abode*, Wallich-Clifford's account of his pioneering work with down-and-outs and meths men in 1960s London, contains the following passage on the juxtaposition of kindness and competition, community and market.

Armed with large sacks nicked by Tommy from a nearby dump, Cuthbert, Neil, Fred, Tommy and I made our first advances on Spitalfields Market. God knows what we looked like as we scurried between the swiftly moving barrows and dived into the gutter, gathering our harvest of cabbage leaves, squashed onions ... mashed tomatoes and sheared-off celery sticks ... The Porters looked on with amusement, disdain and now and again a rugged "Fuck off, you bloody dossers", but we survived ... As time went on the marketeers got to know us very well ... we had only to walk into Spitalfields to find the salesmen had left out damaged sacks or crates filled with fresh veg and fruit "for the silly buggers doing a bloody fine job"

(Wallich-Clifford, 1989: 120)

Members of the fledgling Simon Community<sup>17</sup> are foraging for food, raiding the market for leftovers to supply a communal 'dossers' stockpot.

Competition and kindness, two aspects of (and/or responses to) urban life and a modern society of individuals; and a tension between the two, perhaps a balance, the one holding the other in check. And yet. Does grubbing around the gutters of Spitalfields market really make the weight? Bloody fine job or not this is a negligible activity, a small work of consideration in amidst the leavings of the busy market. Commensalism. Nothing so grand as one half of a 'great tension ... the duality which marks the modern city' (Sennett, 2002). What are we missing here? Possible answer: the state

### **Unnatural selection**

From medieval Paris and London's East End back to Manchester and a development that moves us on from the binary of competition and compassion; a development brought on by the imbalance of the 19<sup>th</sup> century industrial city in which competition is rampant and appears to so outstrip compassion as to call the future into question. Victorian Manchester's raw physical geography – streets and structures done over by capitalism, dug up, torn down, rebuilt – tallies with a moral landscape disfigured. A war of each against all; countervailing instincts for compassion and interpersonal care outdone; individuals, unstuck and indifferent to all but their own selfish interests; and Engels left wondering how the social fabric can possibly hold together. Civil society as animal kingdom. 'Darwin rediscovers, among the

beasts and plants, the society of England' Marx writes, '... [a] Malthusian "struggle for existence"'. No holds barred. Natural selection. But a fair fight? Well, actually no. All were at liberty in the city, but not as players on a level field. The odds were stacked overwhelmingly in favour of those in possession of capital. In this sense, for Marx and Engels, Manchester was the setting for a one-sided, spiralling process of *unnatural* selection; its ecology out of kilter and liable to result in extinctions, in desolation, in transformative upheaval.

Engels and Marx were right, and wrong too, as it turned out. Things could not go on as they were, nor did they, but there was no collapse, no revolution. What happened instead was an adjustment within the prevailing scheme of things, enough to keep the social fabric hanging together after all. And how? The simple answer is the state. The state took a hand, shoring up a flagging counterweight of kindness, abstracting this from the personal and local/communal into remedial (national) bureaucracies of amelioration and social citizenship. Competition was bridled (domesticated), its energies and excesses contained; social administration – national insurance, health, housing, social services – underwrote a continued economic antagonism by taking some (just enough) of the jar and scrape out of the city of competition. All of which gives us an arrangement of sectors with which we are already familiar. Like this:

**competition – community/kindness – regulation**

or:

**market – community/kindness – state**

or, for our purposes today:

**market – third sector – state**

or, to give one final tweak:

**market – third sector – state**

We have the city, Manchester, say, or Cardiff, or London, made possible by market and state; the city strung between these two poles. Competition driving and invigorating, fuelling the city; the (local and national) authorities managing consequences, setting limits and administering a macro-structure of consideration. Each of these operating without regard for persons. And in the middle, remaindered and under-resourced, a continuing and unremarkable work of personal kindness, perhaps picking up a few of the people and pieces that would otherwise get missed. (Note: in the middle. Neither one thing nor the other – not-for-profit, nor coolly bureaucratic;<sup>18</sup> or, which amounts to something like the same thing, perhaps a bit of both – enterprising, but also principled.)

I want to bring this to a close briskly now by suggesting a reconfiguration. I have positioned the regulatory and remedial powers of the (welfare) state as an emergent counterweight to competition run riot. However, it is worth remembering that the 19<sup>th</sup> century was marked not only by alarm at the unregulated energies of competition but also by concerns for the disruptive powers of the indiscriminate gift. If voluntary kindnesses were outmatched by the ascendant powers of a competitive economy, they were still

considered in their own way potent; capable of further distorting a social fabric already stretched to breaking point. State intercession can be seen in this context also: the state regulating competition but also taking on the administration of kindness and thereby regulating – defusing – the gift, reconfiguring it as a mark and entitlement of national citizenship.

Gareth Stedman Jones' (1971) classic survey of 19<sup>th</sup> century metropolitan class relationships, *Outcast London*, explores these very concerns. Middle-class anxieties about a skewing of class relations brought on by well intended but indiscriminate generosity in the anonymous metropolitan context; charity no longer winding the needy in to their benefactors in gratitude, but breeding idleness and dissipation. A (unnatural) deformation of the healthy disciplines of labour and thrift, which, allied to widening class segregation, might lead to any manner of evolutionary consequence.<sup>19</sup> So the state steps in. Systems of national welfare damp down the incautious heat of competition and compassion alike. There will be limits to getting, and to giving. Voluntary kindness can continue, but now its work is sidelined – care for the socially inadequate, the lumpen and pitiable – and so less consequential and alarming; the mass of the poor are otherwise provided.<sup>20</sup>

I have suggested that the notion of natural selection provided a backdrop against which anxieties about both urban competition **and** urban compassion could be expressed in the Victorian city. The same language suffices today, certainly so in respect of the continuing allegation that kindness can soften up those whose best interests would be served by a tougher love. Here is Steve Hinchliffe writing about pigeons of all things, but also about cities and unnatural selection:

There are pigeons in most city centres. In some ways they tell us where the centre of a city can be found. They are part of the place. But feral pigeons also upset a few too many urban sensibilities. They crowd into city squares and parks. They demand food from strangers, and have yet to learn the sacred nature of personal space. They show no respect for urban landscapes and memories, defacing monuments and buildings with their excrement. Their own appearance is shabby, their plumage is often soiled, they display gnarled limbs and their common foot atrophy suggests that all is not right in their world, or for that matter in our world.

Hinchliffe, 2000: 179)

The ironic parallel with the (human) homeless is surely intended. Hinchliffe continues ...

There are of course urban sympathies. Passers-by toss their excess bread to the needy ... [s]ome even go short themselves to contribute towards pigeon welfare. But urban pigeon benefit, like other welfare systems, has become a subject for critical review ... in helping some of the most needy, urban people are encouraging “unnatural” selection. In a bid to reform the pigeon poor laws, we are told in true Malthusian, anti-welfarist tones that kindness can only prolong the suffering.

(Hinchliffe, 2000: 180)

And there is the possibility – I am interested in the possibility – that, behind the persistent (though far from hackneyed) allegations of demoralization and undeservingness, and the scolding of indiscriminate givers, lie powerful if inexact anxieties about the subversive power of undifferentiated, unchecked community to unbalance the urban ecology. Which is to say that charity wounds – not only the recipient, but the city too, its fabric and economy; don't feed the pigeons.<sup>21</sup>

Back to Charles Street, where the Rainbow Soup Run continues its modest and unobtrusive work of kindness every day of every week – as it has done for years. Only not as unobtrusive, in recent months, as it once was and might wish to have remained. There have been complaints, and a questioning of the real need for, and legitimacy of this kindly activity. Well-intentioned, doubtless, the Run has been described as an irresponsible activity, damaging even. There has been talk of a ban. The context for this has been one of commercial interest and economic development.

Why? What sort of annoyance or indeed *competition* might the humble soup run pose to neighbouring business interests? Let's consider this briefly. Soup run volunteers on Charles Street do and distribute good(s): foodstuffs and sometimes clothing and equipment. Keeping just to food (and drink), it is interesting to ask just how much (money) the Run gives away under the noses, as it were, of nearby businesses looking to sell for profit. Here is a record of a fairly typical 'basket' of goods to be carried away from the Run (I collected these myself one evening, and could – as others do – have got much more without too much trouble). Alongside each I have set the equivalent price at which the item, or the closest thing to it, is available in the adjacent Marks and Spencer's food hall.

<b>Item</b>	<b>Unit price</b>
1 x hot sausage	30p
2 x hot coffee	1.70p
2 x bag crisps	50p
2 x chocolate biscuit	50p
2 x mini sausage roll	20p
1 x boiled egg	40p
1 x muffin/cup cake	79p
1 x carton orange	44p
1 x banana	25p
2 x ham sandwich	1.20p
1 x apple	45p

The basket 'costs' £11.13 and could easily have been more if I'd pushed my luck. Call it £12.00. The Run operates 7 days a week, 365 days a year. That's a £2,500 weekly basket; approx. £125,000 a year. Admittedly, set alongside the profits made elsewhere on Charles Street this is no very great sum; but it is hardly peanuts. £125,000 a year, for free. (This is one way, perhaps, in which to recognise the cumulative significance of the seemingly negligible kindnesses to which Thrift directs our attention.) The point, however, is that £125,000 of goods given away for free is no more a challenge to retail profit on Charles Street than twice or ten times that sum would be. Why? Because Marks & Spencer's and the Rainbow Soup Run are not in competition for

custom; the one cannot undercut the other. Shoppers exiting the M&S food hall and turning on to Charles Street are no more likely to make use of the Run than Marco and Sean Cousins are to buy their weekly groceries at M&S. These are two different activities – charitable giving and commercial trade. The ‘problem’ is that the two activities abut in space. Shoppers at Marks and Spencer’s bump into Marco and are asked for money by Steve Cousins as they exit and enter the store. They have to step past leashed dogs and cans of lager; they have to negotiate real and luridly imagined incivilities; there is the language and the shouting and the general messed up look of the whole thing. And for M&S the worry is that they may lose custom not *to* the soup run but *because* of it. Rather than run the gauntlet of a particularly rowdy evening at the top end of Charles Street, shoppers may take their custom somewhere else. The competition is in and over space.

There is much to say, though not here, about space and the city; about ‘urban ecology’; about the complex relationship between public space and socially marginal groups; and, particularly, about the accommodations in space that the competitive, indifferent city inadvertently affords the needy. If the city, as I have suggested, not only hosts but also itself bears some of the brunt of competition, then this can be seen not only in a rawness of place – Engel’s Manchester torn up and worked over by competitive energies – but also, in turn, in a neglect. The competitive city remakes but then despoils and abandons place, moves on from it. The central Manchester of my childhood was just such a place of neglect – backstreets, canals, depots and warehouses abandoned and run down; not yet re-imagined as heritage. And at that time the homeless – tramps and drinkers – occupied these spaces as conspicuously as anyone else, and were left alone there, by and large. And knew they would be. Neglected space was theirs; indifference guaranteed them a place in which they could be alone with their need.

Derelicts: people and structures left behind by a competition and capital that had over the years flowed elsewhere. But competition and capital can just as soon flow back as flow away – as anyone who knows Manchester today will acknowledge. Manchester has changed (again); it isn’t the place it was; its shape and spaces have shifted in ways which go way beyond the daily ministrations of repair that Thrift refers to as ‘the systematic replacement of place’ (2005:135).<sup>22</sup> The city has been made good and made over, in a more comprehensive manner tied to new forms of urban competition;<sup>23</sup> it has been skinned again, knocked about and done up. Spaces of neglect ringing the city centre have shrunk and do not offer the retreat and hiding place they once did.<sup>24</sup> ‘Welcome to Manchester, home of urban renaissance. And if you don’t like the sound of that, the city authorities will be very pleased to give you an ASBO.’

Cardiff is seeing its tide turn too; is turning itself inside out in ways which bear comparison. New (commercial) uses for central space, investment opportunities, a sudden enthusiasm for city centre living: all these reshaping the city. Grand designs for urban renewal in Cardiff converge on a landmark development in the heart of the city, a £675 million, 967,500 sq ft expansion of the St. David’s shopping centre. Preparatory and infrastructural work is underway – sewers exposed, cable laid, buildings vacated and swathes of the centre stripped for demolition; the city scraped raw, all over again, 150 years on from the industrial transformations and intensive urbanization of the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century that saw the city established as a coal metropolis (see Hooper,

2006). A plywood barrier marks the perimeter of the project and gives a sense of the scale of the transformation: a massive reconfiguring of the city; a new layout and economic geography, a new ecology; and a likely transformation of the moral geography of the city too. In which context a new acuity to the juxtaposition in space of competition and kindness; a revived commercial interest in central space and a new care and concern – kindness even – for the look and feel of the city (centre). A dwindling of the indifference that makes space for the needy and allows an inconsequential, crepuscular work of kindness to proceed unremarked. Twilight in the city has been pushed back well into the night. The lights are on later and later, and not just on a Thursday. And the Run has been nudged into the spotlight, and looks increasingly out of place in the new space taking shape around it. A city centre redeveloped as a national and international retail, tourist and leisure destination does not have the same sort of space for this sort of kindness.

Here then, finally, by way of a conversation between myself and Steve, manager of the CCT (whose outreach workers – Jeff, Nicy, Dennis – attend the Rainbow Soup Run just to keep an eye on things, but do not feel it is necessarily the best way to go about being kind in the city) ... here, then, finally is my reconfiguration of our three key terms.

**Steve:** I spoke to the manager of Marks and Spencer's [at a recent city-centre strategy meeting] ... as he limped across the room at the meeting with his crutch from where he broke his ankle where he slipped in a ... a human excrement, coming out of his ... the door of his ...

**Tom:** You're kidding me? Out of the door of his ...?

**Steve:** Out of his ... out of Marks and Spencer's on a Thursday night. Thursday night's the problem, the late night opening. I mean he's absolutely adamant he cannot have this continuing on his premises. And I've got tremendous sympathy. They have requested an ASBO.

Prohibition. Extinguish the (irresponsible) gift, or at least remove it; put it at a comfortable distance. Cool the subversive energies of indiscriminate kindness and undifferentiated community.

**Tom:** An ASBO?

**Steve:** But [... I've asked] do we really need that, or is there another way?

Steve is looking for a middle ground, a novel compromise that might safeguard space for gifts in the city – but not as an unregulated activity. Thinking back to Dennis and Marco, some sort of a system, perhaps?

**Steve:** [...] I've been working on this idea of a street-carers accreditation scheme. Trying to build up a head of steam which says the Cardiff way is half way in between banning them and letting them run riot. We say if you want to do it, do it, but you have to be regulated. You have to prove the need, show us what it is you're doing, and have proper standards in terms of food

preparation, standards in terms of knowledge and the competence of the people who are involved, the task that you have chosen to do, and where you are going to do it and the time you are going to do it [...] And to put that forward as kind of a middle way [...] You know. There's rules. There's laws, about it. A soup run blunders into several laws. The police would have a role – you're blocking access here. You know. There's food every... you know. Environmental Health might have a role. So there's a whole series of things that we would use ...

'[H]alf way in between', 'kind of a middle way'. I have little more to add. We have our three terms, and the familiar sequence: market and state bracketing a middling third sector. I have shuffled these three together and now lay them out like this, with the (local) state now in the middle:

**market – state – third sector**

or

**competition – administration – kindness**

Competition and kindness (not market and state) as the two poles of the urban milieu; the state as intercessionary, keeping things in balance and cooling the indiscriminate heat of each extreme. This configuration has some descriptive and analytic purchase on Charles Street, Cardiff and I offer it up for discussion on that basis.

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