

places a more wildly undulating invisible social topography.

We count distances in miles and kilometres, but in London, and especially underground,<sup>15</sup> more often distance is measured in seconds and minutes. We assess height as feet or metres above sea level, but in our great flat cities, especially today, elevation is more often measured in terms of enhanced life expectancy, inflated house prices or impressive school exam results. For every minute spent moving east past homes on the Central Line, the GCSE results of the children you pass by drop by four points. One grade C, worth 40 points, is lost every ten minutes on the tube while heading eastwards through this part of London.

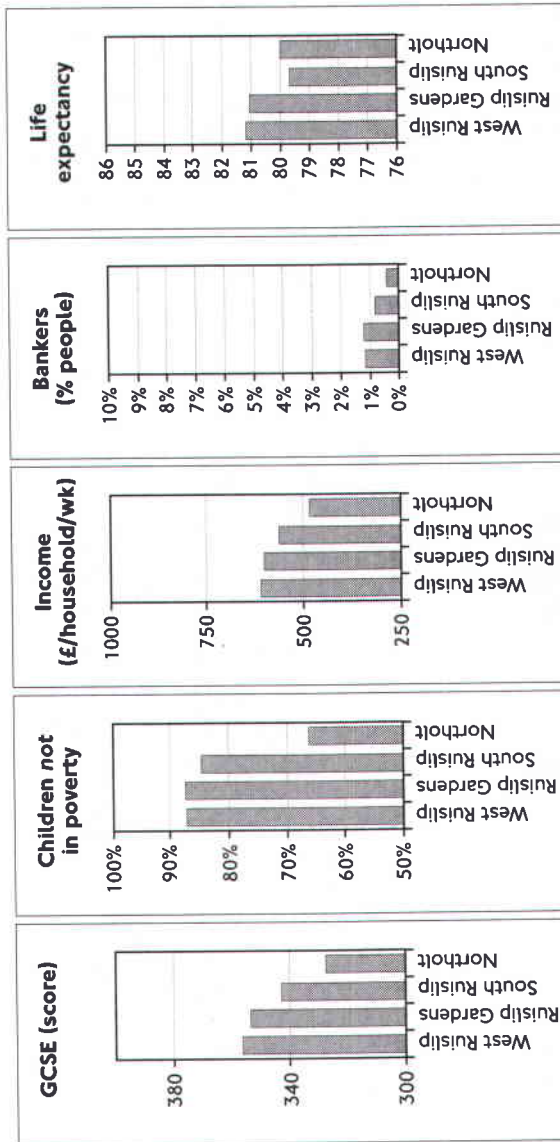
Between the first four stations on the Central Line it is the accelerating drop in GCSE results that is most consistent. It is the sudden rise in poverty on entering Northolt that is most shocking. It is the relentless drop in average incomes that underpins this social landscape, the real landscape influencing people's lives: London pay not London clay.

The direction of the gradient on this part

of the line is about neither extreme riches nor dire poverty. This part of the line is typical of much of Britain. It is not that there are that many bankers to the west or that those bankers are not found to the east. It is that, at most, only around a single percentage of the population hereabouts work in well-paid jobs in finance. And, although life expectancy drops overall, the fall is not monotonic.<sup>16</sup>

Monotonic has two meanings. One describes the act of talking on and on in a monotone, a tone designed to ensure that boredom quickly sets in. Social statistics are often associated with monotonic lecturing. The other meaning describes a set of values that always go up or always down. Two of the five values shown below are monotonic, but only along just the first four stations of the line. These are GCSE results and household income. Both fall at every station as you begin to move east.

Five little charts,<sup>17</sup> each with four little bars, can sum up the first four stations of the Central Line: the general trend is downward in all these social measures, as you move from exurbia to suburbia. It's about schools, and avoiding 'bad



Source: See <http://www.londonmapper.org.uk/features/incquality-in-london/>

ones'. It's about money, and avoiding living next to the poor. It's about income, and keeping up appearances; it's *not* about bankers. It is about your health, but there is only a year's worth of life-expectancy difference between West Ruislip and Northolt. Then again, that makes over ten thousand years if you think of all the people who are losing out.

Ten thousand years is a hell of a lot. Just over ten thousand years ago and the last Ice Age was ending, the ice was melting, and the area that is now London was part of the Eurasian land mass, not on the edge of the sea. There was no English Channel, let alone Britain. Even if, in the grand scheme of things, each premature death might barely register, seen this way a year of life lost across ten thousand people is of geological *significance*. Seen from the point of view of a nine-year-old boy whose father is dead, it is more important than that. Life expectancy falls quickly when a few extra people die young.

Place matters and even what appear to be the smallest of changes between places matter. Later on along the line there are far greater

shifts in life chances than are shown here, but few people cross over those chasms to move home from one area to the next.

It is along stretches of the line where conditions are more similar that people can envisage choosing between residential neighbourhoods, and so it is in parts of London like this where the local school exam results are so keenly observed, where housing prices and tenure exclude most of the poor from the neighbourhoods where chances might be a fraction better.

It is along the first part of the Central Line where household incomes drop so neatly in line with GCSE results, where few bankers live because these areas are mostly *beneath* them, but where people, on average, can expect to live around the national average length of life, if not a little longer – because here is better than average.

Greenford, 8.00 a.m.

‘Have you seen my tie?’ he asked.

‘The wedding’s not until 11.00,’ she said.

He couldn’t help it. He got up every day for