

PRODUCTIVITY

A STORY OF LONDON BY ELLIOT NEALE

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The morning starts like any morning for Toby Forbes, the constant buzz of the alarm clock at 5am, like a broken record that you just do not want to hear. Toby leans over and presses the snooze button, silencing the alarm for just five more extra minutes of sleep. He drifts off to sleep, the alarm buzzes again and almost as though in a hypnotic state, he turns off the alarm clock. Toby is 25 years of age, born within the city, he lives on his own in the maintenance sector, one of 9 sectors in London. Within the 9 sectors there are further subsections to create zones. Toby is a building services engineer by trade and is responsible for the electric, water, heating and communications within the centre of the capital, C9.

Toby stirs following the sound of a horn outside. He rolls over to see that he has overslept. Toby jumps into a frenzy to make it work on time 'I must be productive' he mutters to himself. 'Productivity comes from efficiency and productivity brings development and growth', a regular phrase Toby sees saying to himself, regularly printed in the city. Toby rushes out of the door of his small one bedroom apartment and into the bustling streets.

The streets of London have been adapted away from the conventional design of the previous century. The pavements are now narrower, with pedestrians travelling in the direction of vehicular flow. Those walking, unintentionally walk in step in small groups, as though a march to their place of interest. Cars are near nonexistent and have been replaced with automated busses. The busses communicate to each other and remove the need for signaling. Toby avoids the busses and transfers into the underground rail system.

Entering into C2, once called London Kings Cross, Toby goes to his regular breakfast stop, 'Capital Breakfast', here he swipes his wrist on the 'Oyster card' like reader. The reader bleeps and reads out 'H2O: Low, Magnesium: Low, Iron: Low...' at this point Toby loses his focus and remembers he forgot to take his 'Productivity tablets'. The tablets are designed to subdue any feelings of aggression and violence and simulate energy and overall health. Toby's mind comes back into focus, 'Food preparation: complete' the machine states monotonically. Toby collects his meal from the food dispenser. The food is packaged in a noughties (a term to describe the 2000's) mess tin. The food is quite heavily processed but provides all the nutrients required as a result of analysis from the last use of a toilet. Toby puts the container into his satchel and heads towards the underground system.

The underground system has been vastly altered since the last century. The system is in the process of optimization and upgrade. The previous multi-line system with original and unique names have been replaced. The system is designed for commuting to places of work only. Transport for pleasure and leisure, not that there is much in the city, is provided through bus usage. Entering into the underground system, Toby passes the alternative group, a rebellion group promoting those to break away from the city. They are identified by the scar on the wrist where they have prized the chip out which was implanted at birth. They form a picket line, generations ago used to laugh at the union picket lines as they strike about the work conditions, little has changed. Each day a few speak to the rebellion group but there is not the sense of mass interest. The group name is unknown, Toby puts his head down to inspect his watch, 'five minutes late' he thinks, 'can't waste the day like this'.

Inside the station box, it is less like the traditional, pick the train line of your choice, it is more like a twentieth century sheep separation yard, with gates swinging left and right to filter passengers. Toby swipes his wrist on the

sensors and continues in single file towards the separation gates. Here an automated system separates the orderly line into another set of queues, Toby walks into the assigned queue. Less like a queue but a conveyor belt of people, continuously shuffling forward. The process of separating and filtering continues twice more. The waiting area for the train capsule is comparable to a livestock pen. The capsule arrives on-time and almost silently. The open platform and line has been changed on the entire system to security doors synchronized with the capsule doors. The capsule operates on a magnetic levitation monorail, boasting a system which is highly efficient, minimal environmental impacts and minimal maintenance.

The capsules are programmed such that all those within are going to the same destination. The previous multiline system has been altered such that all lines are interlinked together. The capsules are designed to look in elevation like an original twenty first underground carriage but cut in half vertically, allowing two trains per tunnel. This allows for an increase in capacity on the lines and removes the requirement to increase the tunnel diameters. Toby darts into the driverless capsule with twenty others or so. The bleeping sound of the carriages remain and the classic 'Please mind the gap' is constantly repeated too frequently. Although the constant safety reminders are frustrating to each and every user, any delay on the lines heavily impacts the transport infrastructure and will ultimately damage efficiency and productivity since the core system of moving intellectual capital is hindered.

Toby arrives at the station closest to his place of work, C9, 'C' standing for core, C9 is the new name for Victoria. The capital is comprised of a number of districts, all who provide to the economic growth of the city. As Toby climbs the steps up street level, the city scape reveals itself. The buildings have all been increased in height over the last 100 years to the same level of The Shard. The buildings are mostly glass clad with the financial institutions at the top overlooking London and those within the city. Beneath are the commercial corporations and at the bottom are the local and social amenities, cafes, bars and restaurants. The financial institutions are connected together by 'sky walkways' designed such that occupants can pass to each office quickly and efficiently to ease pressure induced by the industry. The urban planning has been influenced by those with the greatest contribution to the capital with respect to the economic growth, in an attempt to develop the capital at a greater rate than the remainder of the country. The Northern Power House developed by the Conservative government at the start of the last century has been near but abandoned. The high speed links did not encourage business to develop in the North of England but merely resulted in a net influx of people into the capital.

Toby commences his final part of his journey to work by foot, walking in a synonymous march with surrounding people he makes it to the C8/C9 boundary. The area is the new Green Park, now no longer an area of open greenery, but rather an extension of the financial district. The narrow pavements are still a problem for the older generations as the previous pavement design was wider and incorporated bike lanes. Now the elderly feel as though they are a hindrance to society, as the pace set by those walking is greater than the pace that most of the elderly walk at. Bike lanes gained great popularity at the start of the last century, however the increase in accidents involving cyclists created a burden upon the health care system. The cost of caring for those who were unfortunate enough to be caught up in an accident greatly outweighed the net benefit to society. As a result the state discouraged the use through removing the bike lanes and removing the legal framework once in place to protect the cyclist. In turn, the bike usage declined to zero and created a shift onto the public transport.

Arriving at the entrance of one of the major buildings, Toby swipes his wrist on the scanner indicating his time of arrival. He then makes his way to the briefing room and to his work station. Once at his work station he swipes his wrist again to record his time of commencing work, '5 minutes late' the machine reads out. Toby's work day continues as with his the majority of his daily routine, on his own. He is not too fussed about the slightly late start as pay is capped within London to a modest wage, benefits arise depending upon productivity and efficiency. Those who contribute most to society gain the greatest benefits; better housing, better food quality, better health

care and greater access to entertainment and social activities. Those who provide less do not reap the rewards of the benefits. The idea being that if you contribute more to society the more you will get back, thus promoting social responsible values.

Toby receives the first job of the day, the 'dispatcher', a table top machine prints a microchip which Toby plugs into his wrist watch. The microchip contains the data for the project, location and client. A financial institution is having a problem with a display, the chip notifies Toby of the required tools and parts. He grabs his tool bag and heads out to the financial institution.

At the base of Stanley Axe Tower, a leading investment banking corporation, Toby heads into the external elevator and heads to the fortieth floor. "Welcome to Stanley Ltd, how can I be of assistance?" a secretary politely asks from behind the granite topped counter. A water feature cascades down a wall directly behind. "I am here for Jules Evangeline to fix the telecoms interface." Toby makes eye contact with the secretary, young, pretty, well dressed. The secretary hesitates and calls Ms. Evangeline's office. The secretary directs Toby back to the external glass lifts and sets the lift to rise to the seventieth floor.

Whilst in the lift, Toby notices the flying personal vehicles which allow those who work in the financial institutions to commute outside of the city, away from the narrow streets with the over shadowing high rise towers, a scar of the city scape. In the distance Toby can make out the entrance to the city, once called the M25. Now it is a division between the outer world and London. A wall of defiance and strength, with a monorail running along the topside, surprisingly few attacks happen to the wall. To the North is where the politicians are based, apparently to show leadership and direction, encircling round are the other public subsidiaries; postal, transport command, defence control and medical experts.

Entry into the city is similar to that of getting a job. Adverts are posted outside the parliamentary building detailing the required skills that are needed in within the city. These are generally roles that need to be replaced as a result of ill health, death or those absconding the city. Upon application of a job, you must show evidence of your productivity and your contribution to society. After analysis by a selection committee and you are accepted, you then can live in the city. You are chipped and given the base rate of benefits. A person cannot simply just enter the city for their personal interests and pleasure. Tourism is limited but mainly focuses on the values and strength of the city, however there are mechanisms in place to ensure that you cannot out stay your welcome.

The elevator 'dings' and Toby flicks out of his thoughts and walks into the office of Jules Evangeline. Jules walks over and gestures him to greet with a handshake. A simple, engraved brass plate on the dark oak door displays 'Jules Evangeline – Director of Accounts'. In the new society, contract and office managers have been removed and been replaced with automated systems in an aim to remove the middle man and drive down costs, thus maximizing net benefits. It is not unusual for Toby to meet those at the bottom of society to those at the top with no managerial interface just the chip in his watch to direct and control movements, monitoring the workload.

"I am having problems with the interface with the stock market display board" Jules points to the hologram display next to one of the windows. The office is sleek, designer, with cushioning carpet. Artificial lighting is minimal and is provided through modest up lighting, large glass windows create full height views of the city. Toby asks about the problem, "the hologram flickers" she sharply responds as she looks up from her computer. "Okay, and how long has this been happening? Have you tried..." he asks as he plugs in the diagnostic computer, less of a computer but rather a plugin from the watch. Jules interjects, "Would you like a job here?" she continues "We are having quite a few problems with various parts of the buildings." Startled by her assertive behavior he asks a few basic questions. "Sorry for being blunt, we are in the middle of a large deal. We need someone like you, I can see from the database you have lived in London your entire life, you are loyal and have a high productivity value. We need

someone like you, someone who cares about the city.” Toby stands a little taller “Thank you” he responds. “We will upgrade your benefits package, you will have better food, use of the sky walks, better food, increased medical access and I am sure we can find more suitable accommodation, C2 is hardly glamorous.”

Toby establishes the cause of the problem, a simple glitch in the processing card. The system had predicted this problem and Toby simply replaces the card. Jules continues to engage in conversation during the repair “Just think, your life will be richer, you will live a better life whilst continuing the career you have always had. You will be one of us.” Supposedly meaning that Toby can be a part of a financial institution. Jules offers to exchange details though the smart watch, Toby accepts, he looks up, “It will be a decision you will not look back on.” They hold eye contact momentarily, he breaks the bond and heads towards the lift. He stands at the window looking downwards at the streets below. People crowded, the limited daylight, the noise, the feeling that you are constantly being surveyed from those above. Jules joins “Do you want to be one of them? Or one of us?” she continues “You have a chance to break away from the life you live and move up a level.” Toby looks away and puts his head down “I will get back to you, I need to think.”

On the way down to the street level in the external glass elevator, Toby looks at the ring around London and observes the flying cars running backwards and forwards to the boundaries of London, like worker bees foraging for pollen. A positive he has noticed in recent years is that the yellow like haze of the city has disappeared and the sky is much clearer, probably as a result of the low emission flying car. The flying car, solely used by those at the top could be a new mode of transport for him, a chance to break away from the city but still receive the benefits of the city. Outside of the boundary looks green, uncongested, fields can be seen, greenery in London has all been removed.

The lift rings, ‘Street Level’ the automated voice states. Toby steps out of the door and into the rush of people. Instantly he wishes he was at the top, clean, quiet, and uncongested away from the hustle of life on street level. Toby stares at the narrow roads, wishing that he could once again use a bicycle to move between jobs. The previous government had opened the disused train lines to create safe, fast passages to move around the city. He used to enjoy darting through the tunnels as a child, however these have all been removed to maximize the underground transport system.

Toby takes a short walk considering the proposal and arrives at C10, the new Sloanne Square, once a prestigious area with its renowned Victorian architecture, destroyed by the need for production and economic growth. As Toby passes into the underground, a young, slightly poorly dressed man moves towards him, Toby instantly has a heightened sense of awareness. The man locks onto the side of him, the man in a surprisingly soft voice engages in conversation. Toby notices the scar on his hand, a sign of a rebellion member, a person who is breaking away from the system. “Have you considered leaving the city? Search for a new life? A life where you are in control of your surrounds? A life which is relaxed and healthier? A life without productivity pills? A natural life?” The rebel member asks, Toby a little startled responds ‘The city has everything I need, a sense of belonging, an efficient city, state provided benefits and a stable career. Why should I leave?’ They continue conversing, he understands the man's name is Karl, Toby interjects mid-sentence “How do you survive in the city with no chip? How do you get food? How do you move on the transport?” Karl responds “There are several ways of getting around the system. Firstly, I have kept the chip, solely for transport. For food, we have people on the inside who can provide food. Money is an issue but the odd delivery can get ‘disrupted’, but we do not steal, the city is near crime free and we do not wish to contribute, we collect.” Toby invites Karl to the underground system, they travel through the automated barriers, to Toby’s surprise Karl passes through the barrier and is filtered into the same lane. This happens two more times. He is intrigued, “How does this person move so freely around the city?” he thinks.

Toby and Karl board onto the same carriage, 'How would you like to join me this weekend and we can discuss further? You don't appear to be tied into the city, you can break away and escape this depressing and controlling city" Karl says. They exchange details and Toby returns back to the main office, swiping in at each door way. Work continues for several more hours. Toby swipes his chip after twelve hours at work and commences the commute home.

The station is particularly busy this evening, even the filtering of passengers is not adequate for the demand of the transport network. The working day has been changed to remove the pressures of rush hour, such that demand should generally remain constant as the city 'never sleeps' as there is constantly a work force. The separation of working day and night, and social and unsociable hours have been removed. The positive of having a constant work force is that production never stops and the system becomes highly efficient. Transport systems have a constant flow of people opposed to peaks and troughs of passenger flow. The peak loads in energy do not occur as before and thus allow for efficient energy production.

Toby boards onto the autonomous carriage, nearly crushed against the far door. His mind is now full of thoughts: "Do I stay or do I go? The city provides everything I need, I have a stable life, and I get to see the city. I have the chance for a promotion, a better way of life. However, the constant surveillance remains, the state knows what I eat, where I go, how I work and god knows what else that I am not aware of, I don't have a social life but I have a city which supports me. A city which ensures that I am cared for, a city with low emissions, a city with nearly zero crime." His train of thought is lost, a carriage pulls into a station and a crowd of passengers get off, in a surge to either sleep in preparation for the next day or to go to work.

Toby arrives at his home destination and decides to contact Karl, the weekend cannot wait. Karl tells him to head to C3, 'Camden' as it was once called, to the North of the city. An area renowned for its slightly more relaxed style of living and a little more 'free' than the centre. Toby does not hesitate and leaves his apartment immediately. He decides not to use the public transport, the route can be logged and alarms raised to those at the top. He decides to walk to the area.

Karl meets him in a small stairway to a basement. Toby informs Karl of his decision "I wish to leave the city, this place is ruining me, I am just a cog in the machine." Karl pauses momentarily "You understand, once you leave you cannot come back, that is it." In the corner a young lady is sitting smoking something Toby has never smelt, a substance, green in colour, looking slightly fluffy. She sits there content, almost happy. Karl notices his confused look. "Don't worry about that, this is our alternative to the productivity pills." He continues "Removing yourself from the city is like a relationship, you can completely withdraw to allow the relationship to collapse and force a break away or you can remove yourself." Without hesitation, Toby states his intention to remove himself. Karl responds "That's fine, we can remove you. We have an insider with a flying craft, for a small fee you will be taken out of the city. The fee is your chip." He continues "the chip will allow us food and your benefits for a few weeks until the system realises that you are no longer productive." Toby agrees.

Toby sits in the chair and smokes some of the 'green' plant. He feels euphoric, happy yet calm. Karl opens a packet for a scalpel and makes a small incision in his hand. Toby winces in pain, but the pain is not one to cause an outcry. The process is uncomfortable but not excruciatingly painful. Karl then uses tweezers and inserts them into the small incision. A little routing in the hand and Karl clasps the chip and extracts it. Almost like keyhole surgery, the incisions is minimal and the need for stitches is not required, a small amount of glue is passed over the incision to prevent further loss of blood and prevent a bacterial infection.

They talk for a few hours, smoking a little more and drinking some alcohol. A substance incredibly hard to get hold of as a result of the damage it causes to the body and the associated social effects.

Karl takes Toby to the base of one of the major investment banks close by. The security guard, clearly on the inside of this operation, nods and opens the external elevator doors. Toby and Karl enter and travel to the highest floor, as promised. They both stand on the roof top, nearly 100m above the London sky line, both standing near the edge. The city lights twinkling, the night is clear, the stars are clearly visible. "2 minutes until the car should be here to take you away, would you like some more to smoke?" Karl asks, "That will calm my nerves, a new start, a new life, a...." Karl lunges towards Toby, at the same time the flying car comes into focus and prepares to land. "Today has been a test, you have been offered a chance to rise to the top, and this was a test of loyalty." Karl continues "You show great productivity, but you show weakness. You are not committed to the capital. You are showing clear signs of breaking and cracking, fractures in society will only propagate. We have had concerns about you, we wanted you to prove us wrong but you have not. You have reinforced our thoughts. You didn't even give a day of thought about moving out." Toby tries to reason to no such avail. "We have no place for you here, if you leave you will only speak of bad words about us and we will lose our potential talent."

Karl starts walking Toby backwards, his strength overpowering Toby's resistance. Karl moves him to the edge of the building. "Who are you? You are not part of the rebellion." Toby frantically asks to try and show his humane side, a tactic used to reason at times of high stress. "We are a service brought in by the government aimed to prevent uprisings. The lines we form in the stations have nothing to do with an uprising. We are trying to find those who are not loyal, those who affect productivity. Our job is to remove them." Karl releases his grip, Toby falls, quietly. No screams, no shouts. Just falls in silent to the street below. The moment his body impacts with the road below, an empty bus stops just in front. Two men jump off the bus, place his lifeless body in a bag and drive off under the cover of darkness. London has taken another victim.