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The Schillers of the Suburbs: Creativity and Mediated Sociality

Theories around the cultural geography of creativity have given new life, in recent years, to criticisms of 'suburban isolation'. These theories have emphasised the importance of tacit knowledge, suggesting that, even in the era of the internet, creativity requires an immediacy of social interaction which can only be found in the city. The paper brings these theories into question through a long historical perspective on the relation between mediated sociality and creativity. Drawing on the work of Norbert Elias, it suggests some surprising parallels between the position of German artists and intellectuals in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and suburban creative practitioners today. The former were in many respects 'isolated', relatively dependent on mediated sociality, and yet they produced a major historical flowering of creative activity. The example prompts us to think more sympathetically and optimistically about the creative potential of contemporary suburbia.