

Getting close to intimacy: A philosophical investigation of loneliness and intimacy across Sloterdijk's *Bubbles* and Abbott's *Flatland*

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Abstract

Loneliness, a frequent phenomenon in Dutch society, is associated with a lack of intimate relationships. To understand and act on loneliness, conceptual research is needed. Sloterdijk's *Bubbles* can provide valuable insights into the concepts of 'loneliness' and 'intimacy'. However, *Bubbles* can be quite dense. To grasp Sloterdijk's ideas better, Abbott's novel *Flatland* may be helpful. This interpretative thesis investigates the degree of similarity between *Bubbles* and *Flatland*. A narrative analysis is conducted which includes quotes and thought experiments. Overall, *Bubbles* is found to be highly comparable and compatible with *Flatland*. Findings of this thesis can be applied to other disciplines.

Introduction

*"To the query, "What is a friend?" [Aristotle's] his reply was, "A single soul dwelling in two bodies.""*¹

More than 23 centuries ago, the philosopher Aristotle may have used this metaphor to underline a notable trait among people: People are able to form close and affectionate, or intimate, relationships with each other. Intimacy can be experienced among all kinds of (relatively small) groups of people, such as family members, students, neighbours, colleagues, and partners. Moreover, it is through intimate relationships that people feel supported in life, especially in the tough times of life when people feel (extra) vulnerable. For instance, patients who are in the process of finding out if they have a debilitating disease, often rely on people with whom they have intimate relationships. The same goes for patients who have just found out that they have a debilitating disease. However, some patients do not have (sufficient) intimate relationships. Because these people are alone, they may also feel alone and thus experience loneliness.

Loneliness is a frequent phenomenon in Dutch society: In March 2023, 45% of young people were somewhat to very lonely, 28% of adults were somewhat lonely and 11% of adults were extremely lonely. Moreover, loneliness often occurs together with mental symptoms and diseases, which are also frequent in Dutch society: In March 2023, one out of three young people and around one out of five adults experienced mental symptoms. Furthermore, in 2022 around one out of four adults had a mental disease. The prevalence of mental symptoms and diseases will likely increase in the Netherlands, if only because of the influx of refugees and asylum seekers, who are prone to developing mental symptoms and diseases. As the prevalence of mental symptoms and diseases will likely rise, so will the prevalence of loneliness. The latter will greatly affect Dutch people and society. Overall, loneliness is an issue that needs to be urgently addressed in the Netherlands.

Currently the phenomenon of loneliness is largely addressed in empirical research. An example of such research is monitoring the prevalence of loneliness and evaluating interventions for loneliness. Another type of empirical research is reflected in a recent study where stakeholders deliberated together on a new concept of 'mental health'. While the latter study is about concepts, it is not conceptual research, because it used surveys.² Just like empirical research, conceptual research can provide valuable insights into the phenomenon of loneliness. One paper puts it this way: "every research strategy within a discipline, contributes importantly relevant and complementary information to a totality of evidence".³ Moreover,

¹ Diogenes Laertius, "Aristotle," in *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, ed. Robert Drew Hicks (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972), book 5, chapter 1, Perseus Digital Library, <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=urn:cts:greekLit:tlg0004.tlg001.perseus-eng1:5.1>.

² Briefly, empirical research involves gathering and analysing data from real-world observations and/or experiments, while conceptual research involves creating and refining frameworks, theories, models and/or concepts from reasoning and existing data.

³ Charles H. Hennekens and Julie E. Buring, "Observational evidence," *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences* 703, no.1 (Dec 1993): 18–24.

conceptual research can benefit much from the discipline of philosophy, because in philosophy the foundations and presuppositions of topics and issues are questioned and discussed.

One philosopher who has extensively written about the concepts of 'loneliness' and 'intimacy' is Peter Sloterdijk. According to Sloterdijk's *Bubbles* (1998), we humans live in a world which has no ready-made, protective domes for us. Nevertheless, to survive and thrive, we have built our own protective domes, called 'spheres'. Moreover, our intimate relationships form microspheres or bubbles, and loneliness results from a lack of these microspheres. Furthermore, in *Bubbles* Sloterdijk performs an ontological investigation, whereby he investigates the nature and conditions of microspheres and how they influence our human existence. While Sloterdijk's *Bubbles* can provide valuable insights into loneliness and its absence in intimacy, these insights may be difficult to distil from his work. That is, because Sloterdijk's work can be quite dense. For instance, Sloterdijk's *Bubbles* contains many references to other sources and fields, such as art and history, which does not only make his work erudite, but also complicated.

To bring the ideas from Sloterdijk's *Bubbles* to light, they can be compared with the ideas of a work that is similar, but simpler. By doing so, the ideas of the other work can accentuate Sloterdijk's ideas on intimacy and loneliness. This kind of interaction between ideas is described by philosopher Donna Haraway, who once wrote that "It matters what matters we use to think other matters with".⁴ As mentioned earlier, Sloterdijk's *Bubbles* discusses microspheres as a form of vital geometry for human existence. Therefore, a similar yet simpler work also needs to discuss geometry as an important aspect of (human) existence.

Here, the novel *Flatland: A Romance of Many Dimensions* (1884) by Edwin A. Abbott may be a suitable work to assess against Sloterdijk's *Bubbles*. This famous novel is about multiple geometrical figures who live in different dimensions of space. There is for instance Flatland, the land of two dimensions, which is populated by two-dimensional figures, such as triangles, squares, and circles. Moreover, the novel discusses how multiple geometrical figures experience space and develop intimate relationships with each other. Overall, Abbott's *Flatland* views geometry as an important aspect of one's existence, just like Sloterdijk's *Bubbles*. However, Abbott's *Flatland* seems to be simpler than Sloterdijk's *Bubbles*, if only because the former is a 100 page fictional work, and the latter is a 600 page philosophical work. In this way, Abbott's *Flatland* seems to be similar yet simpler if one assesses it against Sloterdijk's *Bubbles*.

Although Abbott's *Flatland* seems to be similar to Sloterdijk's *Bubbles*, the degree of similarity is unknown. This thesis fills up the lacuna. The purpose of this thesis is to increase the capacity of people to grasp the concepts of 'loneliness' and 'intimacy' better in our current times in which loneliness is a frequent phenomenon in Dutch society. The latter is done by assessing the degree of similarity between the ideas in Abbott's *Flatland* and the ideas on intimacy and loneliness in Sloterdijk's *Bubbles*. In doing so, this thesis is shaped as an interpretative thesis with a main question and sub-questions:

⁴ Donna Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), 12.

Main question:

- To what extent are the philosophical ideas on loneliness and intimacy in Sloterdijk's *Bubbles* similar to the ideas in Abbott's *Flatland*?

Sub-questions:

- What are the philosophical ideas on loneliness and intimacy in Sloterdijk's *Bubbles*?
- What ideas are discussed in Abbott's *Flatland* that are related to loneliness and intimacy?

In what follows, the methodology of the thesis is described. Afterwards, a summary is provided of Sloterdijk's *Bubbles* and Abbott's *Flatland*, which highlights the ideas on loneliness and intimacy in both works. Each of the next four chapters features the ideas of the four dimensions that Abbott's *Flatland* discusses, namely Pointland, Lineland, Flatland, and Spaceland. Hereby the ideas of each dimension are assessed for comparability and compatibility with the ideas of Sloterdijk's *Bubbles*. Lastly, the findings are discussed and concluded in a final chapter.

Methodology

Literature research

The methodology of this thesis follows from the classification of this thesis as an interpretative thesis. The aim of an interpretative thesis is to improve the interpretation of a philosophical work or concept, mostly by using quotes and interpreting them in a novel way. For this thesis quotes about loneliness and intimacy are collected from Abbott's *Flatland* and Sloterdijk's *Bubbles*.

Moreover, quotes about loneliness and intimacy are collected from Sloterdijk's *Globes* (1999) and *Foams* (2004) which complement *Bubbles*. *Globes* and *Foams* are related to *Bubbles*. In fact, *Bubbles* is the first part of the trilogy *Spheres* which Sloterdijk wrote, and *Globes* and *Foams* are respectively the second and third part. While *Bubbles* discusses microspheres that pertain to intimate relationships, *Globes* discusses macrospheres that envelop and unite the people of the world. Think hereby of ideas like metaphysics, empires, and globalization. Moreover, *Foams* discusses how in contemporary times macrospheres have burst and how we humans come together in the form of foam, a plurality of spheres, to create a society, a so-called 'Foam City'. While *Globes* and *Foams* do not necessarily discuss the topic of intimacy and loneliness, some parts of these works complement *Bubbles*. For instance, *Globes* contains a passage called 'Parenthesis: On Depression as a Crisis of Extension' which can be said to discuss loneliness. Therefore, apart from *Bubbles*, quotes about intimacy and loneliness are gathered from *Globes* and *Foams* that complement *Bubbles*.

Narrative analysis: Comparability and compatibility

After the quotes are collected, they are used to create a summary which describes the through line of Sloterdijk's and Abbott's ideas on intimacy and loneliness. Next, the degree of similarity between Sloterdijk's *Bubbles* and Abbott's *Flatland* is determined in a narrative analysis which consists of two components: Firstly, the degree of comparability between Sloterdijk's and Abbott's ideas is examined. Here comparability is defined as the commonality of Sloterdijk's and Abbott's ideas. Moreover, the comparability is examined by interpreting the collected quotes from Sloterdijk's *Bubbles* and Abbott's *Flatland* and putting the interpretations next to each other. Furthermore, the comparability between both works is examined in four chapters, which resemble the four dimensions of space that Abbott's *Flatland* discusses.

Secondly, the degree of compatibility between Sloterdijk's and Abbott's ideas is examined in the narrative analysis. Here compatibility is defined as the ability for Sloterdijk's and Abbott's ideas to co-exist. Furthermore, the compatibility is examined by assessing whether there are major differences between the ideas and whether it is possible to imagine that these differences are reconciled or bridged. For this purpose, thought experiments are utilized, because imaginability is here the indicator of compatibility and "Thought experiments

are basically devices of the imagination.”⁵ Lastly, the compatibility of Sloterdijk’s *Bubbles* and Abbott’s *Flatland* is also divided into four chapters, which resemble the four dimensions of space in Abbott’s *Flatland*.

Investigating philosophy and literature together

The methodology of this thesis rests on the assumption that the ideas of a literary work like Abbott’s *Flatland* can be assessed against a philosophical work like Sloterdijk’s *Bubbles*. However, one might wonder whether it is possible to relate a literary work to a philosophical work. For instance, one might argue that a novel focuses on emotion and passion, while a philosophical work focuses on truth and reason. This begs the question whether a literary work can be assessed against a philosophical work.

According to the Oxford Handbook of Philosophical Methodology, there are three different views about the relationship between philosophy and literature. One view states that works of literature can provoke philosophical thoughts. However, this may be said for any story which appeals to people and resonates with them. Another view states that works of literature can support and guide philosophical thoughts “in interesting ways through their narrative structures, delineation of characters, and use of point of view”.⁶ Moreover, yet another view states that works of literature can embody philosophical thoughts in unique ways that cannot be matched by other (types of) works. Overall, it is possible to relate a literary work to a philosophical work. Consequently, there does not seem to be a (major) problem for assessing Abbott’s *Flatland* against Sloterdijk’s *Bubbles*.

Moreover, this thesis seems to resonate with the view that literary works can support philosophical works. That is, because this thesis investigates to what extent a literary work is comparable and compatible with a philosophical work. In this way, this thesis investigates the extent to which the contents of a literary work can substantiate the contents of a philosophical work. Therefore, this thesis seems to resonate with the view that literary works can support philosophical works. Furthermore, the thesis does not seem to resonate with the view that literary works can embody philosophical works in unique ways. That is, because the thesis does not focus on the literary work surpassing the philosophical work. Likewise, the thesis does not focus on forming new philosophical thoughts, but on distilling existent philosophical thoughts. That is why the thesis does not resonate with the view that literary works can provoke philosophical thoughts.

⁵ James Robert Brown and Yiftach Fehige. “Thought Experiments,” last modified September 26, 2019, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/thought-experiment/>

⁶ Gregory Currie. “Methods in the Philosophy of Literature and Film,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophical Methodology*, ed. Herman Cappelen, Tamar Szabó Gendler and John Hawthorne (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 646, Oxford Academic. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199668779.013.33>

A summary of *Flatland* and *Bubbles*

Abbott's *Flatland*

"Imagine a vast sheet of paper on which straight Lines, Triangles, Squares, Pentagons, Hexagons, and other figures, instead of remaining fixed in their places, move freely about, on or in the surface, but without the power of rising above or sinking below it".⁷ This is how the narrator, A Square, describes Flatland, the land of two dimensions, in which he lives. Moreover, each Flatlander only sees straight lines, similar to the way in which we humans only see a straight line if we look at a penny from the side (figure 1).

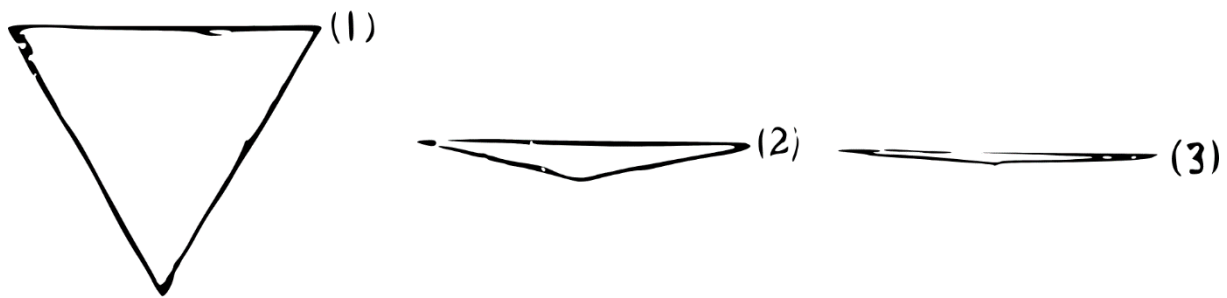


Figure 1. Moving from the perspective of a human (left) more to that of a Flatlander (right)

Regarding the Flatlanders, all women are straight lines. However, the men of Flatland are various two-dimensional shapes and the more sides a man has, the higher his social status is. Moreover, there is a law of nature which ensures that a son has one more side than his father and thus a higher social status than his father. Consequently, "the duty of fathers is to subordinate their own interests to those of posterity".⁸ This law of nature does not apply to women. While woman cannot socially advance, they must not be underestimated because woman, as straight lines, can easily perforate and kill others if they are triggered (by men). "Not that it must be for a moment supposed that our Women are destitute of affection. But unfortunately the passions of the moment predominates [then]".⁹ Overall, there is peace between men and women in the households of Flatland.

Furthermore, Flatlanders recognize each other in three ways. Firstly, they can distinguish the voices of Flatlanders and their classes, even if low-class Flatlanders can feign the voice of high-class Flatlanders. Secondly, Flatlanders can feel the sharpness of an angle and infer the shape and class of a Flatlander. Thirdly, Flatlanders can visually recognize each other because of the fog in Flatland, which makes distant angles look dimmer. Moreover, Flatland is a black-and-white world, but colour used to be another way in which Flatlanders recognize each other. That is, because Flatlanders used to paint themselves according to their class. However, painting was banned because low-class Flatlanders could deceive others very well by painting

⁷ Edwin A. Abbott, *Flatland: A Romance of Many Dimensions* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1926), 3.

⁸ Abbott, *Flatland*, 48.

⁹ Abbott, *Flatland*, 14.

themselves as high-class Flatlanders. Furthermore, all methods of recognition in Flatland are only efficient as far as Flatlanders are regularly shaped, i.e. a woman is not only a line, but a straight line. Because the recognition of irregular figures is quite complicated, irregular Flatlanders are ostracized and/or destroyed.

Besides Flatland, the narrator, A Square, describes Lineland, the land of one dimension, which he saw in a dream. Lineland consists of one straight line on which smaller straight lines and points, respectively men and women, move and emit sounds (figure 2). Moreover, in his dream A Square talked to the Monarch of Lineland. The Monarch thought that everything outside the line “was a blank (...); nay not even a blank, for a blank implies Space; say, rather, all was non-existent.”¹⁰ In fact, the Monarch thought that A Square was a voice from his stomach. Furthermore, the Monarch stated that no Linelander is allowed to feel each other, because this collision may destroy the women of Lineland. Furthermore, the Monarch stated that physical proximity is not necessary for “the union of hearts”¹¹ of Linelanders. Instead, Linelanders use sound to resonate and harmonize themselves with other Linelanders.

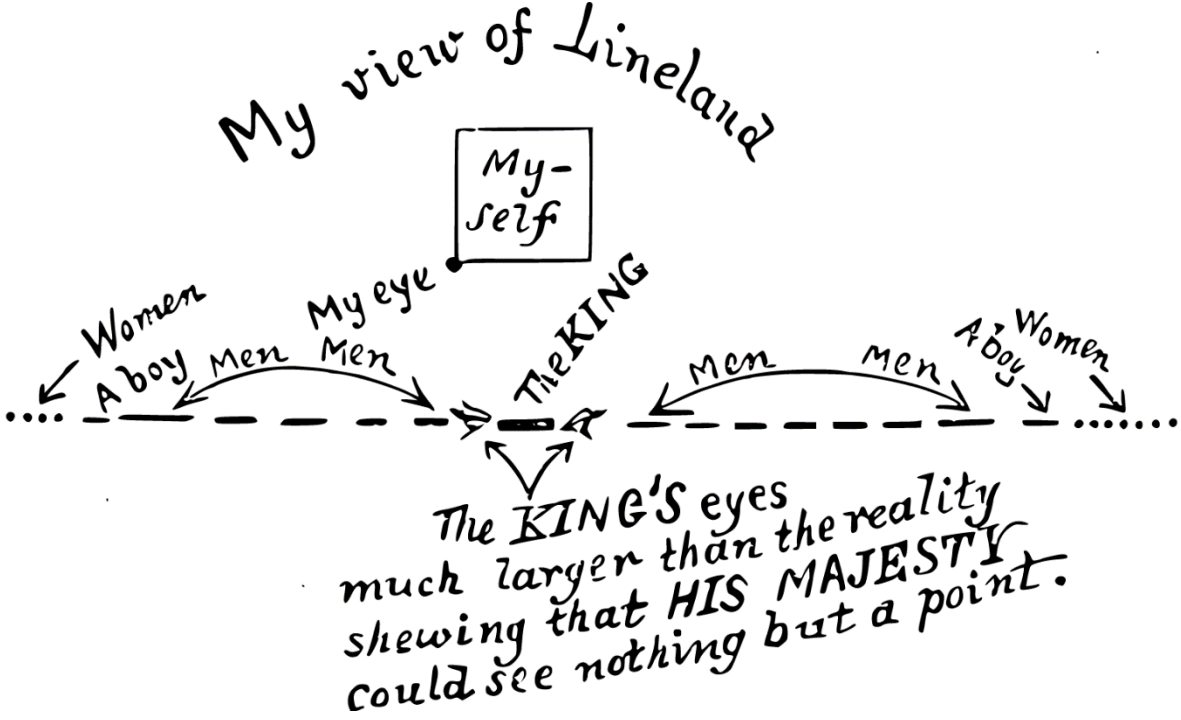


Figure 2. A Square’s view of Lineland

Apart from Lineland, A Square describes Spaceland, the land of three dimensions. Moreover, A Square learns about Spaceland from a visiting Sphere. As soon as the Sphere arrived, the Square was aware of its presence, and when the Sphere revealed himself, they argued about (the existence of) the third dimension. Nevertheless, A Square was reluctant to believe in the third dimension. Therefore, the Sphere resorted to actions, such as rising out of Flatland and touching A Square in his stomach (figure 3). The Sphere even carried A Square to

¹⁰ Abbott, *Flatland*, 55.
¹¹ Abbott, *Flatland*, 56.

Spaceland, where A Square viewed Flatland from a new perspective and acquired new knowledge about himself and his world (figure 4). The square was “Awestruck at the sight of the mysteries of the earth, thus unveiled before my unworthy eye”.¹²

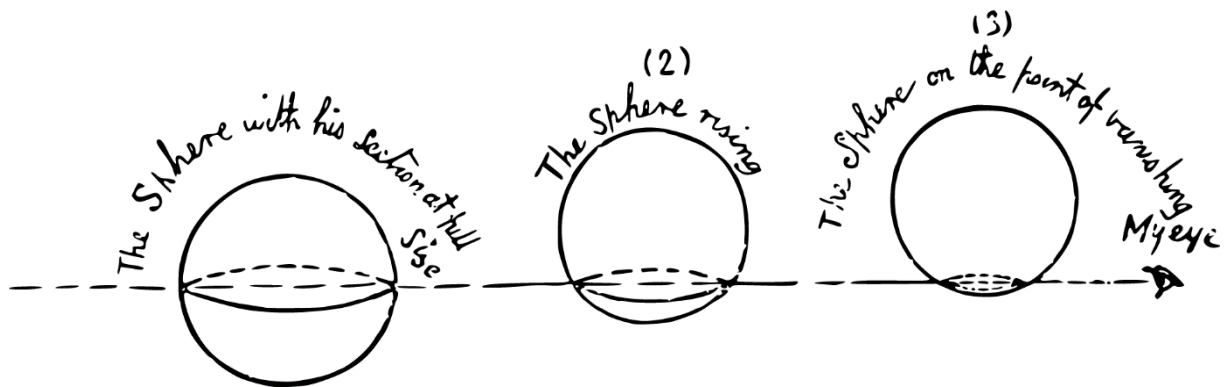


Figure 3. The Sphere rising out of Flatland for A Square

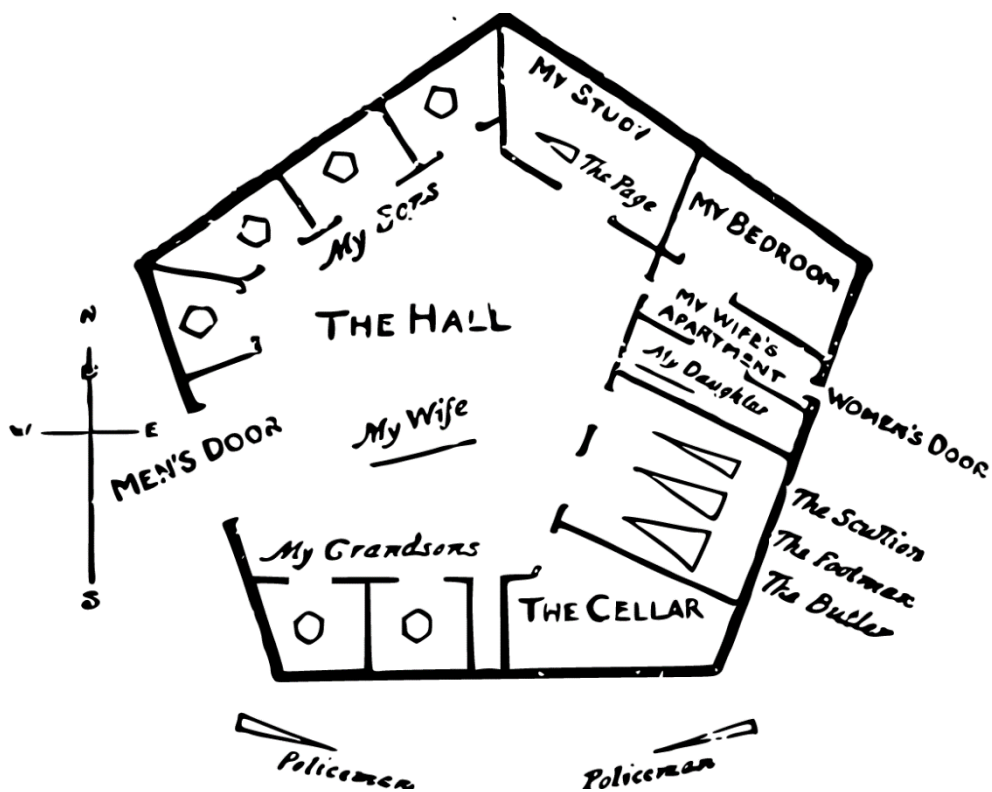


Figure 4. A Square's view of his house from the perspective of Spaceland

Aside from Spaceland, A Square describes Pointland, the land of zero dimensions, which he visits together with the Sphere in a dream. Pointland consists of one point, the Monarch of Pointland, who believes that he is the only one that exists. In fact, the Monarch “has no cognizance even of the number Two; nor has he a thought of Plurality; for he is himself his One and All”.¹³ Moreover, A Square is unsuccessful in convincing the Monarch of the presence of

¹² Abbott, *Flatland*, 81.

¹³ Abbott, *Flatland*, 93.

multiple dimensions and geometrical figures. Instead, the Monarch of Pointland treats A Square's words as if they are figments of his imagination.

Sloterdijk's *Bubbles*

According to Sloterdijk, "Life is a matter of form"¹⁴, meaning that our existence is shaped by forms. In the past we believed that protective shells were formed for us. Think for instance of the idea of the celestial spheres that surround Earth, the planet at the centre of the universe. However, due to the Copernican revolution, we were no longer the centre of the universe. This made us realize that there were no protective shells for us, but a cold outside which is indifferent to us. In this Modern Age, the age of shelllessness, we have built our own protective shells, called 'spheres'. To stand up against the outside, spheres must be constantly taken care of, for if they are not, they implode.

In what follows, Sloterdijk analyses the formation of bubbles or microspheres that constitute intimate relationships. Hereby the analysis is "neither a purely constructivist projection of rounded-off spaces in which people imagine they are leading a shared existence, nor a purely ontological meditation on the circle in which mortals are captured through an inaccessible transcendent order."¹⁵ Moreover, the idea that people form bubbles with others, is reflected in the field of psychology, which supports the notion that people arrange and share the world with others.

According to Sloterdijk, people form bubbles in the intercordial space. Within European cultures and (Catholic) religions the heart is seen as the source for intimate relationships. This is based on the idea that holding onto one's heart is impossible. Instead, the heart enables people to form community and concord with each other. Moreover, the intercordial space is displayed in stories in which people are united by literally offering their hearts to the other in the name of love. However, the intercordial space became more devalued as postmortem examinations were more practiced. That is, because these examinations presented the heart as a stand-alone organ of an individual. Sloterdijk describes this as follows: "To the analytical eye of the anatomist, the individual human body presented itself as an autonomous workshop of life, as it were, the physiological thing-in-itself. For there is nothing in the open-up innards of the corpse that allows a tendency towards existence in intimate connection with others to come to light."¹⁶

Furthermore, people also form bubbles in the interfacial space, which depends on the exchange of glances between people. The interfacial space is reflected in the way we have focused on human faces throughout history. Think for instance of the portraits we made and presented to others. Moreover, think of sexual selection: Evolutionarily speaking, people with a face that is welcoming to other people are more likely to reproduce. Overall, we humans seem to have our faces for the other rather than for ourselves. In fact, for a long time, one's

¹⁴ Peter Sloterdijk, *Spheres. Volume 1: Bubbles. Microspherology*, trans. Wieland Hoban (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2011), 11.

¹⁵ Sloterdijk, *Bubbles*, 79.

¹⁶ Sloterdijk, *Bubbles*, 130.

face was virtually only accessible to the other, who could react with his own face. This leads to a game of gaze and counter-gaze that can create intimate relationships. However, when the mirror became a commonplace object in society, one could learn about one's face and complete oneself in this manner without the other. Consequently, the intercorporeal space became more devalued.

Moreover, bubbles are formed in the intercorporeal space, the space of magical forces. In the early Modern Age people believed that the relationships between people take priority over the people themselves and that there are intersubjective energies which people can use to enchant each other. Think hereby of mesmerism, which revolves around the idea of people as animal magnets who can be influenced through their magnetic fluid. Another example is artificial somnambulism or hypnotism, a practice whereby people are guided and brought into a lucid, sleep-like state. Each of these practices temporarily creates a bubble between two people, the influencer and the influenced, in which thoughts are transmitted back and forth. This is achieved by having the influenced submit himself to the influencer and having the influencer engaging himself with the influenced. While magical practices like hypnotism were performed in society, they were later discredited, which devaluated the intercorporeal space, the space of magical forces.

Additionally, one forms bubbles with one's ancestors in the terrestrial space, the space of one's motherland. The concept of 'motherland' arose after the Neolithic revolution, when people of hunter-gatherer tribes settled down and started to farm the land. The lands of Neolithic settlements were called motherlands, because the fertility of soil was linked to the fertility of women. Hereby the vulvas and wombs of women are particularly highlighted, because these organs give rise to new life. Moreover, as people continued to live in tribes on their motherland, the motherland became the place that witnesses the life and death of fellow tribespeople. Consequently, one's motherland became the place that holds knowledge and truth about one's genealogy and ancestors. Accordingly, "For the restless living, the womb becomes a place of truth"¹⁷, and the vulva becomes the portal to truth. In this way, the terrestrial space, the space of one's motherland, became a space to be (more) intimate with one's ancestors.

Afterwards, Sloterdijk continues his investigation into the intrauterine space by imagining that he enters the vulva and becomes a foetus. Normally a person regards himself as a subject and he views the vulva as an object. The latter conforms to the classical subject-object relationship. However, this epistemological relationship does not stand when one aims to enter the object, the vulva, and envision oneself as a foetal pre-subject. In this case, the vulva gives up its object character and becomes a so-called 'nobject'. Therefore, according to Sloterdijk, a new perspective is needed to continue the investigation into the intrauterine space. Here, Sloterdijk evokes the field of 'negative gynaecology', a field which brackets any outside observations of the female organs and the mother-child relationship, all of which give rise to objectifications. This is in contrast to the field of 'positive gynaecology'. In what follows, Sloterdijk conducts a thought experiment whereby he splits his intelligence into two communicating halves: One half adopts the principles of positive gynaecology and observes

¹⁷ Sloterdijk, *Bubbles*, 272.

outside the vulva; the other half adopts the principles of negative gynaecology and becomes a foetus in the womb. Hereby the former half reminds the latter half that whatever it experiences inside the womb is part of a dyad between mother and child.

Subsequently, Sloterdijk describes how the two halves have together stumbled upon a bubble. The dark womb holds something apart from the foetus and to not stray into subject-object relationships, Sloterdijk renames the two entities¹⁸: He calls that other thing the 'With' which is located in 'Yonder'. Moreover, he calls the foetus the 'Also' which is located in 'Here', in the sense that the foetus is 'also here' besides the other thing. As it turns out, the With nourishes the Also and forms a bubble, an intimate relationship, with the Also. Moreover, once the Also is born as a person, the With disappears. Just like the Greek myth of Orpheus and Eurydice, the Also is destined to thrive and the With is destined to perish. Here Sloterdijk reveals the With to be the placenta.¹⁹ Moreover, Sloterdijk links this to the long-held view in cultures and civilisations that the placenta is the double of a person. However, the placenta became more devalued from the 18th century onwards. In fact, once a person is born and the bubble is burst by cutting the umbilical cord, the placenta is often treated as a waste product. "To cut means to state individuality with the knife"²⁰ and what is left of the foetus-placenta bubble is the navel on the person's body.

As the foetus-placenta bubble bursts upon birth, other bubbles are formed with the newborn. Firstly, some cultures and religions state that all newborns have a guardian spirit or soul companion who silently follows their charge and protects them. By doing so, the soul companions create closeness with their charge. In some religions and cultures this intimacy is only temporary, in order to allow a person to further develop in life. However, a person is not left shellless, because he also forms a bubble with other nearby people, such as his mother, father, and siblings. It is these people which protect the new person and help him become acquainted with the world. This acquaintance with the world needs to be done in a well-regulated manner, just like a membrane regulates metabolic exchange. If this is the case, then "The openness of the world is the gift of the double as membrane."²¹

Lastly, Sloterdijk describes that bubbles are also formed in the interaural space, the space of sound perception. Here, Sloterdijk discusses the siren effect, the way in which people are receptive to the sounds of others with whom they have intimate relationships. The siren effect is named after the sirens of Greek mythology, who lure sailors to their death by singing "precisely those songs in which the passing sailor's ears yearn to immerse themselves."²² Hereby the sirens appeal to those sounds that perfectly resonate with the sailor and arouse him. Moreover, the siren effect, the fact that people's ears have a certain selectivity to voices, already plays a role in infants. Infants are able to recognize their mother's voices. This is likely because they become attuned to their mother's voices in the womb. Consequently, the first greeting of a child by its mother during pregnancy forms a lasting bond between mother and

¹⁸ This is in accordance with the principles of the field of negative gynaecology.

¹⁹ This is in accordance with the principles of the field of positive gynaecology.

²⁰ Sloterdijk, *Bubbles*, 388.

²¹ Sloterdijk, *Bubbles*, 442.

²² Sloterdijk, *Bubbles*, 487.

child. While both have not faced each other during the pregnancy, they still form an acoustic bubble among each other.

Overall, Sloterdijk describes seven ways in which bubbles are formed. He also notes that the inter-genital and inter-manual space are not featured in his investigation, because they do not create intimacy of their own. If intimacy is featured in these spaces, "it is only through the transference of closeness from real intimate scenes of the kind listed above".²³

²³ Sloterdijk, *Bubbles*, 541.

Bubbles and Pointland

Comparability

As Sloterdijk explained in *Bubbles*, just as bubbles can be formed among humans, they can be destroyed. This is inevitable for every bubble, if only because through death “all individuals will one day leave the space in which they were allied with others in a current, strong relationship.”²⁴ Hereby the people will be left behind, may become melancholic and mourn the lost people with whom they had an intimate relationship. In this process of (spheric) mourning people may not have other intimate relationships, or they might isolate themselves from them. These are some of the ways in which people may end up in an anti-sphere, as Sloterdijk describes in *Globes*.

While Sloterdijk views the anti-sphere as “the depressive space”²⁵, one could also view it as the lonely space. The anti-sphere is the phenomenon that occurs when a person has no intimate relationships with other people. In spherological terms, a person is a point that has no connection with another person, a counterpoint, to form a sphere. What is left in the anti-sphere is merely “a partnerless point”²⁶, for whom it feels as if it is impossible to undertake anything that can change his situation and create intimate relationships.

This description of the anti-sphere corresponds to the description of (the Monarch of) Pointland in Abbott’s *Flatland*. As the land of zero dimensions, Pointland consists of one point, the Monarch, who views himself as being the whole extent of the universe with himself as its ruler. Moreover, this point has no partner; “he has no cognizance even of the number Two; nor has he a thought of Plurality; for he is himself his One and All.”²⁷ With the latter in mind, one can describe the Monarch of Pointland as being a partnerless point. Moreover, because the Monarch has no conception of plurality, of other points for instance, one can argue that the Monarch of Pointland does not believe in venturing out into the open to create intimate relationships. Just like a solipsist, the Monarch only believes that he exists, and thus he only looks to himself. Just like an individual in the anti-sphere, the Monarch feels confined to his situation and his world.

However, a critic might doubt whether (the Monarch of) Pointland is comparable to (a person in) the anti-sphere. A critic might mention that the Monarch of Pointland is described as being self-content, while a person in the anti-sphere has more negative feelings. This links back to the idea that Sloterdijk calls the anti-sphere “the depressive space”.²⁸ Does it not mean that there is a discrepancy here between Sloterdijk’s *Bubbles* and Abbott’s *Flatland*? Admittedly, at first the feelings of the Monarch of Pointland do not seem to be related to those of a person in the anti-sphere. However, they can be compared to the feelings of another

²⁴ Sloterdijk, *Bubbles*, 48.

²⁵ Peter Sloterdijk, *Spheres. Volume 2: Globes. Macrospherology*, trans. Wieland Hoban (South Pasadena: Semiotext(e), 2014), 581.

²⁶ Sloterdijk, *Globes*, 585.

²⁷ Abbott, *Flatland*, 93.

²⁸ Sloterdijk, *Globes*, 581.

person Sloterdijk describes who is just as alone and lonely as the person in the anti-sphere: The person who uses mirrors to isolate himself and exclude himself from the interfacial space.

As Sloterdijk describes in *Bubbles*, the interfacial space became more devalued when mirrors became commonhold products. Before then, people could virtually only learn about their faces by looking at others. However, when mirrors became more available, one did not need the impenetrating gaze of the other anymore to know about oneself. Instead, one could isolate oneself with a mirror and fully accept one's face as one's own. Consequently, people could sever their intimate relationships and find themselves in an anti-sphere. In other words, with the introduction of the mirror "begins the history of the human who (...) has the ability to *be [and feel] alone*."²⁹ However, while people find themselves in an anti-sphere by obsessing about themselves in mirrors, they are likely to feel satisfied with themselves, because the mirror makes them feel completed. This is linked to the idea that by looking directly at their mirror-image, people can create the illusion that they are in a bubble with another person. Think hereby of the Greek myth of Narcissus, who isolates himself from others because he is obsessed with his mirror-image, and he feels satisfied with looking at it. Narcissus even thinks that his mirror-image is a real person. Overall, it seems that a person who ends up in an anti-sphere, can experience feelings of self-contentment. These feelings can be compared to the feelings that the Monarch of Pointland experiences in Abbott's *Flatland*, who also finds himself in an anti-sphere.

However, a critic might still doubt the comparability of (the Monarch of) Pointland to (a person in) the anti-sphere. A critic might argue that the negative feelings of a person in the anti-sphere cannot be reconciled with the self-contentment of the Monarch of Pointland. While self-content, mirror-obsessed people may be in an anti-sphere, they may not be representative of the people in an anti-sphere. Hereby the critic might say that the people in the anti-sphere may have largely negative feelings that originate from depression and loneliness. While this is a good point, it can still be taken into consideration. After all, depression comes in many forms, such as psychotic depression, which is characterized by delusions. A person with psychotic depression may for instance develop the grandiose delusion that he is omnipresent. Moreover, one can argue that the Monarch of Pointland suffers from a similar grandiose delusion, which he has developed by being and feeling all alone. As mentioned earlier, the Monarch believes that he is omnipresent, even though A Square tries to convince him of the existence of other geometrical figures and dimensions of space. With this interpretation in mind, one can argue that the self-contentment of the Monarch of Pointland comes forth from (psychotic) depression. In this way, the Monarch is quite representative of the people in the anti-sphere.

Compatibility

While Pointland and the anti-sphere are quite comparable, there is a major difference between them. Pointland, the land of zero dimensions, is built on the idea that plurality is not present. However, the anti-sphere is built on the idea that plurality is present but inaccessible. Is there

²⁹ Sloterdijk, *Bubbles*, 203.

a way in which one can imagine that this major difference is reconciled? If so, this can make Pointland and the anti-sphere quite compatible.

This major difference can be reconciled if one evokes Descartes' thought experiment of methodical doubt. In this thought experiment Descartes systematically doubts everything that can be doubted to find out what is necessarily true. Since the senses are sometimes deceptive, they are not necessarily true. Moreover, Descartes doubts simple (mathematical) facts because it is conceivable that he has been fed with false ideas by an evil demon. However, Descartes realizes that because he is doubting and convincing himself of certain things, he is thinking, and he cannot deny that he is a thinking being. Thus, he concludes that he exists, at least as a thinking thing. Even if there is a demon who deceives him, this only proves his point that he exists.

As mentioned above, Descartes' thought experiment is based on the idea that the existence of an external world, including other people, seems necessarily true at first, but that this is not, because they can be doubted. However, the existence of oneself as a thinking being cannot be doubted. Overall, what Descartes' thought experiment shows is that plurality seems to be clearly present at first, but that it can be doubted and become merely an illusion.

The beginning of Descartes' thought experiment, in which other people and plurality seem to be necessarily true, links back to the anti-sphere, whereby someone has a conception of plurality and other people and believes in their existence. Nevertheless, a person in an anti-sphere finds other people and plurality to be unattainable and unreal, which leaves him with his thoughts. The latter is linked to the ending of Descartes' thought experiment, in which Descartes does not find plurality to be necessarily true, but his existence as a thinking being. In turn, this links back to Pointland, whereby the Monarch does not believe in the existence of plurality, and he immerses himself in his own thoughts. Overall, Descartes's thought experiment makes Pointland and the anti-sphere quite compatible.

Lineland and *Bubbles*

Comparability

In his investigation on intimacy Sloterdijk ventures into the intrauterine space in which the foetus develops. Hereby he conducts a thought experiment in which he splits his intelligence: One half stands before the vulva as an outside observer with knowledge of the mother-child relationship.³⁰ Meanwhile, the other half enters the vulva and envisions itself as a developing foetus in the darkness of the womb.³¹

The darkness of the womb can be compared to the darkness that Linelanders experience in Abbott's *Flatland*. Linelanders live as lines or points on one straight line and for them there is no space outside the line. For the outsider, like the visiting Square, Lineland looks alike to a Morse Code message (figure 2). For a Linelander, the other looks like a point, because they can only view each other from the perspective of the line in which they live on. As Abbott formulates it, "the whole of their horizon was limited to a Point; nor could any one every see anything but a Point".³² However, if one imagines this design of Lineland, one can conclude that Linelanders live in darkness. This can be shown with the following thought experiment: Imagine that you draw a black dot on a white piece of paper and that you look at the dot directly from above. Moreover, imagine making a spyglass out of your hands and looking through it until you only see the black dot and not the white surroundings. This is similar to the way in which Linelanders only see a dot on a line. In turn, if you reduce your vision to a point, your vision will be covered in darkness. The conclusion of this thought experiment is that a Linelander lives in darkness, and the darkness in Lineland can be compared to the darkness of the womb in Sloterdijk's *Bubbles*.

However, a critic may object here and argue that the darkness of the womb does not match up against any other darkness. Sloterdijk formulates this as follows: "Descents into foreign tunnels do not lead you back into the incomparable black monochrome background from which your life began to emerge as a vibrating figure long ago".³³ Admittedly, the critic is right in the fact that Sloterdijk emphasizes that the womb's darkness is incomparable. Nevertheless, the critic also has to consider that Sloterdijk himself does not describe the womb's darkness in its totality. After all, in order to conduct the investigation on intimacy into the womb, Sloterdijk does not rely on actual experience, but on a thought experiment. Consequently, Sloterdijk relies on his imagination to shape the darkness of the womb and to envision himself as a foetus. Thus, the critic who questions how similar Lineland's darkness is to the womb's darkness, also has to question how similar Sloterdijk's depiction of the womb's darkness is to the actual darkness of the womb. Hereby the critic will not likely question the latter, because thought experiments and the imagination seem to be the only way to depict the womb's darkness. Although all humans have once experienced the womb's darkness, there

³⁰ This is in accordance with the principles of the field of positive gynaecology.

³¹ This is in accordance with the principles of the field of negative gynaecology.

³² Abbott, *Flatland*, 55.

³³ Sloterdijk, *Bubbles*, 346.

does not seem to be a way to return to that position after birth. Therefore, the critic's objection about the comparability of Lineland's darkness to the womb's darkness can be refuted.

Moreover, the thought experiment that Sloterdijk employs, is comparable with Abbott's story of A Square, the narrator, in Lineland. As mentioned earlier, Sloterdijk imagines that one half of his intelligence is a foetus, and it describes the existence of (the bubble between) the Also and the With. Meanwhile, the other half of his intelligence is an outside observer which reveals the Also and the With to respectively be the foetus and the placenta. In other words, Sloterdijk's thought experiment is revolved around adopting an outsider and an insider perspective. This is also reflected in Abbott's story of Lineland. A Square sees Lineland in a dream, and he derives at his own conclusions about Lineland from an outsider perspective. Moreover, A Square converses with the Monarch of Lineland, who offers A Square an insider perspective of Lineland. In this way, the adoption of the outsider and insider perspective is comparable between Sloterdijk's *Bubbles* and Abbott's *Flatland*.

Another comparison between Sloterdijk's *Bubbles* and Abbott's *Flatland* lies in the role that sound takes in both works. Sloterdijk's *Bubbles* describes how the sirens from Greek mythology lure sailors by singing songs that are tailored to the individual to move him. This siren effect also plays a role in the first greeting of the child by the mother, whereby the child becomes receptive to the mother's voice and creates an auditory communion with the mother. The fact that intimate relationships manifest themselves through the usage of sounds that resonate with people, is also reflected in the usage of sounds among Linelanders. Linelanders cannot cross or touch each other, but they can communicate with each other via sounds. Moreover, Linelanders form intimate relationships or "union of hearts"³⁴ with each other by emitting sounds and recognizing whose sounds perfectly align. Moreover, sometimes the sounds do not perfectly align among Linelanders, and this stimulates Linelanders to modify their sounds "so as to approximate to the more perfect."³⁵ This means that Linelanders do not merely make sounds, but they make sounds that appeal to something inside other Linelanders and that move other Linelanders. In other words, Linelanders aim to create the siren effect, which shows how similar Sloterdijk's *Bubbles* and Abbott's *Flatland* are.

Compatibility

While Lineland and Sloterdijk's parts on the intrauterine space are quite comparable, there is a major difference between them. The foetus-placenta bubble in the intrauterine space is not made of free will, because the placenta just happens to be there for the foetus. In contrast, an intimate relationship in Lineland is formed when there Linelanders willingly align themselves with each other through sound. Can this major difference be reconciled and make Lineland and Sloterdijk's depiction of the intrauterine space quite compatible?

One can reconcile this difference if one evokes Plato's allegory of the cave. This thought experiment asks us to imagine a cave in which prisoners have lived their lives in shackles in such a way that they can only look at the cave wall. Behind the prisoners there is a fire and in

³⁴ Abbott, *Flatland*, 56.

³⁵ Abbott, *Flatland*, 58.

between them there is a wall. Furthermore, people walk and talk along the wall, carrying all sorts of objects. This creates echoes and casts shadows on the cave wall, which the prisoners perceive to be reality. One day a prisoner is released and sees the fire, which makes him realize that the shadows are not really objects. Next, the prisoner is dragged outside the cave and into the sun, where he discovers a new world that is more real than the world in the cave. Subsequently, he returns to the cave to free his fellow prisoners, but upon arrival his eyes are not used anymore to the darkness of the cave. The other prisoners observe this harm and are reluctant to try to leave the cave.

As mentioned above, Plato's thought experiment shows the co-existence of two types of people: There are the chained prisoners who believe in illusions. They did not choose each other as companions but they find themselves in the same situation. This lack of volition is related to Sloterdijk's depiction of the intrauterine space, in which the intimate relationship between foetus and placenta is not willingly formed. Moreover, Plato describes people like the released prisoner, who learn about the truths of the world but who can still move around and return to the cave, if they want to. Here, the presence of volition is related to Lineland, in which Linelanders willingly form intimate relationships with each other. Overall, Plato's thought experiment makes Lineland and Sloterdijk's depiction of the intrauterine space quite compatible.

Bubbles and Flatland

Comparability

Sloterdijk describes in *Bubbles* how after birth the foetus-placenta bubble bursts. While the foetus thrives, like Orpheus, the placenta perishes, like Eurydice. Nevertheless, the newborn does not remain shellless, but he quickly forms new intimate relationships with others, such as his mother and father. It seems that “Replaceability is Eurydice’s inextinguishable trace; it enables her separated lover to be constantly involved with others, whose changing faces always appear in the same “place.””³⁶ These others, with whom the newborn child forms bubbles, protect the child and help him to learn about the world in a well-controlled manner.

This supportive, parental care of the newborn comes back in Flatland, the land of two dimensions. Within Flatland it is the case that each new son has one more side and a higher social status than his father. For instance, a father who is an Equilateral Triangle and thus a tradesman, brings forth a boy who is a Square and a gentleman. Because of the difference in social status between father and son, fathers are taught in Flatland to enable their sons to fulfil their role in society. Thus, just like Sloterdijk describes in *Bubbles*, Flatland is organised around helping the next generation to flourish in the world by forming protective bubbles.

However, a critic can question the protective care of young Flatlanders by their parents. In doing so, the critic can question the comparability of this aspect with Sloterdijk’s *Bubbles*. Hereby the critic may mention women and irregular Flatlanders. While sons advance on the social ladder by increasing in sides, women do not. That is, because they are always straight lines. Accordingly, Flatlanders are taught to only hold the interests of their sons and not their daughters in high regard. Therefore, the critic may doubt that women receive protective care from their parents. The critic’s point also goes for irregular Flatlanders. Flatland is described as a society which functions for regular figures, and irregular figures are shunned by their parents and others: “[The irregular] is from his birth scouted by his own parents, derided by his brothers and sisters, neglected by the domestics, scorned and suspected by society, and excluded from all posts of responsibility, trust and useful activity.”³⁷ Consequently, the critic can argue that, as soon as irregular figures are born, they do not form intimate relationships with their parents and others. Instead, irregular figures are more likely to end up in an anti-sphere. From this perspective, how can Abbott’s *Flatland* and Sloterdijk’s *Bubbles* then be comparable?

While the critic has a point, the critic must not forget the following: The mentioning or hinting of inadequate protective care among children in Flatland, is also reflected in Sloterdijk’s *Bubbles*. While Sloterdijk describes that the intimate companions of a child are supposed to support the child, he also describes that these bubbles can be inadequate. For instance, Sloterdijk describes that the intimate companions of a child are supposed to introduce the child in a well-regulated manner to the world, like a membrane regulates the exchange of substances. If the membrane is not sufficiently porous, the child is not well introduced to the outside world, and the child closes himself off. Alternatively, if the membrane is too porous,

³⁶ Sloterdijk, *Bubbles*, 415.

³⁷ Abbott, *Flatland*, 29–30.

the child finds himself not able to deal with the outside world, and it develops a pathological fear of the outside world. Moreover, “Both extremes (...) are typical consequences of a failure of the companion’s membrane function. They show what consequences an excessive or a deficient protection of one’s space in early psychological processes can have.”³⁸ Overall, it seems that Abbott’s *Flatland* and Sloterdijk’s *Bubbles* are comparable, because they both discuss the topic of inadequate bubbles at an early age.

In addition, Sloterdijk’s intercordial space is reflected in Abbott’s description of Flatland. The intercordial space is based on the idea that one cannot close off one’s own heart from others, and that heartiness leads to a sense of community and concord among people. In the past the intercordial space has for instance been portrayed in stories whereby people literally consume the hearts of their lovers. This type of visceral unity is represented in Flatland, namely in the way in which women sometimes perforate the Flatlanders with whom they have intimate relationships, such as their husbands. Women in Flatland are likely to do this if they are exasperated. Moreover, Abbott’s *Flatland* mentions that this female act of perforation does not follow from a lack of feelings of affection or intimacy; instead, it follows from an abundance of these feelings: “Not that it must be for a moment supposed that our Women are destitute of affection. But unfortunately the passions of the moment predominates [then]”.³⁹ By perforating the Flatlanders they are close with, the women of Flatland unite their innards with those of their closed ones, to become more intimate with them. In this way, the act of perforation in Abbott’s *Flatland* resembles Sloterdijk’s description of the intercordial space as a space for consuming each other to become more intimate with each other.

Furthermore, Sloterdijk elaborates in *Foams* on how violent acts, like the female act of perforation in Flatland, come forth from intimate relationships:

not infrequently, this close interlocking [of people] triggers the perverse closeness of primary aggression – for things that harbor each other can also imprison and eradicate each other. At the same time, this relationship also holds all those possibilities referred to by tradition with such sonorous words as “friendship,” “love,” “understanding,” “consensus,” *concordia* and *communitas*.⁴⁰

As Sloterdijk mentions above in the block quote, acts of aggression can follow from close relationships, which the women of Flatlanders for instance exhibit when they perforate their intimate companions in fits of fury and passion. However, Sloterdijk also emphasizes here the vast opportunities to establish concord and community through close relationships. The latter aligns well with Sloterdijk description of the intercordial space in *Bubbles*. Moreover, the establishment of concord through close relationships is also featured in Flatland. While women in Flatland sometimes perforate the other in Dionysian frenzies, “On the whole we get on pretty smoothly in our domestic relations”.⁴¹

³⁸ Sloterdijk, *Bubbles*, 440.

³⁹ Abbott, *Flatland*, 14.

⁴⁰ Peter Sloterdijk, *Spheres. Volume 3: Foams. Plural spherology*, trans. Wieland Hoban (South Pasadena: Semiotext(e), 2016), 14.

⁴¹ Abbott, *Flatland*, 15.

Furthermore, Sloterdijk's description of the intercorporeal space, the space of magical forces, is reflected in Abbott's description of Flatland. The space of magical forces is based on the idea that there are energies between people which a person can harness in such a way that he can enchant or influence another person. Similarly, Flatlanders can trick or influence each other by feigning the voices of other classes or painting themselves in the colours of other classes. Moreover, these tricks create a temporary bubble among Flatlanders whereby the enchanter controls the enchanted and the enchanted submits himself to the enchanter. That is, because a Flatlander who colours or voices himself as a higher class will receive more respect and obedience from other Flatlanders. Furthermore, this deceiving Flatlander will have more control over other Flatlanders because of his seemingly higher status. Overall, Sloterdijk's space of magical forces is reflected in the description of Flatland.

Compatibility

While the description of Flatland and the space of magical forces are quite comparable, there is a major difference between them. According to Sloterdijk, the enchanter influences the enchanted by using the surroundings, namely by manipulating intersubjective energies. However, in Abbott's *Flatland* it is described that that a Flatlander can influence another Flatlander by changing himself. Is it possible to imagine a way to reconcile this difference and make Flatland and Sloterdijk's space of magical forces compatible?

One can reconcile this difference if one considers the following thought experiment by philosopher Donald Davidson: Imagine that lightning strikes in a tree in a swamp, and a person stands nearby. As the person is reduced to ashes, the molecules of the tree are rearranged to form an exact replica of the disintegrated person. This replica, the Swampman, adopts the life of the person. For instance, the Swampman moves like the person, and it greets the friends of the person. And no one knows the truth behind the Swampman.

As mentioned above, Davidson's thought experiment shows that the Swampman can deceive other people. Moreover, this deception occurs through a lightening event in which a person and the surroundings are changed: Firstly, in Davidson's thought experiment a person is changed; he is disintegrated when he is hit by lightning. This change in personhood corresponds to the change of personhood that a Flatlander undergoes (in his voice or colour) to deceive other Flatlanders. Secondly, in Davidson's thought experiment the surroundings are changed when the lightening turns a tree into the Swampman. This involvement of the surroundings is related to the surrounding, magical forces that Sloterdijk describes. In this way, Davidson's thought experiment is able to unite Flatland and Sloterdijk's space of magical forces, which makes them quite compatible.

Spaceland and *Bubbles*

Comparability

Sloterdijk discusses in *Bubbles* that intimacy with one's ancestors is found in the terrestrial space, the space of one's motherland. The motherland is the fertile land that witnesses people's births, lives, and deaths. Consequently, the motherland holds knowledge and truth about one's genealogy and ancestors. Moreover, Sloterdijk describes how people would seek out these truths: "people would descend to the mothers in order to find among them, and within them, something they would later refer to without the slightest blush as "knowledge.""⁴²

The fact that intimacy can be found through exploring the space of one's motherland also comes back in Abbott's *Flatland*. The latter is especially reflected in the part where the Sphere takes A Square to Spaceland, the land of three dimensions. After adjusting himself to the new dimension, A Square is able to look at his homeland, Flatland, from a new perspective. He could for instance view the totality of his two-dimensional house and look into the insides of fellow Flatlanders (figure 4). Moreover, "We [the Sphere and A Square] mounted higher, and lo, the secrets of the earth, the depths of the mines and inmost caverns of the hills, were bared before me."⁴³ Overall, by entering Spaceland A Square is able to learn more about (the truths of) his existence and his fellow Flatlanders. Admittedly, due to this journey, A Square does not seem to have an increased intimacy with one's ancestors. Nevertheless, A Square expresses that he has acquired more knowledge about himself, others, and his homeland. This resonates with Sloterdijk's description of people who would explore their motherlands to learn about themselves (by learning about their genealogy). In this aspect, Abbott's *Flatland* and Sloterdijk's *Bubbles* are quite comparable.

Compatibility

Abbott's *Flatland* and Sloterdijk's *Bubbles* both speak of acquiring knowledge by exploring the space of one's homeland. As mentioned above, there is a difference between these works here, but this difference does not seem to be major. Therefore, it is not necessary (to imagine a way) to reconcile this difference. Overall, both works are quite compatible.

⁴² Sloterdijk, *Bubbles*, 272–3.

⁴³ Abbott, *Flatland*, 81.

Discussion

Summary

In this thesis the ideas in Sloterdijk's *Bubbles* and Abbott's *Flatland* were examined against each other. In doing so, Sloterdijk's concept of loneliness, the anti-sphere, was addressed. Furthermore, all seven types of intimacy of Sloterdijk's *Bubbles* were discussed: Intimacy in the intercordial space, the interfacial space, the intercorporeal space (the space of magical forces), the terrestrial space (the space of the motherland), the intrauterine space, the familial space, and the interaural space. Moreover, all four dimensions of Abbott's *Flatland* were discussed: Pointland, Lineland, Flatland, and Spaceland. Overall, in this thesis it was found that the ideas from Sloterdijk's *Bubbles* and Abbott's *Flatland* are highly comparable and compatible: There is a lot of commonality between Sloterdijk's and Abbott's ideas, and it is possible to imagine that major differences between their ideas are reconciled.

From paper to practice

This thesis used Abbott's *Flatland* to deconvolute Sloterdijk's concepts of 'intimacy' and 'loneliness' in *Bubbles*. The insights into these concepts can generate new concepts and theories and/or specify existing concepts and theories. This can further the understanding of the concepts of 'intimacy' and 'loneliness'. Hereby the findings of the thesis do not necessarily have to be applied to the discipline of philosophy. Just as this thesis is built on a collaboration with literature, the findings of this thesis can be applied to other disciplines that are involved in intimacy and loneliness. Firstly, the findings can be applied to the discipline of psychology. For instance, attachment theory, a psychological theory, states that children require adequate care from at least one caregiver in order to explore the world and form meaningful relationships. Moreover, the protective care for children resembles the protective bubbles between parents and children that Sloterdijk's *Bubbles* describes. In this way, the findings of this thesis can be applied to the discipline of psychology.

Furthermore, the findings of this thesis can be applied to the discipline of medicine. For instance, in medicine hypnotherapy or hypnosis has been researched as a way to relax patients and relieve pain (from medical procedures). Hereby Sloterdijk's description of the intercorporeal space, the space of magical forces, as a form of intimacy can be evoked and compared with. Moreover, in medicine transplantation is a major practice. Hereby patients, who need organs, may receive these from people with whom they are intimate, such as family members. The latter can increase the intimacy between people, which is related to Sloterdijk's description of the intercordial space, as a space to share innards with each other. In this way, the findings of this thesis can be applied to the discipline of psychology.

Limitations

While the findings of this thesis can be applied in multiple situations, it has some limitations. Firstly, this thesis is largely anthropocentric, due to the fact that Sloterdijk's *Bubbles* largely discusses intimacy between (developing) human beings. Therefore, the findings of this thesis may not be quite applicable to other forms of intimacy, such as the intimacy between humans and animals, or between humans and artificial intelligence (AI). Regarding the latter, think of the recent release of My AI, an AI that suggested to meet with people in real life. In general, more (conceptual) research is needed into other forms of intimacy than that between (developing) human beings.

Another limitation of the thesis is that it is based on the English translation of Sloterdijk's *Spheres (Bubbles, Globes, and Foams)* rather than the original German texts. Thus, it is possible that certain meanings are lost in translation. The latter happened when *Being and Time* (1927) of philosopher Martin Heidegger was translated from German to English. In this work Heidegger distinguishes between 'being' as a noun and as a verb. While the German language distinguishes between these forms, the English language does not.

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