


Look at you. You are two now.  
You both sit on a chair, bending  
forward like writers at their  
desks, backs desk lamp shaped.  
The longer I look, the more  
your hunched backs become  
desk lamp balanced arms, the  
more your heads turn into lamp  
shades. It is the archetypal  
image of a writer writing, the  
primal scene, the intimacy of  
an act that spawns characters,  
spins plots and spans distances.



That's how John Updike wrote about it in the introduction to *The Writer's Desk*, the bible of literary voyeurism. One picture in the book is especially fascinating. It shows Kurt Vonnegut writing by hand, a black desk lamp behind him in the exact same position as his upper body, his feet bare.

Except, of course, you are two. You face each other and that is all the difference.

Are you two writers working, maybe even on the same book? You might be Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir, sitting on opposite sides of a narrow café table in *Les Deux Magots*, gently touching knees while each working on your own books, passing on words in the process, almost a public performance of intellect. You lived at a time when people still knew the exact size of a table

- I don't have to tell you that a table should be twice the average upper leg length wide. Knees should touch, tips of noses too if we want them to. Nowadays, we sit at tables so wide we can't even touch each other's shoulders. We have to yell to be understood. And don't get me started on round tables, the death of the table, if I may say so. Try working at one. Where do

your elbows go? Round tables are objects unrelated to our bodies.

You are two old men wearing flat caps. I see you all the time, in parks in Brazil and in Paris, under yellow leaved trees or canopies in faraway places, focused, silently watching a chessboard, thinking about the next move in the game. Hidden underneath those caps, onlookers peek

into the meeting of two minds. The distance of the table is hardly anything, a minimal gap as a condition of possibility. We only really meet with a doorstep or a table in between us as marks of connection, as arrows pointing at a handshake or at cheeks touching. Look at these two thinking. That's what it says.

You are animated lamps,  
light itself playing a ball game,

projecting itself into the animated world the way John Lasseter showed in *Luxo Jr.* What is happening? I recognize the bouncy balls, but why the solemn bow? You are not a movie, but a still from one. You are one panel of a comic book, speech balloons above your head to show what's going on, two wide open, gaping mouths staring into the world. If one of you speaks, the

words get lost in the distance,  
then hit the other in the back  
of the head like a bullet. You  
meet, but the whole world is  
involved. Whatever one of you  
says, comes from the outside.  
The detour is a trip around  
the globe. A speech balloon  
without a tail refers to someone  
speaking from a place off  
screen. Do you both speak our  
words or do we need to blow  
smoke in the room to reflect

and show the bundle of light  
keeping your words tethered to  
the ground?

How to contain this light?  
How to cut and frame, how to  
look? How to talk about this  
as if it were a photograph? We  
would need a huge box to store  
all that's going on, a box that's  
bigger on the inside than what  
it looks like from the outside,  
a box that's stretched on the  
inside, the biggest box in the

world. You know that children have a very effective way of showing that something is the biggest ever. By maximally opening their arms, children surpass their reach, infinitely stretch it until it contains the entire world. Adults have lost that capacity. Their arms are shorter than those of children. It is no coincidence that the arm span of adults is equal to their height. We can reach exactly

as far as we are tall. Our body is our limit. We have our arms only to show how tall we are. To reach any further, we would have to tear ourselves in half.

*Sis Matthé, April 7th 2016.*

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