that the term is borrowed from Paul Valéry, who, in *History and Politics*, expresses his feelings on the subject of France and Europe before developing them into a philosophical and political axiom. Derrida's point is that what might seem to be an offhand comment, the expression of a personal predilection or feeling, is never without ideological implications. Valéry writes:

> I will end by summarizing for you in two words my personal impression of France: our special quality . . . is to believe and feel that we are universal—by which I mean, *men of universality*. . . . Notice the paradox: to specialize in the sense of the universal. (436)

Derrida's intention is to question the relation between a personal feeling or a particular cultural and political identity and any universalizing claim or axiom that is advanced on the basis of that feeling or identity. (Derrida later cites Valéry's feeling on the subject of philosophical speculation itself: "It is my feeling (and I apologize for this) that philosophy is a matter of form" [432].)

By beginning the second sentence with "already," Derrida draws attention to the philosophical and political character of his own gesture, dispelling any illusions that he has not yet begun the properly philosophical analysis of European identity. Because readers might reasonably assume that Derrida's personal feelings about Europe or about his status as a European lie outside the talk proper, that his informal incipit precedes the philosophical analysis of Europe, Derrida reminds readers that he is *already* introducing his subject—Europe's heading in the 1990s, the role of a heading or telos in the formation of any cultural or political identity.

Derrida could also count on audience expectations concerning the subject of his text, since it had, in effect, already been announced—that is, in the title. As Derrida has ceaselessly pointed out, a title or heading never lies completely outside a text but always forms what might be called its border of public accessibility. Derrida's second line thus suggests that he is *already* introducing the subject indicated by the title and responding to the expectations of his readers.

We realized, of course, that by leaving the second line a fragment we ran the risk of being misread, but since the two sentences surrounding it both speak of the same "feeling," we thought the risk minimized. And while "about" or "concerning" may have been more natural translations of "au sujet de" than was the overly literal "on the subject of," the briefer terms would not have alleviated the possibility of misreading or conveyed the sense of "headings" as the explicit theme or *subject* of the text. Finally, in writing "[*caps*]," we simply assumed—perhaps mistakenly—that its function as a translators' insertion would be one of the "publicly accessible things" that are established by, say, MLA convention.

Such things as "taking care of readers, making modification clear to them, making reference only to publicly accessible things, maintaining sentence coherence" are, we would agree, central to the tasks of writing and translating, but, as *The Other Heading* demonstrates, none of these responsibilities can be taken for granted, and none of them is beyond philosophical scrutiny and critique.

PASCALE-ANNE BRAULT
MICHAEL B. NAAS
DePaul University

The Congress of Writers for the Defense of Culture

To the Editor:

The photograph on the cover of your January 1993 issue left me perplexed. If one knows the full circumstances surrounding that scene, it is fraught with disturbing significance. Since the picture illustrates no passage in any of the articles, I surmise it is intended to represent the special topic: Literature and the Idea of Europe. Unfortunately, the picture shows literature being trampled by the idea of a Europe ruled from the Soviet Union and submitting to socialist realism.

In this photograph, from the 1935 Congress of Writers for the Defense of Culture, Magdeleine Paz is courageously delivering a long plea for the liberation of Victor Serge, a dissident Belgian-born Muscovite official of the Third International deported to the Urals. Postponed from an evening plenary session, her speech did not conform to the organizers' purpose of condemning only Nazi abuses and praising Soviet antifascism. Three Soviet delegates came forward to tell this small afternoon meeting that Paz didn't know what she was talking about. She did. Such unwanted incidents did not occur at the huge evening meetings reported by the newspapers.

I have written an account of the five-day conference in "Having Congress: The Shame of the Thirties," the opening essay in *The Innocent Eye* (1985). The essay also appears in *Partisan Review* (51 [1984]: 393–416). I quote one passage:

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> This was one of the most thoroughly rigged and steamrollered assemblages ever perpetrated on the face of Western literature in the name of culture and freedom. That estimate does not diminish but rather amplifies its significance as a historical and intellectual event. Only a few rightist critics and Fascist rags talked of funds from Moscow and Red writers. There sat some of Europe's most distinguished men of letters presiding over a meeting that systematically swept into a corner any dissent from the prevailing opinion that the true revolutionary spirit belonged to the Soviet government. (*Innocent Eye* 28–29)

I hope I am right in thinking that something went amiss in the choice of this photograph to illustrate "Literature and the Idea of Europe."

ROGER SHATTUCK
Boston University

Reply:

Nothing "went amiss" in the choice of the photograph that disturbs Roger Shattuck. The image was meant to indicate the intricate and tense relation between literature and politics particularly and between art and society more generally and to do so by reference to a signal manifestation of this relation at a crucial moment in European history. Too often, critics and others writing in and of modern and contemporary European contexts (although not Shattuck himself) have ignored or denied the political engagement of artwork, no doubt largely to avoid being disturbed. The disquiet arises not only because for centuries Western writers have striven to place the arts above mundanities but also because engagement obliges one to make choices. "Every writer," Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o observes, "is a writer in politics. The only question is what and whose politics?" (*Writers in Politics: Essays*, London, 1981, x).

In my judgment, the evaluation of the 1935 congress that Shattuck presents in his letter is not entirely accurate. It depends, I think, on turning away from what was said in most of the speeches and on downplaying historical pressures and the realities of political possibility. In his twenty-nine-page essay, Shattuck makes such gestures only in the passage he quotes, when it is, he writes, time to "call a cat a cat." But his own evidence undermines both his title and his condemnation. It leads to the contradictory conclusion that the congress was a cover for the propaganda of "a terroristic foreign state," yet "a mammoth public ritual [that] consecrated the formation of an intellectual Popular Front" (29–30).

Shattuck is quite right to say that Paz received much flak for raising the Serge case. So did Gaetano Salvemini and Charles Plisnier. Paz and Plisnier seem to have been ostracized as a result. Although André Gide sought to intervene later, privately, with the Soviet ambassador, the incident remains a black mark. But the congress was neither "rigged" nor "steamrollered." It had indeed been brokered by left organizations, initially at the behest of the Comintern. In the event, however, its five days became a sort of festival of the Popular Front, which was formally inaugurated as a party three weeks after the congress closed. To read the published speeches is to understand just why Maxim Gorky thought fit to publish a scathing critique of the congress in *Monde* the following month (if it *was* Gorky). Almost without exception, the delegates, as much the Soviet ones as the others, upheld a traditional liberal line on the value and purpose of literature and on the nature of creative authorship. Their heroes were Cervantes and Shakespeare, Descartes and Voltaire, Rabelais, Gogol, Spinoza, Molière, Goethe, Constant, and so on. There is nothing of "literature being trampled by the idea of a Europe ruled from the Soviet Union" or of "socialist realism" (itself not without ambiguity at this or any other date).

I cannot argue the case here. Like Shattuck, I (with Patricia J. Penn Hilden) have done so elsewhere ("Discourse, Politics, and the Temptation of Enlightenment: Paris, 1935," *Annals of Scholarship* 8.1 [1991]: 61–78). It must be remembered, however, just how frightening to most thinking people the early 1930s were. Many were led to think and write of a society coming to an end, persuaded not only by the "unemployment, economic crisis, nascent fascism, approaching war" of which Stephen Spender later wrote (*World within World*, New York, 1951, 126) but also by a sense of spreading violence. Many, who justifiably saw the growing strength of a violent Right as a principal menace, thought the only alternative to the failures of liberal or left centrism lay in national and international communism. Nor must we forget that by 1934 the Comintern, which had asserted the hard line that all noncommunist Western parties were tools of international capitalism, was seeking alliance with the Western Left of almost any stripe. In France, this culminated in the Popular Front of 1935 (voted into government the next year). The vast majority of those at the Paris congress were not stooges of the Comintern or of the Soviet propaganda machine. They saw aesthetic culture as one principled reply to a political and economic leviathan in disarray and as a hopeful barrier to its growing threat of violence. Whether or

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