Beyond textual expressions which chart the entrenchment of social constructionist identity politics in literary studies – and arguably more widely in the humanities and social sciences – lie other relatively intractable, unrecorded, transient, and yet familiarly institutional expressions. The recorded tracings of Theory-‘against Theory’-‘after Theory’ developments, of self-announcements, of textbook and anthology production, of canon debates, constantly emanate from and return within such a diffuse hum of numerous untextualized exchanges and communications and gestures. Ultimately, such untextualized exchanges moderate the everyday life of academic institutional spaces amidst other kinds of institutional spaces and within the broader life of society. So, beyond those textual traces that the previous three chapters are devoted to there is this larger field of everyday institutional expressions, and it may be expected that just as identity politics is entrenched within and structures the disposition of textualized expressions of literary studies, it is so too for untextualized expressions. If identity politics is institutionalized, it is as much within the ebb and flow of the untextualized everyday life of literary studies as within the textualized archive.

To try to render this everyday institutional life tractable, to categorize and analyse its nuances, to collect observations about it and systematize them, would be akin to what Geertz described as collecting ‘convergent data’ from a wider range of sources than this study can attend to. This study has attended to a narrowly circumscribed and limited range of observations, drawing on a particular kind of source – but the inferences available from that seem to me to be sufficiently indicative.

Though a systematic exploration of the everyday institutional life of literary studies and the place of identity politics therein is outside the scope of this study, a few habitual and typified questions of transient
everyday occurrence can be noted to gesture towards the disposition therein. For those readers who, like the present author, are within the academy, and particularly within the institutional practice of literary studies, the occurrence of such questions might seem commonplace. The answers to such questions are most immediately a matter of recognizing patterns and tacit or agreed assumptions and associations and experiences that are the everyday life of literary studies. And such questions are in fact not simply a trigger to recognizing something that already obtains; such questions are often within the interstices of the institutional practice of literary studies as interrogatives, as moments of self-reckoning, doubt, indecision, prickliness. That such questions are not just after-the-fact or retrospective modes of seeking direction but constant nudges and winks within the everyday life of literary studies gives some indication of their relevance for gauging the institutional disposition of the discipline, the entrenchment of identity politics therein.

I have in mind such questions as may arise in a literature department meeting devoted to discussing curricular issues. ‘Why aren’t there any women/black/gay authors in this genre or period based course?’; ‘Would it be possible to increase our student intake by making the curriculum more inclusive?’; ‘Surely, any respectable undergraduate programme for English must have courses in postcolonial literature, immigrant writing, women’s literature and so on?’; ‘Can’t we follow a conventional syllabus and yet acknowledge the great importance of neglected minorities and their writings?’; ‘How can we find a text that fits all aspects of the core course in Theory – can Pride and Prejudice be used to explain gay theory/postcolonial theory/black writing …?’; ‘Who will teach that course on gay literature/women’s writing/postcolonial literature?’ Then there are questions about appointments and academic responsibilities. ‘The employment prospects for gay/ethnic minority/women academics have improved with the advent of Theory, haven’t they?’; ‘Do we have any black or coloured applicants for this post of Lecturer in Postcolonial Studies?’; ‘As the only gay person in this department does it fall to me to offer a course in Queer Studies?’; ‘She is not the obvious person for it, but perhaps we can ask her to supervise this dissertation on feminist literature?’; ‘Is it true that somehow, as much through choice as through the amenability of the environment, women tend to research and teach in areas related to women’s writing, immigrants tend to research and teach in postcolonial literature, black academics tend to have research and teaching interests in black writing and criticism, and so on?’; ‘Though not quite in my area, perhaps I should apply for that Lectureship