On Norms and Opposition

Samuel A. Chambers*

Much has been written on the relation, both conceptual and historical, between the norm and the law. If we begin with Ancient Greek, we can say that *nomos* means both 'law' and 'norm': in the context of the Ancient Greek world it was not possible to distinguish cleanly between, on the one hand, social norms, customs, and mores, and on the other, the will of the *demos*, the actions of the legislative assembly (*ecclesia*). Of course, in our modern lexicon the English 'law' and 'norm' have distinct etymologies. 'Law' comes from the old English *lagu*, meaning 'something laid or fixed'; it dates to circa 1000, with its current spelling emerging in the 16th century. 'Norm' is a borrowing from the classical Latin *norma*, a noun referring to the squares used by carpenters to form right angles, and it only appears in English in the 19th century (*OED* 2017). This etymological *separation* proves important as it is illuminated by and in turn helps to illuminate some of Foucault's most significant writings.

In his 1977 lectures at the Collège de France, Foucault suggests that the juridical model of sovereignty—the monarchical theory of power—'dates from the reactivation of Roman law' during the Middle Ages (Foucault 2003a, 34). 'Juridical power' names a theory or model of power based on reconstructing an idea of Roman law around the institutions of feudal monarchy; the theory both *reflects* and *justifies* the 'actual power mechanisms' of sovereign (kingly) power (Foucault 2003a, 34–35). Hence juridical power is simultaneously the power of law and the power of the king. Perhaps Foucault's most radical historical claim is that by the 18th century '*a new mechanism of power*' is invented, a form of power that is, above all, nonsovereign, i.e. 'absolutely incompatible with relations of sovereignty' (Foucault 2003a, 35, emphasis

* Professor of Political Science, Johns Hopkins University
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added).[1] Whatever else we might say about this new form of power, we must emphasize its relation to the *norm*: this historically distinct technology of power functions in, as, through, and around the norm. Moreover, Foucault asseverates that the practices, techniques, and mechanisms of this new power have all been growing since its emergence, and they have done so *at the expense* of juridical power.

This important conclusion ties in directly to Foucault's better-known claim—made in *The Will to Knowledge*, and published the same year as these lectures were given—for a 'juridical regression'; this term points not to the disappearance of law but to the historical fact that 'the law operates more and more *as a norm*' (Foucault 1978, 144, emphasis added). Therefore by the 19th century the gap between law and norm has been dramatically narrowed, as the two become entangled.[2] Indeed, in the following year Foucault opens his third Collège de France lecture by pointing directly to this entanglement. As Foucault humbly phrases it, 'some people' have been 'prudently re-reading Kelsen' on the 'fundamental relationship between the law and the norm', and Foucault concurs with a general principle that emerges from Kelsen's work—namely, the fact of 'a normativity intrinsic to any legal imperative' (Foucault 2004, 84; Kelsen 1967). Nonetheless, in his very next breath Foucault emphatically insists that even if the law cannot be dissociated from the norm, this does not mean that the problem of norms can be contained under (or conflated with) the rubric of law (Foucault 2004, 56). For Foucault, the 'juridical regression' means we must pay more attention to norms, lest we blind ourselves to the importance of this new mechanism of power by trying to view it through the old juridical model. Norms are the key to grasping this historically new form of power, and this is so not despite, but precisely because the law now operates in and through norms.

Yet, to shift our analytic (and perhaps political) focus from law to norms, as Foucault repeatedly calls on his readers to do, immediately raises its own conceptual (and political) conundrum. I phrase it in the form of a simple question: *what does it mean to oppose a norm*? The question of resistance was, as everyone knows, always at the heart of Foucault's project; it served as the pivot point for the story he repeatedly told about sovereign and nonsovereign forms of power. After all, the

1 The fundamental difference between this new power and juridical power does not itself prevent the theory of sovereignty from retaining its dominance, and therefore, by 'superimposing' itself on the new mechanisms of power, it (sovereignty) serves to mask those new functions (Foucault 2003a, 37).

2 François Ewald claims that the law/norm relation becomes more complicated, perhaps even overdetermined, from the moment in time (the early 19th century) when 'norm' makes a partial break from 'rule'. Ewald contends that once *norm* comes to mean not only rule but also a principle of producing rules, and even 'a principle of valorization', law ceases to be an act of sovereign will and becomes instead a purely social act. Norms now serve as the very foundation for law (Ewald 1990, 140, 155). I will discuss Ewald's work and its vexed relation to Foucault in more detail below, but for now it seems essential to underscore two points. First, Ewald emphasizes the reverse of Foucault: where Foucault seeks to show that the law functions *as* a norm, Ewald asserts that norms *found* law. Second, in proclaiming that 'there is a radical change in the relationship between the rule and the norm', Ewald may underestimate the continued significance of the complex linkages between rule and norm (Ewald 1990, 144). As I have previously argued, one way to discern if a norm is changing, or if its foundations are crumbling, is to notice when rules are asserted and laws are made in order to bolster or support a norm that was previously thought not to need such assistance (Chambers 2003; Chambers 2005).

primary problem that Foucault identified with the juridical model of power was not strictly an 'academic' one: it was not merely that such a model failed to adequately *capture* (conceptually) the workings of the new form of power that was invented in 17th- and 18th-century Europe. No, the problem runs much deeper than that: as Foucault says repeatedly, from the moment that the juridical model takes shape, the sovereign theory of power itself serves as the primary mechanism by which to contest sovereigns: 'the theory of sovereignty then became a weapon that was in circulation on both sides' (Foucault 2003a, 35). By 'both sides' Foucault means monarchists and anti-monarchists—those trying to maintain sovereign power, and those wishing to check, undermine or overthrow it. Thinkers such as Locke and Rousseau do no more than rework the theory of sovereign power in such a way as to limit or delegitimate absolute monarchy (Ibid.).[3] But this is not the worst of it: the problem becomes pernicious when we 'find ourselves' stuck with the same toolkit, i.e. the sovereign theory of power, while facing a whole *new* set of mechanisms and technologies.

> We now find ourselves in a situation where the only existing and apparently solid recourse we have against the usurpation of [this new form of power] and against the rise of a power that is bound up with knowledge is precisely a recourse or a return to a right that is organized around sovereignty, or that is articulated on that old principle. (Ibid., 39.)

We need a new *theory* of power not merely in order to trace the workings of new *forms* of power, but also so that we might find ways to *resist* those new forms. Because his understanding of power was always linked to his thinking of resistance, Foucault's work on norms was inextricably bound up with the idea of *opposition to those norms*.

I will return to Foucault's work on power and norms below, but here I want first to make the case for why such a return is itself appropriate and important. The ubiquity of references to Foucault, the fact that in many academic circles his is a 'household name' may, I suggest, sometimes make it easy for us to overlook the still fresh, still significant, and still fecund nature of his project, and it may also lead us to misrecognize that project itself (because we mistake the boilerplate reductions that everyone knows by heart, given their rigid ossification over so many years, for the investigations themselves). In particular, I will suggest that Foucault's work from the late 1970s can make an (un)timely intervention in contemporary debates on norms and normativity. To focus the point, I will show that what we need desperately now is a sophisticated and dynamic understanding of norms and the possibility of opposition to them, and this is just what Foucault's work from this period provides.

To lay out the case for why such work remains *necessary* today, let me begin with a very basic point. Starting from first principles, unlike opposition to the law, it is not

3 Foucault's historical account deftly unravels the apparent paradox by which Hobbes and Locke can use all the same conceptual tools to build utterly opposing theories of politics.

at all simple or straightforward to describe what 'opposition to a norm' might mean theoretically or what form it might take practically. The English language is filled with synonyms for 'against the law' in the sense of illegality—illegal, illicit, banned, criminal, unlawful, etc.—and through recourse to the Ancient Greek etymology, we can locate a singular term to designate an opposition to law: antinomian.[4] But 'antinorm' is not a word. And since norms are not promulgated by legislative bodies, signed by designated political officials, or given official names or titles, we never encounter them directly or in the singular in such a way that we would be able to explicitly register our 'opposition' in formal terms. In a sense then—and this point is telling—the only way to oppose a norm is to deviate from it. However, given the very structure and action of norms (as I will discuss below) it remains unclear how deviation would 'count' in terms of opposition to a norm. Would such deviation register as 'opposition' *to* that norm or would that deviation be nothing more than the standard functioning *of* the norm—part and parcel of it? Moreover, since the norm is not a law, it does not include explicit penalties, and because the suffering of those penalties is an essential component of civil disobedience as a political practice, that practice cannot be taken up as a tactic in opposition to norms.[5] Unlike law, then, the idea of *opposition* to norms appears at best, opaque, at worst, incoherent or nonexistent. It is not easy to grasp, much less to efficaciously mobilize, opposition to the norm.

With this in mind, I want to turn now to a specific disciplinary debate that I think captures the importance of understanding the relation between norms and opposition. My aim is two-fold: to contribute to the debate by way of an intervention that clarifies its terms and argues for a transformation of its parameters, while simultaneously using the debate as the occasion to return to Foucault, so as to underscore the continued salience of his own work on norms. The field I have in mind is the still developing discipline of queer theory (not yet 30 years of age), and the debate to which I refer is one that was (re)ignited by a 2015 special issue of the journal *differences*, guest-edited by Robyn Wiegman and Elizabeth Wilson.

It is important to stress here that queer theory *as a discipline* is always already vexed by the fact that at its very inception 'queer' was meant to mark a sort of *antidisciplinarity.* For queer to become a theory or a field or a set of institutions is for it to become unqueer. Kadji Amin puts the point this way: '*queer* can never be *queer enough*' and this means that a queer future always depends upon being queerer than the past (Amin 2016, 176). Perhaps the burden of this edict (for an always queerer future) could once have been met, at a time when 'queer theory' was a scandalizing and mobilizing performative, but once 'queer theory' becomes a constative that names

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4 Furthermore, we have to hand a series of ready understandings of what opposition to law would mean: from voting against the passage of a law, to seeking its repeal, to standing against it through an act of civil disobedience. The wide variety of ways of describing opposition to law testifies to how easily we grasp the meaning(s) of such opposition.

5 This is not to deny that deviation from the norm produces its own, often harsh 'sanctions' of various sorts, but rather to emphasize that the historical and political practice of civil disobedience depends upon a violation of law.

an existent field, a discipline—and one with a past, no less—the formula becomes an equation of impossibility: how can the future be more queer than the past when the 'foundation' of queerness (of queer studies) lies in the past. This may explain why, as Amin argues, so much of contemporary queer theory is eager to *forget* its past, its history, the political context of its historical emergence (Amin 2016, 181).

Of course the conceptualization of queer that emerges with the origin of queer theory, i.e. the very meaning of 'queer', serves to name a relation to a norm. Perhaps the most enduring 'definition' of a term whose anti-essentialism resists definition is that given by David Halperin. Writing in 1995, he argues for an understanding of queer that is indissociable from norms: '"queer" does not name some natural kind or refer to some determinate object; *it acquires its meaning from its oppositional relation to the norm*' (Halperin 1995, 62, emphasis added). In one sense then Halperin answers the central question of this essay—what is the meaning of an oppositional relation to a norm—with a direct answer: queer. But if 'queer' is itself opposition to norms, yet queer is never queer enough, then the problem of norms and opposition is the constitutive problem of the 'field'—which will itself always have a problem with being a field.

All of this provides crucial context to help grasp the meaning and stakes of the 2015 special issue, which Wiegman and Wilson title, 'Queer Theory Without Antinormativity'. That title conceals a complex conceptual claim, hidden in the double negative of 'without' and 'anti'. That is, the title announces Wiegman and Wilson's *opposition* to what they see as queer theory's own *abiding opposition*. In unpacking the claim we find two distinct elements: first, an historical account of queer theory as built upon and guided by this fundamental principle named 'antinormativity'; second, a call to move beyond (leave behind, or go *against*) this principle. In a word, Wiegman and Wilson are *anti*-antinormative.[6]

Given their tone (decisive, combative) and given the context (taking up an entire issue of a major journal in the field), it is hard to avoid the conclusion that Wiegman and Wilson, despite their protestations to the contrary, are spoiling for a fight (Wiegman & Wilson 2015, 2). As a challenge to the field of queer theory, it seems only fair to describe their critique as of the 'scorched earth' variety, since Wiegman and Wilson aim not merely to correct recent developments in the field of queer theory, nor simply to criticize a select number of authors or texts. Rather, in their rejection of 'antinormativity' they indict, quite literally, almost all of the major

6 It goes without saying that all authors would reject the effort to sum up their project in a single word: Wiegman and Wilson explicitly resist the idea that the essays in the special issue speak with a 'unitary' voice, and they directly refuse the notion that those essays 'respond to the problems we [Wiegman and Wilson] raise by insisting on anti-antinormativity as a new critical value' (Wiegman & Wilson 2015, 2). In a way, I would not dispute this assertion, since 'anti-antinormativity' would hold no coherence as a 'critical value'. Yet it still makes rhetorical and descriptive sense to characterize Wiegman and Wilson's project (which must surely be distinguished from the individual projects of the authors in the special issue, see Duggan 2015) as 'anti-antinormative' because its entire intellectual force rests on its *oppositional* nature. Wiegman and Wilson are not 'for' anti-antinormativity as a critical value, but that is because they are not really 'for' anything in particular; they are *against* what they call 'antinormativity'.

contributors to the field going back to its very inception more than 25 years ago (Ibid., 3). At the very least, they certainly want to shake up and reorganize the field of queer theory, which while certainly still in its infancy has already been marked by numerous battles over its meaning, terrain, and political trajectory (Warner 1993; Berlant & Warner 1995; Halperin 2003).

Moreover, whether they intentionally wished it or not (I suspect they did) the issue produced controversy: within months of publication, Jack Halberstam picked up the gauntlet with his own blistering, polemical response. Halberstam makes the case that 'anti-antinormativity' is nothing other than a merely *normative* (a word he uses as a pejorative) position: he advances a withering critical response to both the framing and the impact of this project, accusing Wiegman and Wilson of a vast enterprise of constructing 'straw people'. 'Oppositionality'—or the very idea of 'opposition'—is central to Halberstam's polemic since, for him, Wiegman and Wilson are offering nothing other than opposition (as an end in itself). They therefore leave us, Halberstam concludes, with no new theories, no new methodologies, no new avenues for future work; instead, we get 'disciplinary, neoliberal, no stakes, straight thinking' (Halberstam 2015).

Rather than reinforce or refute Halberstam's arguments and conclusions,[7] I would prefer to leave the gloves where they lie and instead use the occasion of this debate over so-called antinormativity as a concrete context for reposing the question of norms and oppositionality. In his polemical effort to entirely undo Wiegman and Wilson's project, Halberstam may too easily accept their framing of the issues—especially their *conceptual* framing.[8] This is not at all surprising given that Halberstam's piece is not a scholarly article or essay; it is a blog post, *intended* to be polemical. But it is also a *widely read* blog post, and at the time of my own writing, it remains what we might call 'the definitive response' to Wiegman and Wilson (see also Duggan 2015). For these reasons, it matters that the reader of this debate may be left with the conclusive sense that Halberstam is simply *for* 'antinormativity' and Wiegman and Wilson are simply *against* it—as if it were obvious or clear what sort of thing 'antinormativity' is. But this brings us to the crux of the matter: at this stage in the debate over 'antinormativity' (after Wiegman and Wilson, after Halberstam), it is simply not the case that we know what antinormativity is, or that we have any sense of how to conceptualize the crude idea of being against a norm.[9] Rather than 'taking a side' pro or con, I want to step back to see how we got to 'antinormativity' or 'anti-antinormativity' in the first place. Surely the best way of doing that is not merely to *oppose* Wiegman and Wilson's *opposition* to that which queer theory putatively always *opposes*. In other words, the answer is not 'anti-anti-antinormativity'.

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7 As noted above, the special issue clearly produced controversy, but to date it has not necessarily generated that much productive debate and dialogue. Mine is an effort to contribute to the latter.

8 Halberstam carefully deconstructs Wiegman and Wilson's framing of the *history* of queer theory.

9 Moreover, and as I will show in some detail below, in their own efforts to clarify terms, Wiegman and Wilson often achieve just the opposite: they repeatedly make a real conceptual muddle out of norms and normativity. And Halberstam's polemical response, though valuable for other reasons, is not designed to resolve these matters.

Therefore, instead of offering another round of opposition, instead of advancing another critique, I propose something of an *archeology* (in the Foucauldian sense) of the terms and concepts of this debate. The starting point for this investigation lies in seeing that Wiegman and Wilson are on to something (even if they failed to mine it properly)—something Halberstam himself misses. I agree with Halberstam that when Wiegman and Wilson purport to show that, in essence, the *entirety* of queer theory has committed itself to 'antinormativity', they wind up mainly with empty assertions (Wiegman & Wilson 2015, 3–4; cf. Halberstam 2015). Yet Halberstam says little about Wiegman and Wilson's effort to parse and critically rethink the meaning of 'norm' that they see at the heart of so-called antinormativity. Wiegman and Wilson's main argument here is that a more careful understanding of 'norms' should require us to rethink the 'antinormative' as a theoretical conception (and hence as a political position) (Wiegman & Wilson 2015, 14–16). Too little thought has been put into the question of what we ought to do with the broad problematic of normativity, and too often such necessary analysis has been displaced by an almost 'reflexive' denunciation of 'normativity' (Amin 2017).

In this vein, and departing from Halberstam, I try herein to read Wiegman and Wilson through the lens of the Gadamerian 'hermeneutics of charity'—in contrast to a 'hermeneutics of suspicion' (Weinsheimer 1985; Gadamer 1989; Davidson 1984; Ricoeur 1974)—which allows us to see that at the core of their project lies a meaningful attempt to (re)conceptualize norms in such a way as to undercut the idea that norms are simply things one would (or should) oppose. This project proves important because it has the potential to broach the crucial question of the status, meaning, or conditions of possibility of *opposition to the norm*.[10] In what follows, then, I work archeologically through the layers of Wiegman and Wilson's broadside against (what they see as) queer theory's persistent 'antinormativity' with an eye to developing a clear conceptualization of the relationship between oppositionality and norms. I will show that everything hinges upon a crucial *distinction* between terms that Wiegman and Wilson persistently *conflate.* This is the difference between, on the one hand, *opposing norms,* which is nothing less than a conceptual impossibility[11] (and thus a political non-starter), and, on the other, *opposing normativity and normalization,* which proves theoretically tenable (and sometimes politically necessary). The parsing of these distinctions is enabled by, and benefits enormously from, a return to Foucault's work from the late 1970s, since at this juncture in his career Foucault himself was experimenting productively with a variety of ways of understanding norms and opposition to them. Ultimately I will prove that through

10 Such work itself proves preparatory to developing political strategies, cultural practices, and material mechanisms that would give concrete form and shape to this opposition (on this point I owe a debt to Kadji Amin).

11 To be perfectly clear here, I distinguish my claim in the text, which is that we simply cannot coherently or tenably conceptualize the idea of 'opposing norms' *simpliciter* from the very different project of *conceptualizing* impossibility. The latter has a long history in continental philosophy, so much so that 'thinking the impossible' proves a common article and book title (for example, Gutting 2013) and provides many resources for theorizing politics (for example, Chambers 2013).

careful consideration of *norms, normativity,* and *normalization,* we can make sense of the nature and type of opposition that can be mobilized in response to normative forces and normalizing practices.[12]

This conceptual work begins by thinking about the nature and history of the concept of 'norm', in relation to a host of other related terms. Here Wiegman and Wilson can serve as a useful guidepost, because they appear to return to some of the key early theoretical resources for theorizing norms, including Canguilhem, Foucault, and Ewald. Yet their main source turns out to be Ewald, a significant point to which I will return below. They draw from Ewald the central idea that norms are *averages.* As such, norms have a wide and inclusive reach: 'averages don't exclude anyone' (Wiegman & Wilson 2015, 15). This means that norms have no singular force; they do not 'demand that each of us bend to a common point'; norms are diffuse and heterogeneous, since they require and depend upon deviant outliers (Wiegman & Wilson, 16, 15; citing Halley 2006, 121). In bringing this line of logic to its culmination, Wiegman & Wilson offer a long quote from Ewald about the 'normative equality' that is produced by the norm's demand for comparability: 'the norm is most effective in its affirmation of differences, discrepancies, and disparities. The norm is not totalitarian but individualizing', says Ewald (1990, 154; quoted in Wiegman & Wilson 2015, 16).

Ewald's account of the norm provides Wiegman and Wilson with their pivot point: if we come to understand norms as individualizing and equalizing, then we have no grounds or reasons to reject normativity. Hence Wiegman and Wilson conclude as follows: 'it is not clear what antinormativity would be […] because the norm is already generating the conditions of differentiation that antinormativity so urgently seeks' (Wiegman & Wilson 2015, 16). Wiegman and Wilson seek to defend a conception of the norm as fluid, dynamic, and systemic; above all, this means the norm ought *not* to be understood on what they call a 'center/periphery' model. In thinking about the norm as something that divides, 'antinormativity misses what is most engaging about a norm: that in collating the world, it gathers up everything'

12 Once we see what a valid 'antinormative' position looks like, we also see clearly why and how Wiegman and Wilson's anti-antinormative position might be said to boil down to what Halberstam disputatiously calls, 'straight thinking'. In this context I should expand briefly on a point hinted at in the text: despite my disagreements with Wiegman and Wilson, I believe they are responding to a real and significant phenomenon within the recent literature of queer theory—namely, a certain vagueness or ambiguity about norms, and about what it means to be 'antinormative'. As I show in the text below, Wiegman and Wilson see queer theory writ large as being opposed to norms; this is what they mean by 'antinormative'. Therefore, in a limited sense I concur: *some* recent theory has advanced (or loosely conveyed) the idea that norms themselves are something always to be opposed and rejected. One can even find rhetorical flourishes in a brilliant book like Halberstam's *The Queer Art of Failure*, places where in trying to underscore a radical political point, Halberstam could be taken to imply that he is rejecting norms *tout court* (2011, 89, 159, 181). One of my central points in this essay is to show that by carefully conceptualizing norms—hence delineating the distinction between norms and normativity—we see the viability of a certain form of 'antinormativity', one that does not oppose all norms, but that challenges specific normative enforcements of those norms. In this context I think it makes more sense to read authors like Halberstam generously, thereby seeing their 'antinormative' claims not as denunciations of all norms, but as radical rejections (both rhetorically and politically) of concrete normative orders and injunctions.

(Ibid., 17). Hence for them, the problem with the 'antinormativity' position in queer theory boils down to the following: antinormativity '*asphyxiates* the relationality' of norms, it '*turns* systemic play…into unforgiving rules', and it '*converts* the complexity of moving athwart' into static and 'anodyne' opposition (Wiegman & Wilson 2015, 18, emphasis added). I have italicized the active verbs from these quoted phrases, as they indicate something I see as crucial to Wiegman and Wilson's logic. Their account operates on two levels: first, they draw from Ewald to give an account of the norm as a comprehensive, relational average; then, they attribute to the work of queer theory a certain force for transforming the truth of norms into the falseness (i.e. the conceptual untenability) of 'antinormativity'.

We can now draw a close link between the structure of their account above and the crux of their critical claims against antinormativity. Those central claims read as follows:

> [1] antinormative arguments—entrenched or *en passant* [*sic*]—tend to immobilize the activity of norms. [2] By transmogrifying norms into rules and imperatives, antinormative stances dislodge a politics of motility and relationality in favor of a politics of insubordination. [3] Importantly, these lifeless norms (e.g., heteronormativity) don't stand prior to our antinormative analyses, awaiting diagnosis; rather, they are one of our own inventions. These norms [are] birthed by queer antinormativity… (Wiegman & Wilson 2015, 14.)

I have numbered each of the sentences (in brackets), so as to delineate my commentary on this key passage.

> 1) This sentence contains the core of Wiegman and Wilson's conceptual work: they wish to show that a generalized and wholesale 'antinormativity' operates by way of a fundamental misunderstanding of norms and their operation. Since norms contain and depend upon the marginal and excluded, since norms function by including that which would oppose them, it is impossible to be against norms *simpliciter*. This is all undoubtedly true. But Wiegman and Wilson move from this sound conceptual argument to an odd or ambiguous conclusion. Grammatically, the sentence can be reduced to the following: *antinormative arguments immobilize norms*. But what does it mean to say that an argument can 'immobilize' a norm? It is one thing to suggest that an antinormative argument *incorrectly conceptualizes* a norm *as if* it were static, but how could the argument about norms literally *immobilize* real-world norms? If I were to assert, mistakenly, that 'queer' lies outside and in utter opposition to the practically deployed norm of straightness, then I would fail to grasp how straightness works as a norm (i.e. it depends for its existence upon the deviant and the marginal, but it also thereby contains them within the norm). My false assertion, however, would not itself *alter* the norm of straightness. In this case we see a significant slippage between conceptualizing how norms work and engaging with norms concretely—a problem that returns with a vengeance in the final sentence of this passage (see below).

2) Here the language of Wiegman and Wilson again has 'antinormative arguments' *acting* in ambiguous or questionable ways. To read them without suspicion I take them to mean not that such arguments would literally transform norms into rules (though that is the language they use), but rather that within antinormative arguments we can identify an untenable conceptual move by which norms are treated *as if* they were simply rules or directives. The last half of the sentence contains the political and theoretical stakes of this problematic move, but the content proves fuzzy. Here the enemy—again, so-called 'antinormative arguments'—are accused of 'dislodg[ing] a politics of motility and relationality'. Rhetorically, it seems obvious that this is a bad thing for Wiegman and Wilson, but logically I do not know what it means to *dislodge motility*—on my understanding, 'motility', the capacity to move freely, would seem to be always already 'dislodged', i.e. displaced from any fixed position—nor what the implications might be.[13]

3) This brings us to the culmination of the logic in this passage and to a series of crucial theoretical and above all *political* claims. This key sentence begins with either deep intentional irony or a massive Freudian slip, as Wiegman and Wilson refer to heteronormativity, a normative force that draws precisely from the idea of heterosexual reproduction, as a *life force*; they label such heteronormativity a 'lifeless norm'. Putting that aside, the central claim here matters most—namely, that heteronormativity (apparently like all such norms) does not exist prior to its critique by queer theory. Theirs is not the assertion that heteronormativity is not natural, a declaration that Wiegman and Wilson might find banal, since it has been made so consistently by the very queer theorists that they call 'antinormative'. No, theirs is the much more radical claim that heteronormativity is a construction produced by that very queer theoretical critique. Heteronormativity is thus not a construction of the world that queer theory—*and queer politics*—would then identify and challenge; heteronormativity is 'one of our own inventions'.

At this point my efforts to implement the principles of a charitable hermeneutics reach their limits, since I simply cannot find a subtle, deft, or politic way to respond to this last claim: it is utter nonsense. Heteronormativity existed long before queer theory emerged to name it, analyze it, and mobilize resistance to it. Heteronormativity existed well before queer politics identified it as a target of subversion. And heteronormativity persists not because of but in spite of the best efforts of queer theory and politics to challenge it. In the face of more than a quarter of a century of work in queer theory that studies the concrete forces and historical impact of heteronormativity, I find myself at a loss as to how the following point could evade

13 It is true that Wiegman and Wilson refer specifically to the '*politics* of motility', but dislodging that object hardly makes more sense: if the 'politics of motility' were either stuck or entrenched, then it would still seem that dislodging it would be a good thing. Halberstam (2015) is similarly but much more extensively critical of Wiegman and Wilson's vague language when it comes to specifying the impact of what I am calling anti-antinormativity.

scholars who have been working in the field of queer theory: heteronormativity is in no way an invention of queer theory. As I will elaborate in much more detail below, heteronormativity is a *real-world force* related to and emanating from the norm of heterosexuality when that norm is upheld and enforced by social mores, by cultural expectations and traditions, by law, and by practices and institutions (see Chambers 2003, 26; cf. Chambers 2005).

Wiegman and Wilson reserve their strongest critical ire for the idea of heteronormativity as dividing the world between 'center' (hetero) and 'periphery' (non-hetero), thereby 'figur[ing] statistical distribution more or less in oppositional terms'. In response, they contend that this idea of 'bifurcation' leads to the confused idea of 'antinormativity'—that is, opposition to the center, the 'hetero'. Worse, it leads all the way, 'comically' they say, to the notion that one would stand against oneself (since we are always a part of some normative system). In this context, they suggest that the only thing 'hetero' about heteronormative systems is that they are *generative;* they are 'hetero' because of 'their barely containable, ever mobile heterogeneity' (Wiegman and Wilson 2015, 17). But as I have suggested above by drawing on the rich tradition of queer theory, and as I will show in more detail in my conceptual work below, heteronormativity does not divide the world into the binary choices 'straight' and 'gay'. Indeed, the narrow identitarian notion of 'sexual orientation' achieves that end. In contrast, the work of queer theory that has *named* and *analyzed* the real-world force of heteronormativity has simultaneously refused or resisted the division of the world into two fixed identity categories (straight and gay). The norm of heterosexuality *distributes* identities, practices, and ethoi across a range, while the *force of heteronormativity* operates across that space to delineate, judge, stigmatize, and normalize. This is why that force—of heteronormativity—impacts those in the so-called 'center' just as much (though in far different, and almost always less directly dangerous ways) as those at the periphery—a point that has been essential to so much work devoted to theorizing heteronormativity.

Rather than continuing on, at necessarily great length, to cite all the other excellent accounts of heteronormativity that would repeatedly show how it is a concrete and definite phenomenon *of the world*, with material effects, let me instead retreat a few steps in order to consider where Wiegman and Wilson's ostensibly fine-grained account of norms goes off the rails. In doing so, I intend to turn back sharply to my abiding question: what does it mean to oppose a norm? This also means to return to the historical context that Wiegman and Wilson themselves appear to be drawing from, but to portray it in a very different light than they do.

Let me clarify: by far the most important *theoretical* work done by Wiegman and Wilson centers on their conceptualization of norms. They state at the outset that their article has two parts: the first asserts the centrality of 'antinormativity' to the entire field of queer theory and the second 'offer[s] a more studied consideration of the character of norms' (Wiegman and Wilson 2105, 2). In advancing this 'studied consideration', as I have already shown above, Wiegman and Wilson turn to the work of François Ewald. By enfolding Ewald's work on norms within that of Foucault, a

thinker who unquestionably serves as a lynchpin source for the field of queer theory, Wiegman and Wilson present this turn as unproblematic. I am tempted to say that Wiegman and Wilson 'naturalize' the presentation of Ewald by linking him so tightly to Foucault: immediately upon first citing Ewald they describe him as 'following Foucault', but later this formulation—Ewald-drawing-from-Foucault—morphs into a reference to work done by 'Foucault and Ewald', seemingly together (Wiegman & Wilson 2015, 14, 15). In other words, on a first reading of these passages, Wiegman and Wilson seem to be 'schooling' members of the field of queer studies on norms, by returning to the field's very roots in the work of Foucault and Ewald. But on closer inspection it turns out that the mentions of Foucault prove superficial: in the four pages of detailed discussions of norms, Ewald is cited repeatedly and extensively—his work completely drives the argument—while Foucault is cited only once in the form of a short snippet of text from a very famous passage that Ewald himself cites (and that I also quoted at the opening of this essay). My point proves simple: it may at first seem as if Wiegman and Wilson's crucial conceptual work on norms draws from Foucault and his French contemporaries (Ewald and Canguilhem), but in fact the entirety of their argument rests on the work of Ewald alone.

This point matters because while both Ewald's theoretical understanding of norms and his mobilization of them for his political philosophy surely draw from Foucault's work, they also *diverge dramatically* from Foucault. More to the point, whereas Foucault always theorized power and norms in terms of the possibility of opposition or resistance, Ewald breaks significantly and decidedly with Foucault to develop an account of norms that can support a politics of interest-group consensus liberalism and a politics of neoliberalism. Such claims about the relation between Ewald's theory and politics may sound overstated, but they are not hollow assertions: one finds ample support for them by looking more closely at the development of Ewald's theory, and by sketching his own personal political trajectory.

On the first front, Michael Behrent has done a brilliant job of explicating the development of Ewald's thought, showing how it definitely emerges out of, but decisively departs from Foucault. Behrent tracks Ewald's intellectual trajectory, showing how he takes up and runs with the ideas of insurance and risk that were at the heart of Foucault's work in the late 1970s (Behrent 2010, 594–607). Ewald, however, carries those ideas as far from Foucault as one might imagine, since for him the 'philosophy of risk' served as the *point de passage* for *a rejection of any politics of opposition or resistance*. Ewald draws these conclusions based on his novel understanding (one not shared with Foucault) of risk as itself creating the grounds for 'solidarity between the employer and the worker', thereby eliminating any 'antagonism between capital and labor' (Ewald 1986, 11; quoted in Behrent 2010, 612). Accordingly, for Ewald the goal of politics becomes the end of politics—'the withering away of the state'—in favor of the rational management of the welfare state as negotiations between interest groups (Behrent 2010, 615). Crucially, as Behrent nicely underlines, this entire account of risk depends on Ewald's reconfiguration of the concept of norms: 'Ewald needed to use the term "norms" somewhat differently

than Foucault had in his best-known statements of the problem' (Behrent 2010, 615). In particular, he had to develop a 'nondisciplinary conception of normativity' very much distinct from Foucault's: 'norms, rather than being treated with suspicion, must be seen as an indispensable and even salutary dimension of modern society' (Behrent 2010, 616).

It is no wonder that Wiegman and Wilson find Ewald's work so useful in their own effort to challenge the idea that norms are restrictive and exclusive (Wiegman & Wilson 2015, 12). Indeed, Ewald goes much further in resignifying norms than Weigman and Wilson allow. For him, norms are not merely salutary, they are in fact central to democracy. Norms become the very fabric of modern society: they 'breed solidarity' as Behrent puts it, and in Ewald's own words, they become 'the modern form of the social bond' (Behrent 2010, 617; citing Ewald 1986, 584). Ultimately Ewald diverges so far from Foucault's critical account of norms and normativity that he eventually sees norms, and even normalization, as the central element of an all-inclusive, modern, and fundamentally democratic society. In a particularly powerful flourish he goes so far as to suggest an utter reversal of Foucault's consistent critique of normalization: 'Normalization is a type of power-knowledge that incites the invention of democratic procedures such that all interests, all components of society may negotiate with one another' (Ewald 1986, 593; quoted in Behrent 2010, 617). For readers of Foucault, it might be worth pausing for one moment to consider how astonishingly such a claim ignores or overturns the entire edifice of Foucault's project; for everyone else, allow me simply to specify that this definition of 'normalization' as the lifeblood of democracy bears utterly no resemblance to Foucault's theory.

Wiegman and Wilson may have had many reasons not to follow Ewald to these conclusions, but it bears emphasizing that he reached them in his 1986 dissertation, well before the 1990 article from which they draw. Perhaps they avoided those conclusions because at that point the tension between Ewald's approach and that of not just the central texts, but indeed most texts, of queer theory would have become palpably obvious. But Ewald's full expression of his theory of norms and normativity may also lead one to consider the way in which Ewald himself translates this conception into concrete politics. It would take us too far afield to consider this issue in depth, but it proves worthwhile to offer the briefest synopsis of Ewald's personal trajectory: in 1990 he founded a journal to support the French insurance industry; in 1993 he went to work for the professional organization representing that industry (FFSA); in the 2000s he became the 'most prominent intellectual advocate' for the pro-business federation 'Medef', strongly supporting their efforts to carry out a '*refondation sociale*'—'a coup of civil society against the state' achieved by renegotiating the social contract underlying the welfare state; and in 2006, Jérôme Monod, the business executive and personal advisor to President Jacques Chirac, awarded Ewald the *Ordre national de la Légion d'honneur* (the highest order of merit in France) for his work supporting Medef and FFSA (Behrent 2010).[14] Ewald's is

14 In this light, Antonio's Negri's 2001 description of Ewald as a 'right Foucauldian' appears rather fair-minded (Negri 2001, 4; cited in Behrent 2010, 586). Behrent's account also makes a great deal of sense out of the wide

not exactly a queer politics, and perhaps this is because his was not exactly a queer theory to begin with.

Bracketing these significant problems with the nature of Wiegman and Wilson's source material, let me shift focus to the conceptual work they do, by specifying two overriding problems with their account. First, they significantly and repeatedly overemphasize the link between the norm and an average. It is surely true that as we move from the idea of the norm as a rule or edict, to the conception of a norm as a way of measuring and comparing across a population—an *historical* move charted by Ewald, in a manner that does indeed follow Foucault—so we can see that the broad notion of 'the norm' overlaps and is bound up with the idea of statistical averages. And Wiegman and Wilson are also exactly right that neither norms nor averages have an 'outside', since they are measures designed to 'include'—or better, *contain*—all cases. Nonetheless, averages are reductive, and sometimes singular, in a way that norms are not, and for this reason among others, norms are absolutely irreducible to averages.

Let me delineate some of the key differences (between norms and averages) by starting with the idea of the average age of a population. This average can and will be expressed as a single number—say, 42-years old. But here immediately we can see that 'norm' and 'average' are not substitutable terms, since it wouldn't make sense to call '42-years old' a 'norm'. Indeed, there is absolutely no such thing as a 'normal' age.[15] And this helps us to see a simple but fundamental point: norms are meant to convey *distributions across a range*, where averages collapse that distribution into something singular.[16] This is why the best way of thinking about a norm is to visualize (perhaps even to draw) the normal bell curve. Here we can see how much broader the norm is compared to the average: the average is a *point* on the bell curve, but the norm is a distribution of cases, *a dispersion across the entire curve*.[17] Only in this very specific way can we say that the norm 'contains everything'. Saying that the average age of the population is '36.8 years' does not 'include' everyone in the entire group. The process by which the average was calculated surely *counted* everyone in the group, but 36.8 is an almost meaningless number if we want to ask about boys under the age of 4 or grandmothers over the age of 80.

This brings us to one of the crucial features of the normal curve, *standard deviation*.[18] To talk about a norm is to convey the idea both of averages (means,

areas of agreement, and general rapport between Ewald and the famous neoliberal Chicago economist Gary Becker, as brought to light in the transcripts of their 2012 University of Chicago seminar (Becker et al 2012).

15 Here I explicitly reject Wiegman and Wilson's general claim that '*averages are synecdochal measures of the entire group*' (Wiegman & Wilson 2015, 15, emphasis original). As my example in the text shows, often knowing an average tells us very little about the group, and, to underscore my central point: the average cannot bear the weight of standing in for the 'norm'.

16 In this context, it matters not whether we work with mean, median, or mode as our precise statistical measure for 'average' since in all three cases we get a singular quantity, not a distribution.

17 As I will show below, the *normative* is a *force* that operates across this distribution; it is a force generated out of the field produced by the dispersion of cases. As they once said in physics (particularly about gravity), it is a force at a distance.

18 Has there ever been a queerer concept than this idea, central to statistics, that *deviation*, distance from the

medians, and modes) and the deviation from those averages. Standard deviation is a statistical measure of the *dispersion* of values; it tells us *how many* data points lie *how far* from the mean. If the standard deviation is low, then most cases fall close to the mean (picture a thin and tall bell curve); if the standard deviation is high, then the cases are spread out much further away from the mean (picture a wide and short bell curve). There is no need to detail the complex and sophisticated properties of normal distributions, since the point is quite simple: norms take a variety of shapes and forms, and they cannot be reduced to averages since, crucially, *one can have the same mean and median values while having radically different distributions of those values*. And this, after all, was one of Foucault's main points: norms tell us about distribution and dispersion, variance and difference, across a range of cases. In one sense then Wiegman and Wilson are right to conclude that a norm is not something that one could simply be against—one cannot be 'anti-norm'—but they oversimplify, and worse, conceptually flatten, the account of the norm when they link it so strongly to the much more basic, and reductive, notion of 'average'.

Furthermore, this first problem bleeds into the second, which is that Wiegman and Wilson consistently fail to distinguish the idea of a norm from a whole host of related, *yet absolutely conceptually distinct*, terms. To start the list I would offer: normativity, normalization, and the normal/abnormal pair (Duggan 2015). The fundamental flaw in Wiegman and Wilson's argument is that they attempt to lever their putatively richer account of 'the norm' and use this account as a tool against the so-called 'antinormative' position, but in their eagerness to wield 'the norm' as a weapon against antinormativity, they fail to see that *the* norm is only one among a host of related terms and concepts. In this context, I happily grant, and indeed affirm Wiegman and Wilson's point that it makes no sense to be *against norms*. The norm in the singular is not the sort of thing that it would be meaningful to oppose. However, 'the norm' is not the same thing as *normativity*, and it is not the same thing as *normalization*.

In order to unpack these crucial distinctions with some care, let me start to develop an account of the difference between norms, on the one hand, and this other clutch of terms, on the other, by insisting on this point: *not all norms* (not all distributions of cases or populations) *come to matter in a social order in the same way*. We can take human anatomy as an example: numerous characteristics of human body types are distributed and dispersed across a wide range—height, hair color, foot size, etc. And many of these characteristics are also *roughly* binary, with most of the population appearing to fall within two categories: attached and detached earlobes, tongues that roll and those that do not, double-jointedness or lack thereof, and last but certainly not least, sex. Thus, using the analysis from above, we can clearly say that there is a norm for the distribution of sex as a human characteristic—most

mean, is itself *standard*? Certainly not for Wiegman and Wilson, who say that, like norms, standard deviation is 'similarly expansive and inclusionary as a measure' (Wiegman & Wilson 2015, 22). But this makes no sense, even statistically. Standard deviation is a measure not of 'inclusion' but of *distance*; it specifically tells us how *far* a specific case falls from the median point on the normal curve.

individuals in the population are either male or female,[19] though definitely not all (Fausto-Sterling 2000)—and there is a norm for the distribution of whether one can roll one's tongue. Similarly, we could say that there is a norm for sexuality (i.e. so-called sexual orientation) and one for the distribution of hair color.

Yet the limitation in these two pairs of analogies should already prove obvious: in each example, with the second named characteristic, society seems not to care very much if at all about its distribution across the population, while with the first named characteristic, society itself appears to have been constructed and reconstructed very much around those very characteristics. Sex and sexuality are not just norms, not mere averages, but *norms that have been enforced by being built into social ethics, laws, customs, traditions, expectations, and even into physical structures*. We know heteronormativity is not the invention of queer theory simply by going to the bathroom. There, we still usually come face to face with a single binary choice of the male option or the female option. These enforced choices reflect the importance of *both* the norm of sex (the two sexes are our only options) and the norm of sexuality (since bathroom segregation is premised upon the presumption of heterosexuality).[20] The example shows us that there is much more to norms than their existence as a distribution of cases.

In showing here how some norms *matter* in ways that others do not I have also been offering an incipient definition of 'normative'. The word 'normative' is clearly the adjectival form of 'norm', meaning relating to or deriving from a norm. But the term normative also connotes propriety, value, and notions of right and wrong; this is a point that even Ewald himself highlights, and that Wiegman and Wilson ignore, when he stresses that 'norm' points to 'perhaps most significantly

19 It has been suggested to me by a brilliant colleague and good friend that certain scholars working today on the study of sex and gender might contest my phrasing here that 'most individuals are male or female', and that I could instead use the phrase 'so-called male or female'. This hypothetical critique strikes me as potentially significant, yet, at the same time, ultimately untenable and counterproductive. As a radical constructivist and longtime reader of Judith Butler, I would be the first to affirm that 'sex' is not pre-discursive or a-political: 'male' and 'female' are themselves only grasped *through the discourse of gender*. But to say something is discursive is not to say it is unreal, and if we insisted on putting 'so-called' in front of all constructed identifying terms, then 'so-called' would become the most used word in the English language – so-called male, so-called teacher, so-called tongue-rollers, so-called Black person, so-called Irishman, etc. In the text above I am suggesting that the meaningful and important differences between male and female depend not on something natural or innately biological, but on the social and the political. Surely part of the problem here is the assumption, *made more often by humanists than by scientists*, that the biological is not itself historical. There are physical attributes (genitalia, hormones, chromosomes) of most individuals in a population by which we distinguish 'male' from 'female', and there are physical differences by which we distinguish detached from attached earlobes. Rather than adding 'so-called' in front of a biological term in order to designate our theoretical radicality, we ought instead to consider the historical imbrication of the social and the biological. In my analysis here I am pointing in the direction of that imbrication.

20 To complete the logic, simply imagine a world in which 90% of all individuals were homosexual. In such a world there would be no reason to segregate bathrooms based on sex. Today's political battle over the rights of transgender people to use the bathroom of their choice provides a stark and obvious example that heteronormativity is a real, material force—a thing of the world, and certainly not merely a conceptual production created by the academic field of queer theory—since the opposition to allowing transgender people to choose their preferred restroom absolutely depends on the presumption of the naturalness or ubiquity of opposite-sex desire.

of all, a principle of *valorization*' (Ewald 1990, 14, emphasis added). Emphasizing this principle lets us see a crucial distinction between, on the one hand, the bare fact of a normal distribution of some characteristics within a population—a simple norm—from, on the other, the production of standards and ideals—a normative force. Thus we can draw a clear and helpful distinction between, on the one hand, the mere existence of gender *norms*—the variety of ways in which bodies, behaviors, actions, and expressions convey a wide continuum of masculinity and femininity—and, on the other, the enforcement of a *normative* conception of appropriate and inappropriate gender (again, in the shape of bodies, the expression of meaning, and the performance of actions).

In addition to norm and normative, we also have the idea of the *normal*, wherein the normative force emanating from the existence of a norm leads to a binary distinction between identity/action/behavior/expression that is normal and that which is abnormal—or, according to the language of psychoanalysis and psychology, *pathological.* Foucault devoted an entire annual series of Collège de France lectures to the figure of the 'abnormal' (Foucault 2003b). But even Ewald stresses this point, in the very same article that Wiegman and Wilson cite, and he does so in a way that contradicts their interpretation. In underscoring the extent to which a norm contains its own margins, Wiegman and Wilson refuse the idea of interpreting norms in binary terms; they harshly reject an understanding of norms through the language of center/periphery, calling the very idea 'something of a nonsense' (Wiegman & Wilson 2015, 15–16). To do so they must ignore the words of their most important source; Ewald writes, 'norms involve polarity' based upon their production of a stark 'division between the normal and the abnormal' (Ewald 1990, 157). It is true that, as Ewald himself explains, the normal/abnormal distinction occurs through a process of inclusion rather than absolute exclusion; once again, there is no 'outside' of a norm. Wiegman and Wilson, however, appear to want to take the point further, to inflect 'inclusion' with liberal political connotations (in the sense that an 'inclusive' idea of the norm would be linked to a political system based upon the idea of equal respect, dignity, and rights for all individuals). As I have shown above, such a move might well be supported by Ewald's own theoretical and political development, but in this case at least, Ewald's text indicates something quite different—'no escape' (Ewald 1990, 154).

Furthermore, while it is surely the case, as Wiegman and Wilson argue, that the 'periphery' does not lie outside the norm, this fact simply does not have the implications that they imply. After all, the 'periphery' also does not lie outside the world—it, too, is a particular place within the world. The periphery is not the *hors-texte* for the very good reason that 'there is no *hors-texte*' (Derrida 1967, 158–159). A normal curve has tails and these are, by definition, *peripheral* vis-à-vis the center of the curve. The fact that the abnormal or pathological is 'included' within the normal distribution does not change either the fact or the force of the normal/abnormal binary (Foucault 2003b). To take a blunt example: the distribution of the population based on genitalia would *include* some portion of babies that are born

either with both male and female genitalia or with ambiguous genitalia that cannot simply be categorized as distinctly male or female. That these babies are 'included' in the distribution does not serve as any sort of mitigating factor when it comes to consideration of the medical and political history of practices that have deemed them 'abnormal' and used their pathological status as the ground for sometimes violent medical intervention—all designed, of course, to 'make them normal'.

Finally, the idea of the normal can be played out through daily practices, regulatory regimes, and rules and laws in such a way as to be *normalizing*—that is, enforcing a conception of the normal and coercing individuals (in both subtly and forcefully explicit ways) into 'becoming normal'. It is at this point, finally, that I want to return to Foucault's work on norms. As I articulated in the opening of my essay, Foucault saw his theoretico-historical project as an effort to conceptualize the new mechanisms of power emerging in Europe in the 17th and 18th centuries—in order not only to understand their operation but also to provide theoretical tools for resisting those very technologies of power. In his initial attempt to *name* this new form of power relations, Foucault called it 'disciplinary' power, and he described its working in terms of the process he called 'normalization'. Foucault's massively popular and widely read *Discipline and Punish* painted a vivid and animating portrait of disciplinary practices and institutions, and it theorized disciplinary power in terms of his concept of normalization.[21] Allow me then to quote one of the most famous passages in Foucault's published works:

> Like surveillance and with it, normalization becomes one of the great instruments of power at the end of the classical age. For the marks that once indicated status, privilege and affiliation were increasingly replaced—or at least supplemented—by a whole range of degrees of normality indicating membership of a homogeneous social body but also playing a part in classification, hierarchization and the distribution of rank. In a sense, the power of normalization imposes homogeneity; but it individualizes by making it possible to measure gaps, to determine levels, to fix specialities and to render the differences useful by fitting them one to another. It is easy to understand how the power of the norm functions within a system of formal equality, since within a homogeneity that is the rule, the norm introduces, as a useful imperative and as a result of measurement, all the shading of individual differences. (Foucault 1977, 184.)

A lot can be said, and has been, about Foucault's project, which is simultaneously historical, philosophical, and political, but one thing is safe to say: generations of his readers have taken his account of normalization as a way understanding how one might mobilize *opposition* to this 'great instrument [...] of power'.

21 Ewald also discusses normalizing practices at length. Yet Wiegman and Wilson entirely disregard these passages in Ewald: they discuss only norms, without considering the multitude of ways that these other elements, while related to norms, are not reducible to them. They do not cite *Discipline and Punish* or *any* of Foucault's Collège de France lectures; only *History of Sexuality, Vol I*, appears in their list of works cited.

Importantly, however, there has been a great deal of confusion over the years about both the *type* of new power that emerges in modern Europe and the *role* of norms in relation to this power. To simplify, much of this incertitude can be traced to the fact that Foucault changed his mind and changed his terms, without fully clarifying those terms in his published works (nor in his unpublished writings). Putting it schematically we can say that initially Foucault mobilized the conceptual pair discipline/normalization in order to capture the analytics of this new form of power, and this is what the reader finds in *Discipline and Punish*, published in 1975. Yet after exploring the disciplines and their normalizing practices for many years, Foucault came to the conclusion that something was missing. Hence in the final Collège de France lecture given in 1976, Foucault summarizes his notion of disciplinary power and then says the following: 'now I think we see something new emerging in the second half of the eighteenth century: a new technology of power, *but this time it is not disciplinary*' (Foucault 2003a, 242, emphasis added). Both here and in *The Will to Knowledge*, published the same year, Foucault calls this other new power *biopower* (Foucault 2003a, 243; Foucault 1978, 139). Yet in this widely read published book—the first in the famous *History of Sexuality* series—Foucault is not exactly clear about how the distinction between disciplinary power and biopower relates to the question of norms. Luckily (or perhaps more confusingly, depending on one's perspective), in the next year's series of lectures, given in 1978, Foucault significantly clarified his terms by proposing a more subtle distinction between the power of normativity, on the one hand, and the force of normalization, on the other. In those lectures he differentiates the process of *normation* from that of *normalization*. The former is effected by disciplines and centers on the norm as an ideal model, while the latter is carried out by security apparatuses (biopower) and functions by way of normal curves that map the distribution of populations (Foucault 2004, 57). Notice that Foucault here gives a new name, *normation*, to the phenomena he had previously described as normalization, while reserving the latter term strictly for a process tied up with biopower.

The above begins the important work of clarifying Foucault's terms, work which (given the ambiguity in his oeuvre) needs to continue. At this point, I draw from this preliminary sketch two important and related points. First, it is exactly the difference between normation and normalization—that is, the difference between an understanding of the norm as seen through the lens of disciplinary power and an understanding seen through biopower—that serves as a condition of possibility for Ewald's unique (and thoroughly conservative) development of his specific conception of norms. Behrent specifies this key issue, showing that Ewald was 'invoking this nondisciplinary conception of normativity' when he described norms as the lifeblood of democracy (Behrent 2010, 616). In other words, it is only on the basis of Foucault's move, after *Discipline and Punish* and, in effect, also after *The Will to Knowledge* (two central texts for the so-called founding of queer theory) to distinguish disciplinary power from biopower, and thereby to develop two different theorizations of norms—only on this ground could Ewald build an

utterly different account of norms as the modern social bond. Second, and even more significantly, Foucault himself did not use the distinction between normation and normalization in order to suggest a 'salutary' conception of norms. For Foucault, both techniques of normation and techniques of normalization are bound up with mechanisms of power that, while surely not 'bad' in and of themselves are certainly always *dangerous*.[22] In the lectures where Foucault develops the distinction to the fullest, he also continues to press the importance of locating 'points of resistance' to power (Foucault 2004, 194). One can viably argue that Foucault cleared the path that Ewald took from risk/insurance to a rejection of all politics of resistance in favor of social management, but *Foucault himself did not follow this path*.[23] Thus, as readers of Foucault we simply cannot 'snip the thread' that ties Foucault's theorization of normativity/normalization to his conceptualization of the possibility of resistance—of opposition to those forces (Foucault 2004, 194; phrase borrowed from Halperin 2002, 4).

For my specific purposes here, it is this possibility of opposition that matters most, and therefore we can set aside the question of the subtle differences between normation and normalization in order to focus on the more fundamental distinction—that between a norm, on the one hand, and *both* normativity and normalization, on the other. My reading of Foucault above aims to re-inflate the conceptual apparatus that Wiegman and Wilson collapse. To pose the question of opposition to norms it will not do to talk only about 'normativity' (and 'antinormativity'); we must consider, in all their complexity, the forces of normation, of normalization, and of the pathological logic of the normal/abnormal pair.

In this context—that is, armed with even this most basic schematism of broader concepts—we can clearly see that while it would make no sense to *oppose* norms, one could doubtless oppose certain specific forms of *normativity* and *normalization*. For example, I have previously argued that Judith Butler's understanding of gender as a regulatory practice is designed to challenge the normativity of specific forms of gender (Chambers 2007, 662; Butler 1999, 23). In this concrete sense it proves both valid and illuminating to say that Butler's arguments have an *antinormative* valence: she is analyzing, criticizing, and seeking to transform a specific gender normativity. But to say this is in no way to suggest that Butler's work simply *stands in opposition* to norms, nor is it to imply that Butler naively thinks that norms are singular.

One can reject, resist, and in general 'be against' certain forms of normativity and certain practices of normalization, and doing so does not commit one to an untenable understanding of norms. To the contrary, in understanding the relation between norms, on the one hand, and normativity and normalization, on the other,

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22 'My point is not that everything is bad, but that everything is dangerous' (Foucault 1983a). This has long been a favorite Foucault quote for a variety of writers, but it is worth stressing a follow-up point of Foucault's that has been nicely highlighted by Margaret McLaren: Foucault's claim cannot be reduced to relativism or nihilism, since he insisted that 'everything is not equally dangerous' (Foucault 1983b; cited in McLaren 2002).

23 And it is Foucault's work, not Ewald's, that has served as both a foundational and continuing resource for queer studies.

we see starkly how an 'antinormative' argument entails taking proper account of what Wiegman and Wilson point to as the dynamic, inclusive, and capacious character of norms. Here, however, we should also note that norms are not only 'capacious' in this sense; they are also differentiating. Not all norms are merely what Wiegman and Wilson call 'systemic play'. They quote Ewald to the effect that the norm 'allows individuals to make claims on the basis of their individuality and permits them to lead their own particular lives' (Ewald 1992, 154; quoted in Wiegman & Wilson 2015, 16). As a limited account of the relationship among 'cases' within a statistical normal distribution of those cases, this is fine as far as it goes. Yet this may be their most egregious misuse of Ewald, since the text they quote comes immediately after, and as an interpolation of the thesis-like topic sentence of Ewald's paragraph, where he writes: 'the norm can also work to *create inequalities*. This is, in fact, the *only objectivity* that it provides' (Ewald 1990, 154, emphasis added). That is, even for Ewald, the norm underscores our 'equality'—in the sense that it treats us all as statistically similar cases—*only to the extent that it produces objective inequalities* by measuring the gap between and among us.

We must remain vigilant about not extrapolating from the individual cases to the life of real-world individuals who are subject to the *normative force* of norms of gender and sexuality. The queer adolescent who is being beaten by bullies at school and disowned by his parents at home, is not 'allowed' or 'permitted' to lead his own life. Rather, the normative force of patriarchy, misogyny, and heteronormativity demands that queer kid's stigmatization; it seductively calls for violence against him so as to normalize him or make an example of him for others who might be tempted to express their own deviance from the norm. And all of this is because norms do not exist in a vacuum—a point that has crucial political implications. To expand upon both the theoretical and political significance of this idea, we can return one last time to Wiegman and Wilson's own favored source on norms:

> As norms can only exist socially, there can be no such thing as a norm that exists in isolation, for a norm never refers to anything but other norms on which it depends…when the norm appears, it establishes itself necessarily as an order: *the normative order* that characterizes modern societies. [Hence] it is essential to distinguish between the norm itself and the apparatus, institution, or technique of power that brings it into action and functions according to its principles. (Ewald 1990, 153.)

This distinction between the norm and the *dispositif* of power that upholds and enforces norms is exactly, and consistently, the distinction Wiegman and Wilson fail to make and frequently elide. The history of work in queer theory that they seek to displace or overturn with the label 'antinormativity' includes a rich body of literature that attends to just this distinction, by analyzing the history of those apparatuses, institutions, and techniques of power that mobilize various norms in a variety of ways.

Hence we can see that the critique of heteronormativity, a critique that

links various diverse (and frequently contentious) strands of queer theory, is not based upon, nor is itself, a naive 'opposition' to the statistical distribution of sex and sexuality. Like feminist critiques of patriarchy and anti-racist critiques of white supremacy, the queer critique of heteronormativity questions and challenges the normative social and political order that seeks to install and preserve the normative force and normalizing ideal of heterosexuality. In doing so, queer theory has often offered detailed theoretical and historical analyses of the ways in which heterosexuality is itself constructed as a norm and instituted as a social and political ordering principle. Yet this type of critical work, this delineation and deconstruction of heteronormativity as a real-world force should never be confused with the idea that queer theory artificially 'constructs' heteronormativity.

There can be no doubt that the *term* and the *concept* of heteronormativity are produced by—are theoretical constructions of—the work of queer theory. But the idea that a 'norm' itself could be 'invented' by an academic project proves totally untenable on its face—for reasons that Wiegman and Wilson's own analysis makes clear. Despite this fact, they consistently fail to attend to another fact—namely, that *norms are things of the world*. Heterosexuality is not a product of nature, nor is it a construction of queer theory. Heterosexuality is itself the powerful invention of a heterosexist and heteronormative world. It is produced not only linguistically but also materially in the world, and it is sustained by practices of the world. This is why the normative force of heterosexuality—the power of heterosexuality when it appears and operates *as a norm*—comes before the field of queer theory emerges. But just as gay liberation movements, especially through the act of coming out, *named* and thus brought to light the possibility of a gay identity (and hence, retroactively, of a straight identity), so too does the naming and conceptual articulation of heteronormativity bring to light the force of heterosexuality when it functions as a norm. None of this has anything to do with the 'bifurcation' between 'centers' and 'peripheries' (though surely Wiegman and Wilson do not need to be reminded that normal distributions have central humps and marginal tails); it has to do with normative and normalizing forces, and here again, it seems worth remembering that these forces apply themselves to and affect those in the center of the normal distribution—i.e. so-called 'straight people'—on a daily basis. If queer theory tomorrow stopped being 'antinormative', or otherwise moved 'beyond' antinormativity, one can be certain that heteronormativity would not go anywhere.

Let me conclude by synthesizing: norms are more than averages; they are distributions. Normativity is more than a norm; it is a name for the power relations produced and sustained when a norm comes to *matter* within a particular social order (or subculture of that order). Normativity connotes, in a way that 'norm' by itself need not, a distribution understood to be—and often culturally and politically enforced as—proper, truthful, and/or *right*. This compulsive power of normativity can thereby render the tails of a normal curve as wrong, deviant, and/or pathological. Hence normativity can generate a polarity between the normal and the abnormal. Normalization is more than normativity; it is the hegemonic enforcement—through

disciplinary practices or biopolitical apparatuses[24]—of the normative distribution, the continued sustenance of the normative polarity.

In concrete terms, this means that we have, first, a distribution of sexual identities and practices that can be understood as a norm, wherein most people identify as and practice a sexuality that we have (historically) named heterosexuality. But more than this, we then also have, second, a singling out of the idea of heterosexuality as a natural, proper, healthily reproductive sexuality—the right sexuality—that leads to the construal of non-hetero identifications and expressions of sexuality as deviant, unnatural, or, in a word, queer. And this gives us, third, heteronormativity: the normative force of the norm of heterosexuality when it is held up and imposed as a regulatory ideal—supported by other norms, by culture, by tradition, by numerous laws, and by countless institutions. Therefore, as Wiegman and Wilson suggest, it would be illogical to be against the basic idea that there is a norm around sexuality in the sense that there is a normal statistical distribution of sexual identities and practices. However, it makes not only logical sense but also good political sense to *oppose* those practices whereby we (that is, society as a whole) mobilize the norm of heterosexuality as a normative and normalizing force to render and preserve society as straight.

Antinormativity therefore becomes not just viable in a theoretical sense—that is, conceptually coherent—it also becomes possible and sometimes necessary in a political sense. We cannot be against a norm, for a norm is not the sort of thing, in and of itself, that one could oppose. But opposition to normativity and normalization remains a rich resource for theory and politics, often essential to analysis and sometimes 'as crucial as bread' (Butler 2004, 29).

24 As I describe above, Foucault first uses the word 'normalization' in the same sense I do here, to apply to both disciplinary practices and security *dispositifs*. He later suggests in his lectures, but not in his published work, the distinction between 'normation' (normalization as it occurs through disciplinary power) and 'normalization' proper (applying more narrowly to biopower) (Foucault 2004, 57). For the sake of clarity in the final formulation I am offering here, and because Foucault's distinction has yet to take hold in the literature, I leave this subtle distinction out of my summary at this point in my text.

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