

*Abdellatif Atif*  
Free University of Bolzano

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## Instrumentality after radical lack. Education and populism as co-prosthetic

Man has, as it were, become a kind of prosthetic God. When he puts on all his auxiliary organs he is truly magnificent; but those organs have not grown on to him and they fall give him much trouble at times (Freud 1961: 38–39).

### Ignorance is bliss

There haven't been many elections when education has been a political hardliner point. However, Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn, in the elections of 2017 and 2019, has been an exception through his education plans, from children's centers to student grants. His proposals have included a national education service and an end to private schools' charitable status. They also promised six years of free education for adults. Finally, and most importantly to this paper, many ideas that have been considered taboo, like free education, tertiary education tuition fees, and private schools' status, are now back on the agenda for fresh debate. In this discourse, education is clearly an instrument to solve economic, social, and political problems; however, it grounds in rhetoric that represents education as not an instrumental relation. Otherwise, its legitimacy could be rejected as how most approaches in critical educational theory do.

Nevertheless, this situation is not as simple as it may sound because the rejection of instrumentality does not exclude the desire for it; instead, it catches us in an aporia. As in our departing empirical case, on the one hand, we accept the instrumentality of education since its aims do not diverge from the general goals of education. Yet, for safety, one wants to scarify the desire of education to be instrumentalized to worthy goals, to avoid the risk of another instrumentalization that may deviate education from its ends. In both cases, instrumentality seems to be a shame. If one

accepts it, it is possible under the condition of making clear that education can also exist without being instrumentalized.

This contribution supposes that one category that persists in this aporia towards instrumentality is mechanical causality. While it helps describe instrumentality, unfortunately, it substitutes and covers the being of instrumentality by supposedly cause-effect relations. Therefore, challenging this rigid, linear and mechanical causal relation may help us understanding instrumentality in better terms. Preliminary to this attempt to change the understanding of instrumentality is considering its epistemology as not neutral and assuming that there is a bridge between ontology and epistemology. In other words, if we remained with purely epistemological criteria, claims about instrumentality as mechanically causal might be true or false. However, they depend on and reveal ontological assumptions that their authors may not be aware of, but that exist (Glynos, Howarth 2007: 7; Laclau 1990: 34), and this epistemological–ontological bridge is important for our considerations.

### Radicalizing instrumentality

The cornerstone of this paper's attempt at shaking the causal – mechanical reading of instrumentality in education is the assumption that, ontologically, the failure of a subject to be crystallized into a necessary being not only limits it, but it is also ontologically constitutive of it. The “subject” whose ontological limits we are considering here are education (Szkudlarek 2019), the people (Laclau 2005), and instrumentality (Vardoulakis 2020). Thus, a discourse on each of these subjects is an attempt to master their negativity. Let us start with how populist discourses aim to dominate the negativity referring to the people as a subject. In that case, in Laclau's theory of populism (2005: 165), “the people” is much more than an assemblage of residents or citizens (population). It is a political discursive articulation with no privileged signifier (social class, ethnicity, history, etc.) capable of constructing its fullness. Thus, when we talk about a populist articulation of education, we refer to education as one of the nodal points that can support this political articulation. However, education is also a subject with a negativity that can never attain complete objectivity. Therefore, it can exceed the scope of didactic discussions and thus become a space for articulating new popular alternatives that may appear as instrumental to the people's problems. Articulation does not simply mean “expression” or “putting into words” here, but as for Laclau and Mouffe's understanding (2014), it signifies a connection between several elements that transforms them all. Therefore, the populist instrumentalization of education changes the object of education (the people) and education itself. In other words, education as an instrument in populist articulations is not merely a technical attempt to master the people's negativity by recourse to a fixed positivity, the one of education. Instead, in turning the people's negativity into a positivity, education's positivity is contaminated by the identity of the people it aims to sustain.

What has been at stake so far in this discussion is emphasizing the constitutive role of social negativity to get over the dominant understanding of populism as an ideologically perverted political content, and education as grounded in an essentially conceived “the educational”. Similarly, I will proceed to the instrumentality of education in its populist articulations. Let us start with the general understanding of populist instrumentality as framed by a cause-effect relation where a successfully hegemonic articulation of education suppresses the differences (negativity) between heterogeneous social groups and turns them into one people. The problem with this linear causal relation is that it is only possible with what we have rejected before: that the negativity of elements involved in this instrumental relation (education and the people) is limited to their external interactions while internally they are unaltered. In this sense, education and populism, like parts of an engine, are static elements in a mechanical exchange which may change their appearances but never their essences. As mentioned before, such a reading substitutes the instrumental relation for what causal mechanical ties are.

This paper evades the exclusion of negativity to an external level (which would be an ontological condition of this mechanical reading of instrumentality) by seeing negativity as internal to identities and not only external. It builds on the concept of antagonism, which refers typically to external conflicts between subjects (political parties, philosophies, nations, etc.). But for Laclau and Mouffe (2014), it signals not only this external contradiction, but also the constitutive role of internal negativity in every identity. What is then instrumentality in regards to this double level of antagonism? Vardoulakis (2020) gives a satisfactory answer. For him, every subject is condemned to an ontological lack (negativity) that can be temporarily compensated by the instrument of hegemonic political strategies. However, this ontological failure is not a positivity that can be encountered while expressed in many instrumental empirical failures. Therefore, there is a circular relation here: empirical instrumentality is only possible because ontological instrumentality is failing, and circularly, ontological instrumentality is necessary because every empirical instrumentality is failing.

This approach translates this circularity of instrumentality between the two levels into a new epistemological language alternative to mechanical causality. On the first level of this circularity, the aim is to conjecture the logic of how empirical instrumentality shows itself as only a technicality that will undoubtedly attain positive effects and as having no political character; what Glynos and Howarth (2007) call a social logic. Then, we engage the circularity of this instrumentality to proceed to the second level, the one of ontological instrumentality, by looking at how it aims to cover up ontological negativity through hegemonic practices of empirical instrumentalities. We access this second level through two other logics that focus on instrumental relations’ political contingency and ideological underpinnings; Glynos and Howarth (2007) call them political and fantasmatic logics.

What is the status of each of these logics? First, a logic does not speak from a positive or transcendental stand. Instead, it admits that, like any subject, it is

hindered by antagonism, which means that other logics subvert it while it also needs them to support itself. Thus, a valid logic does not refer to the principles of non-contradiction inside a populist instrumentalist articulation of education as causal explanations would see it. Rather, it builds on admitting that contradiction gives the best stand to capture the being of these instrumentalities and permits a better and more explicative analysis. Therefore, a logic does not refer to a meta-discursive level that speaks to the eternal relations of the subjects of instrumentality as causality does, but it is conjectural as it recognizes the overdetermined nature of the parts of any instrumental association.

Let us go back to the empirical case of the Labour party manifestos in 2017 and 2019 to show these three logics of the populist instrumentality of education.

### The social logic of instrumentality: social justice instrumentality

The social logics of instrumentality refer to those sedimented discourses taken as not political (Glynos, Howarth 2007: 137). However, in moments of populist contestation, these logics are activated and shown as political. Thus, before coming to the articulations of education in the two Labor Party parliament elections manifestos, 2017 and 2019, we must first focus on the sedimented discourses these manifestos reacted to. I mean the instrumentality of education that the Thatcherist (1979–1990) and New Labour (1994–2015) eras have sedimented and stabilized.

Starting from Thatcher, good schools are an instrument to achieve a good economy by developing good skills to compete with the outside market. Reciprocally, competitiveness, the logic of every prosperous economy, is an instrument to achieve successful schools. This discourse was scandalous. However, it made a success gradually and its hegemony lasted even 20 years later when the opposition of the Labour party came back to power. When Thatcher was asked about her most outstanding achievement, she answered, “Tony Blair and New Labour. We forced our opponents to change their minds” (Burns 2008). These anecdotal words apply to how education was instrumentalized with the manifestos of the Labor party under the leadership of Blair, Brown, Harman and Miliband. The New Labour indeed recognized the conservatives’ failure in education. “Education has been the Tories’ biggest failure. It is Labour’s number one priority” (Labour Party 1997). However, the solution is limited to reformism; the party acts recognize the general Thatcherist articulation of education and claim that “we only bring change where the Tory’s did not succeed” (Labour Party 1997). This discourse adopts neoliberal policies, and instead of reactivating the articulatory conditions of Thatcher’s instrumentality, it recognizes it as non-political and transparent. Thus, education is not articulated to change its political meaning but in an institutionalist articulation that reduces its crisis to problems related to its administration.

Moving to the electoral manifestos of Corbyn's leadership (2017 and 2019), the party continued to share the same logic of instrumentality of education to the economy. However, this time, it is to have a new result: a new people; as in every populist articulation – the only people. The way to that is through the reactivation of the politics of the instrumentality sedimented by Thatcher and the New Labour Party. Thus, Corbyn shows how the subordination of education to the economy is instrumental, not authentic to the British people, and more importantly, as political and not neutral. With Corbyn, "it is time for real change", as the manifesto of 2017 is entitled. He articulates the existing instrumentality of education as no longer failing because of administrative or technical issues but because of the political character of this articulation.

The New Labour could recognize that something is not working with education; however, the solution is adjusting where the existing instrumentality of education fails. Therefore, an accurate answer to the education crisis should reciprocally generate a response to the other fields. In these terms, the Conservative and the New Labour instrumentality of education is articulated as unjust and as the reason behind a general deprivation concerning education and other lacks in other fields (with which, from our ontological stand, education has no necessary relation). This is how for Corbyn, many inequalities come from the unequal provision of education. Therefore, a new redistribution of education opportunities can recreate the people in a new egalitarian way. One can find different examples in the manifestos of 2017 and 2019 that articulate the inequality in education provision as a reason for economic disparities:

But education isn't just vital to our economy – it lets people develop their talents, overcomes injustices and inequalities, and helps us understand each other and form social bonds. The Conservatives have starved our education system of funding, transferring costs onto students, staff and communities (Labour Party 2019: 37).

The prominent social logic here is a social justice instrumentality of education. It espouses education with specific economic measures that could emerge as a subject ideal of relevance to the people conceived in egalitarian terms. Thus, the demands articulated around the name of education are resources for building the people. They transform education into means to achieve social and economic gains whose result will be an emancipated people.

### The problematization of the social logic

In the articulation of education in these two Labour manifestos, we can recognize something typical of social justice approaches to the instrumentality of education. One feels an implicit anti-instrumentality tone, condemning political interventions as blasphemy to education's transcendence. Still, instrumentality is not negated but

used again for different aims judged as right. In this aporia, the choice of studying the discourse of Corbyn on the instrumentality of education is interesting. If Corbyn remained coherent to an anti-instrumentalist discourse of education and decided to leave it outside his agenda, this study would not have much sense. However, the persistence of instrumentality despite its apparent rejection and ontological unevenness invites to consider, beyond its success or normative evaluation, something ontological that here will be identified as the ontological lack of every identity, and the continuous attempts to cover it through instrumentality.

Thus, it is evident that Corbyn does not aim to talk about education but about the people. Yet, why can he not do it directly? The reason is that since the people is not a pre-existing subject but a discursive one, it is condemned to a radical lack. Hence, to cover up on this absent fullness, it needs to embody an object that covers this absent fullness. That is what education does here by being a hegemonic discourse that interpellates different social demands as a “chain” of equivalence around it that comes about when a series of demands from different discursive origins are articulated as equivalent (Laclau 2005: 4). Consequently, the instrumentality of education has more than didactic or technical means to act on the population’s living. Still, more than that, it is a means for ontological grounding of the people as an identity (Szkudlarek 2017; Tony Carusi, Szkudlarek 2020).

Nevertheless, this grounding function is not a mere technicality because the identities articulated together contaminate each other. Hence, what is the people is contaminated by the sedimented contents of education, and *vice versa* for education as it has to adjust itself to economic, social, and political elements outside its realm. We will call this logic a co-prosthetic relation, where instrumentality as a prosthetic relation covers hegemonically over the lack of these identities through the embodiment of each for the other. However, both identities pay for such a grounding relation by being mutually dependent and thus contingent subjects.

### Why prosthesis?

Prosthesis as a logic for instrumentality is to be worked rather than being a simple metaphor to be adopted. This work aims at the most important level of our ontology, evading limiting antagonism to an empirical level but taking it circularly to the ontological one. The confinement of instrumentality to the empirical level renders it a technical determinism (a social logic). This is what is missing, for instance, in Stegiler’s reading of technology. For him the human being, because it is a being in time, it is characterized by finitude, and therefore has a handicap, “for which he has need of prostheses to supplement this original flaw, or more exactly to defer (and differ from) it [*le différer*]” (Stiegler 2003: 156). However, such reading may oversimplify the conception of instrumentality to a mere mechanical technicality that compensates prosthetically the ontological lack (Marchart 2012).

Instead, the prosthesis needs to refer also to the constitutive ontological negativity expressed at the contradictory level of the positive dimensions of the prosthesis of extension and desire. We can look at how prosthesis also numbs and reminds of loss and even produces uncanniness. Following Glynos and Howarth (2007), I refer to this duality through the political logic of instrumentality (equivalence and difference) and the fantasmatic logic of instrumentality (beatific and horrific fantasies). Furthermore, since what is important is not only showing the contradictions but also how they are constitutive, I will show how these logics limit and sustain each other, and how negativity is constitutive of identities.

With this understanding of prosthesis, we can understand the ontology of instrumentality as precarious. But we can also grasp that its hegemonic success (social logic) depends on the disappearance of the borders of the two subjects of the prosthetic relation (the people and education) into a natural fusion. Thus, the mutual contamination that instrumentality presupposes is misrecognized; no one stares at the body as divided between an original body and a prosthetic device. What research needs to do instead is to look at the unresolvable internal conflicts (antagonisms) between the political logics of the instrumentality and the tensions in its fantasmatic underpinnings.

### The political logics of instrumentality: between extension and amputation

Instead of supplementing the sedimented social logic of an instrumentality, a populist discourse reactivates its political dimension to withdraw its transparency. This makes the difference between an institutionalist instrumentality as in the New Labour and a populist instrumentality as in Corbyn. What the New Labour articulates as an educational policy is a reform of the measures of Thatcher. Therefore, the instrumentality of education they propose is only a prosthetic enlargement of the one by Thatcher. On the opposite, for Corbyn, the Thatcherite instrumentality might enlarge the original body of the people. However, it is not an egalitarian enlargement for the entire body of the people. Metaphorically one feels as if this prosthesis is a deformative metamorphosis. Alternatively, Corbyn articulates a new prosthesis that is natural as it makes an equal egalitarian enlargement of the whole body of to emancipate.

However, even with his prosthesis, Corbyn cannot ontologically fix that lack he points at because the incompleteness of education and the people as subjects is ontological. Thus, Corbyn's instrumentality falls into positively hegemonically supplementing discursive associative equivalences, but discursive differences haunt it. I shall now explain this double dimension of instrumentality via the same logic of prosthesis.

## Extension through prosthesis or equivalence through populist articulation

The work of extension can be found in how education as a demand having a negative answer from the conservatives presents itself as unifying many other demands that also had a negative response from the conservatives. This way, education becomes an equivalence and a representation of many social groups; the manifestos of 2017 and 2019 are full of illustrations. Here are some:

From cutting budgets of schools, disproportionately in deprived areas, to closing Sure Start centres and underfunding support for those with special educational needs and disabilities, Conservative policy has meant those in most need have lost out... (Labour Party 2019: 37)

The Conservatives have failed a generation of children with special educational needs and disabilities, who have endured years of cuts and chaos. Labour will provide the necessary funding for children with special educational needs and disabilities (Labour Party 2019: 39).

Create an Emancipation Educational Trust to educate around migration and colonialism, and to address the legacy of slavery and teach how it interrupted a rich and powerful black history which is also British history (Labour Party 2019: 67).

We will “poverty-proof” schools, introducing free school meals for all primary school children, encouraging breakfast clubs, and tackling the cost of school uniforms (Labour Party 2019: 40).

We will recruit nearly 150,000 additional early years staff, including Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators, and introduce a national pay scale, driving up pay for the overwhelmingly female workforce (Labour Party 2019: 38).

Set targets to increase apprenticeships for people with disabilities, care leavers and veterans, and ensure broad representation of women, Black, LGBT and people with disabilities in all kinds of apprenticeships (Labour Party 2017: 43)

The NES will do the same for the 21st, giving people confidence and hope by making education a right, not a privilege (Labour Party 2019: 34).

All of these groups are crystallized with one name, which is the people:

Our National Care Service will work in partnership with the NHS, ensuring care is delivered for people, not for profit (Labour Party 2019: 36).

Education makes our economy stronger, our society richer and our people more fulfilled (Labour Party 2019: 37).

The challenge here, as in prosthesis, is to convince these groups with their different demands that their natural place is within this chain of equivalence that this articulation of education offers. This question is crucial as it turns our attention to the logic of difference as different from equivalence but as its condition. Difference inhibits the theoretical disclosing of instrumentality to a technical supplement and introduces the circularity of instrumentality to an ontological level. To elucidate this, we will turn to something else that the prosthesis does: amputation. We will refer to it here as the radical negativity that subverts any instrumentality.



## Amputation through prosthesis or difference through populist articulation

The instrumentality of education in a populist discourse shares the challenge of the prosthesis, making the different elements of the chain of equivalence look natural and not instrumental. In other words, it needs to convince the different social groups that the demands they are constructed around are only possible to be responded to through responding to the demand of education.

However, this does not entirely eliminate the negativity between these demands; there is always the possibility that the unity of this equivalence is threatened, and that's why this collapse is deferred through the logic of difference. This means that the elements of the chain of equivalence are totalized only through their shared negativity vis-à-vis the equivalence that the name of the conservatives presents. We can see this in how Corbyn articulates, through a logic of difference, another stance as equivalent to the reason for all the needs of the people. It takes for him the name of "the conservatives"; it represents a range of groups and practices that enjoyed the privatization of education at the expense of the people, and thus in this new prosthesis of education by the people, there is also an amputation of this group from the people:

The Conservatives have starved our education system of funding (Labour Party 2019: 37).

while the Tories' so-called free childcare offer is desperately underfunded and excludes many of the most disadvantaged children (Labour Party 2019: 38).

We will end the fragmentation and marketization of our school system by bringing free schools and academies back under the control of the people (Labour Party 2019: 39).

Labour will end the 'high stakes testing culture of schools' (Labour Party 2019: 39).

The academies system is over-centralised, inefficient and undemocratic (Labour Party 2019: 39).

Schools are being subjected to intensified testing, inspection, league tables and competition (Labour Party 2019: 39).

We will close the tax loopholes enjoyed by elite private schools and use that money to improve the lives of all children, and we will ask the Social Justice Commission to advise on integrating private schools and creating a comprehensive education system (Labour Party 2019: 40).

As the prosthesis extends the identity by putting different elements in one chain of equivalence, it also amputates, through blocking, other elements. Thus, there is a transgression from extension through equivalence to amputation through difference, and vice versa. However, these two dimensions are not separate processes. On the opposite, the necessity of one to the other is ontological because the equivalence of the *people* as a totality for the multitude of social groups is only possible by excluding some particularities and taking their negativity to this outside as the condition of equivalence. Similarly, the difference is only possible by

putting another name as equivalent for other differences. Hence, in this relation of representation, we find the failure of harmonic fullness; a moment in which the people as a totality is simultaneous with all the social groups (the population) through the disappearance of all differences into one equivalence that a certain articulation of the instrumentality of education offers. Nonetheless, a totality can still grip the subjects. How is this possible? With this question, we turn to the fantasmatic logics of instrumentality.

### The fantasmatic logics of instrumentality: between desire and fear

I present the fantasmatic logics of the instrumentality of education as a third type after the social and the political ones. Political and fantasmatic logics account for transforming the circularity of instrumentality from an empirical level, described through social logics, to an ontological one.

Fantasmatic logics elucidate how fantasy suppresses the tensions between equivalence and difference by explaining how specific instrumentalities can grip subjects hegemonically and be stabilized despite their contingency. However, since all meaning is contingent, fantasy is not reducible to a fantasm, a false story set against a true one. Therefore, fantasmatic logics cannot be a final technical solution to provide instrumentality with stable meaning. Alternatively, they have the same structure as political logics since they possess contradictory features, exhibiting a kind of radical instability between incompatible positions. I will flesh out these contradictory positions between beatific and horrific dimensions through the logic of co-prosthesis, where we find a tension between desire and a reminder of loss.

### Beatific fantasy, desire for extension and fulfillment

There is a double desire in the experience of the instrumentality of education. On one side, it is the desire to have the power to transform that the instrumentality of education makes available by all the horizons of change it opens once adopted: a prosperous economy, an egalitarian society, an emancipated youth, etc. The other side is the wish for total transparency, a complete embodiment of the instrument of education that truly becomes the people. Briefly, the articulation of education as an instrument by Corbyn to achieve social justice principles is not meant to be perceived as alien from the British people. At the heart of instrumentality, this contradiction can be described as a transcendence striven for through immanence. A populist instrumentality wants the transformation of the existing articulation of the people by the instrumentality of education to happen as an emancipation of the people. However, this is desired in such a way that we are unaware of its presence, as if

this part of the identity of the people is what was amputated and now comes back to take part of it; it is not a foreign part, it is just coming back to its natural state.

The Labour will create a unified National Education Service (NES) for England to move towards cradle-to-grave learning that is free at the point of use. The NES will be built on the principle that “Every Child – and Adult – Matters” and will incorporate all forms of education, from early years through to adult education.

When the 1945 Labour government established the NHS, it created one of the central institutions of fairness of the 20th century. The NES will do the same for the 21st, giving people confidence and hope by making education a right, not a privilege, and building bridges where the Conservatives build barriers (Labour Party 2017: 34).

Labour will reintroduce maintenance grants for university students, and we will abolish university tuition fees.

University tuition is free in many northern European countries, and under a Labour government it will be free here too (Labour Party 2017: 43).

The Labour Party wants all these new elements in its discourse but wants them as natural moments. It wants no one to look skeptical and wonder: “Is this natural? What does this have to do with education?” In these terms, the instrumentality of education in populist articulations is a relation of quasi-transparency that emerges from a feeling of ambiguity since the extension of every prosthetic articulation (equivalence) is only possible on condition of an unwanted feeling of reduction (difference). Now, I turn to this horrific aspect.

### Horrific fantasy, a reminder of amputation, and fear of repulsion

No matter how the embodiment of the instrumentality of education looks natural, what is articulated as an integral part of the body risks provoking a feeling of alienation when it is seen as unauthentic or instrumental. We find something illuminating about this in the Lacanian reading of the mirror stage; it is a stage in psychological development when seeing his image in the mirror leads the child to become aware of his body and distinguish it from other bodies. Thus, in the mirror stage the child attempts to stave off alienation by producing a sense of integrity and wholeness. We find the same logic in reading the instrumentality of education in populist articulations co-prosthetically. Here, self-awareness (as natural, not instrumental through the mirror) is created from the specular image of education with the identity of the people and the people with the identity of education. However, the disappearance of the border between the original body and the prosthetic one in a total fusion (between the body and its specular image), which is the condition of a good instrumentality and a good prosthesis, cannot be sustainably maintained since it is susceptible to be undone in moments of contestation (as the populist ones).

Such moments show instrumentality, not as a whole subject but as split between an original body and a prosthetic one.

Consequently, instrumentality becomes a relation whose elements face resistance to embody each other. The articulation of education as an instrument shows itself as only partially itself and belongs to other domains outside it (popular identity here). It is not itself to control and recognize itself; its naturalness is no longer natural. Similarly, for the identity of the people, in these moments of contestation, a sense of “inclusive awareness” leads to disintegration among the people over education. Remember, for instance, how although the discourse of Corbyn describes a beatific picture of the people in which education is for free and for everyone, he was accused of willing to destroy the economy of universities by imposing free tuition.

Corbyn does not see this horrific dimension that may appear to many; instead, he focuses on the horrific dimension of those existing articulations. This one is causing a disintegration of the original popular identity; if not in the present as we have shown before, then in the future. A horrific future is drawn in which the education the English people get has nothing to do with the future it deserves:

With automation and the Green Industrial Revolution bringing major changes to the industry, it is more important than ever that people have the opportunity to retrain and upskill throughout their lives. Under the Tories, adult education has undergone 10 years of managed decline. England already faces a shortage of people with higher-level technical qualifications, and demand for these skills will only grow as we create new green jobs (Labour Party 2019: 40)

Schools have faced years of budget cuts, leaving headteachers forced to beg parents for money for basic equipment. Despite promising to reverse their own cuts, the Tories latest funding announcement leaves 83% of schools still facing cuts next year (Labor Party 2019: 39).

## Conclusion

This antagonist reading of instrumentality as recognized in a circular move between an empirical and an ontological level has proved to be productive, permitting a better and more explicative analysis of instrumentality that can account for the different nuances of the instrumental relation of populism and education (Glynos and Howarth 2007). However, this is productive also for at least two other ethical and democratic reasons. Firstly, when instrumentality is confined to an empirical level, some articulations of education are declared natural and thus permitted while others are instrumental and thus are banished. Consequently, because the political is ontological and cannot be banished, instead of being played in the democratic space, instrumentality turns to be substituted by essentialist distinctions, such as racist, moralist, or nationalist ones (Mouffe 2005). Finally, recognizing the inability of all instrumentalities to fix the radical ontological negativity, it is necessary to accept the succession of different instrumentality projects without closing any of them into a final totalitarian fullness (Vardoulakis 2020).

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## Summary

This contribution refuses two positions: one defends education against instrumentality, and the other reduces education to a political instrument. Alternatively, it recognizes instrumentality as precarious but necessary. Thus, with focus on populist articulations, education is instrumentalized as a demand to fix the people's incompleteness as a totality. However, both education and the people are lacking totalities, and it is through their articulation as prosthetic bodies one to the other that they help each other to be, however without fully being.

### Keywords

education, populism, instrumentality, antagonism, radical negativity

### Streszczenie

*Instrumentalizm w perspektywie radykalnego braku.*

*Edukacja i populizm jako wzajemne protezy*

Artykuł przeciwstawia się dwóm stanowiskom. Pierwsze broni edukacji przed instrumentalizmem, drugie redukuje ją do narzędzia polityki. Alternatywnie uznają tu instrumentalizm za prowizoryczny, ale nieunikniony. Gdy spojrzymy na strategie populistyczne, widzimy, jak edukacja staje się narzędziem służącym budowaniu społecznej całości (totalności) ludu. Jednak zarówno ów lud, jak i edukacja są całościami wybrakowanymi. Dopiero ich połączenie jako wzajemnych protez pomaga im zaistnieć – chociaż żadnemu z nich w pełni.

### Słowa kluczowe

edukacja, populizm, instrumentalizm, antagonizm, radykalna negatywność