

# NELSON MANDELA

## UNIVERSITY

100 YEARS OF MANDELA

**Inaugural Lecture: Professor André Keet**

Welcome by Professor Sibongile Muthwa

*Vice-Chancellor, Nelson Mandela University*

23 July 2018, Conference Centre, North Campus

Deputy Vice-Chancellors  
Executive Deans of the Faculties  
Professors and all members of the Academy  
Members of Senior Management  
Students  
Honoured Guests  
Ladies and Gentlemen

It is a distinct pleasure for me to welcome you here this evening on the occasion of the inaugural lecture to be delivered by Professor André Keet.

It is a fitting coincidence indeed, Professor, that yours is the first professorial inaugural lecture to be delivered just a few days after we officially launched our year-long Mandela University Centenary Commemoration programme. I know that your lecture today, Professor, will challenge us to reflect on our noble obligations as the University named after Madiba.

I wish to acknowledge and welcome, in particular, our special guests with us this evening –

Members of the Ministerial Oversight Committee for Transformation in Higher Education:

Prof Crain Soudien

Prof Christine Winberg

Prof Pamela Maseko

Prof Kopano Ratele

Dr Mpilo Sithole

I also welcome Honorary Professor Tate from Leeds Beckett University in the United Kingdom, and Honorary Professor Zembylas from the Open University of Cyprus. The two colleagues are our Honorary Professors attached to Professor Keet's Chair of Critical Studies in Higher Education Transformation.

Colleagues of Prof Keet from the University of the Free State and from the Department of Higher Education and Training, welcome.

We welcome friends and intellectual collaborators from universities in South Africa and abroad, you are all welcome.

And then, most importantly, I wish to welcome Professor Keet's partner, Dr Anneline Keet, their sons Ché and Ethan; his mom, mom-in-law, cousin-aunt, siblings and all extended family members who are with us on this auspicious occasion. We know that the support of family, friends and colleagues is at the core of our success as individuals, and they are our compass in the journey of life.

Let me congratulate you Professor, for your outstanding achievement, in particular, as the Chair for Critical Studies in Higher Education Transformation, and indeed as the Chair of the Transformation Oversight Committee in our Sector.

Your highly anticipated lecture is timely, both in terms of our publicly stated ambitions of re-imagining the Humanities as a catalyst to address commanding challenges facing our society, and in terms of engaging with the complexities anticipated in the decolonial project. We hope that your Chair, and you in particular, will continue to be critical in this project. You will agree with me that transforming Higher Education, and transforming the Academy, in particular, remains a fundamental and pivotal task facing all of us.

In welcoming all of you this evening, I want to share what I believe sets André's work apart:

- It has stayed true to the principles of knowledge work as a vessel for transforming, not just the University, but of transforming society. His incisive grasp of the public good purpose of the University truly sets his work apart.

- Running through the veins of Professor Keet's body of work, as a change scholar, is its unfailing commitment to inquire into the complexity and vulnerability of humanity while positing the same as a necessary strength that keeps the playing field even for all who believe in the power of knowledge as a game-changer.
- André's perspective, as is reflected in his work, is the objective affirmation of the necessary juxtaposition of knowledge traditions in a manner that legitimates and exposes the work of young, and often previously disadvantaged, scholars in particular. Thus, under his leadership, the Chair is quickly becoming an intellectual hub for emerging scholars searching for sanctuaries where they can learn to master their craft as knowledge workers.

Finally, André, your enduring and unassuming humility defies all notions of a foreboding professor (of our student days) and serves to shorten the usual social distance, and so you stand out as an embodiment of a great scholar-activist drawn to confronting all forms of exclusion, while providing various collaborative platforms for others to free their agency.

We are looking forward to your lecture André. You are all most welcome ladies and gentlemen.

I now request Professor Andrew Leitch, our DVC: Research and Engagement, to introduce the Professor.

I thank you, enkosi

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## **André Keet**

### **Introduction by Professor Andrew Leitch**

*Deputy Vice Chancellor: Research and Engagement*

André entered the higher education sector, full-time, in October 2008, when he became the Director of the Transdisciplinary Programme at the University of Fort Hare. Between 1996 and 2008, he worked in and with independent public institutions responsible for navigating the crucial transitional phase in South Africa's contemporary history, whilst also teaching part-time and on a visiting basis at universities across the country. Most of his post-1994 work focussed on processes aimed at deepening democracy, social justice as well as the promotion and protection of human rights. Joining the South African Human Rights Commission in 1996, André later became its Deputy Chief Executive Officer. On a unanimous recommendation from parliament, the President appointed André as a part-time Commissioner to the Commission for Gender Equality in 2008.

André's first professorial appointment was as an adjunct-professor at the University of Pretoria, in 2009; this was followed by appointments at the University of Fort Hare in 2010 and the University of the Free State in 2011, as the Director of the Institute for Reconciliation and Social Justice, and advisor to the Rectorate. He was also appointed as the Acting Vice-Rector: Student Affairs and External Relations at the University of the Free State for a short period. As Director, and with the aid and support of associates, staff and postdoctoral fellows, he managed to bring the intellectual culture and research outputs of the Institute to competitive levels.

André has proven himself a productive scholar, who is widely published nationally and internationally. He has supervised and co-supervised more than 15 postdoctoral fellows, as well as doctoral and masters students – a pattern which he is sustaining. He is involved in 12 scholarly editorships, one of which is as joint editor of a two book series on higher education transformation (one national, and one international), with Michael Cross at the Ali Mazrui Centre for Higher Education at the University of Johannesburg.

As part of his scholarly portfolio and academic engagements, André is frequently called upon and invited as quest speaker with more than 40 keynotes, invited talks as well as prestige and special lectures behind his name; and has recently been offered the Marsha Lilien Gladstein

Visiting Professor of Human Rights (Autumn, 2018) at the Human Rights Institute, University of Connecticut, United States of America. He also received a Keynote and Master Class invitation to the International Graduate Centre for the Study of Culture at Justus Leibig University in Germany.

André is presently the Chair for Critical Studies in Higher Education Transformation at Nelson Mandela University, the Chairperson of the Ministerial Oversight Committee on Transformation in South African Public Universities, a Member of the Council on Higher Education, and Visiting Professor at the Centre for Race, Education and Decoloniality, Carnegie School of Education, Leeds Beckett University, in the United Kingdom.

André is from Kylemore, a town close to Stellenbosch in the Western Cape.

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**The Plastic University<sup>1</sup>**  
*Knowledge, Disciplines and Decolonial ‘Circulations’*

André Keet



The university is as plastic as the social figure of ‘Mandela’ after whom it is named. It is as plastic as the globe and its humanity in whose name it exists. And, it is as plastic as the human subject that is ‘perpetually called on to reconfigure itself in relation to the artefacts of the age’, as Mbembe<sup>2</sup> argues in *Critique of Black Reason*.

The very nature of addressing, of writing ... of inaugurating ... oneself, through an address is an act of reconfiguration, of responding to an artefact of the university and the professoriate. It is, when all is said and done, a performance, a performative act: declaring so and so a professor of this or that status, authorizing ‘it’ to utter something with some kind of formative force.

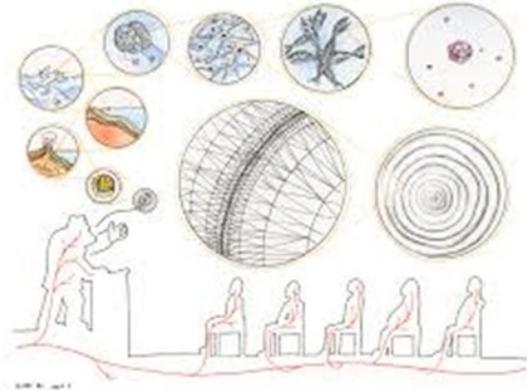
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<sup>1</sup> I am converting this address into a chapter for a compilation, *The Politics of Curriculum*, edited by Jonathan Jansen. Pola Maneli spent time to create and modify images and Nancy Morkel has done a great job in editing this address for public circulation. I am indebted to them.

<sup>2</sup> Mbembe, A. (2017), p4.

I am performing this inaugural with the assistance of some images<sup>3</sup> that I hope can, seamlessly merge into the delivery of the address.

## Desire for 'Professor'



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Change the World

The inaugural, I think we all know, is a confirmation of the normative idea of the professor; it is a form of credentialisation that contributes to defining the social order, within and outside the university ... a sort of 'rite of passage', or 'rite of institution', from one status to another that dissimulates, that is, conceals itself to 'those it dignifies no less than to those it excludes, as a scale of human excellence'<sup>4</sup>. One enters the 'republic of professors'<sup>5</sup> with a diplomatic passport, and all sorts of licenses.

I desire, in a Lacanian sense, this 'rite of passage' as a desire for recognition from the 'Other'. The 'Other', in this context, is the academy, my peers. And I desire this because I presume the 'Other' desires it, and therefore lacks it, and now I have it. The desire for *the professor* is thus the 'passive narcissistic desire' to be the object of the 'Other's' admiration, idealization, or recognition<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> The images were chosen from associations created using keywords from the text at sub-heading intervals to search for 'visual ideas' on the internet. They are referenced from pp31-33.

<sup>4</sup> Wacquant, LJD. (1996). Foreword to Bourdieu, P. *The State Nobility - Elite Schools in the Field of Power*. Polity Press: Cambridge, UK, px.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> See O. Hewitson on Lacan and Desire (2010). <http://www.lacanonline.com/index/2010/05/what-does-lacan-say-about-desire/> [accessed on 5 July 2018].

Studies suggest a ‘crisis of narcissism’<sup>7</sup> within the academy, tagged by a general sense of individualistic self-preoccupation that seems to be endemic to our society and which is, nowadays, generally displayed on our social media platforms. But then again, even as we may admit a ‘crisis of narcissism’ within and around ourselves, I would be patently dishonest to present the academy and professoriate as one big monolith that is woven together by threads of self-regard. Rather, it is probably more accurate to argue that as we are set apart, consecrated, so to speak, by becoming *the professor*, we are credentialised and authorised in ways that give us the power to do harm and good; and we are called upon to make transformative choices on this score.

## Chance and Events



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Change the World

To think of oneself as a reconfiguring plastic subject is to make chance, the accidental and the coincidental, a category in the production of events<sup>8</sup>. Events of actuation and achieving oneself are not simply linked to one’s talents and work. That is, one’s route is never mapped without the possibility of chance, a key notion within the conceptual oeuvre of plasticity. There are some of you here who know of the ‘chance’ of which I speak... chances given to me that produced events for a career. Barney Pityana, Louisa Zondo, Jody Kollapen, Pansy Tlakula, Shirley Mabusela<sup>9</sup>, and many others in the 1990s. Salim Vally and Crain Soudien who

<sup>7</sup> See for instance, <https://www.theguardian.com/science/2017/jan/20/science-victim-crisis-narcissism-academia> [accessed on 5 July 2018].

<sup>8</sup> See Said, EW. (1972). Michel Foucault as an Intellectual Imagination, *Boundary 2*, Vol. 1, No. 1, pp. 1-36; and Malabou, C. (2012). *Ontology of the Accident*, Polity Press: Cambridge, UK.

<sup>9</sup> This group is massive, and literally refers to all Commissioners and staff members at the South African Human Rights Commissioners under the chairpersonships of Barney Pityana, Shirley Mabusela and Jody Kollapen (1996-2007); as well as the myriad of people and organisations I worked with between 1996-2008 in Johannesburg. I also fostered lifelong friendships in this space; too many too acknowledge here ... they, in any case, know who they are.

encouraged me to think, write, and do as an integrated whole. Michael Cross who saw patterns in my work that I did not notice. And a few other crazy people who invited and covered my cost to regional and international conferences at a time when it certainly bemused me.

There are many others here, a great thanks to you too. I need to mention Michalinos and Shirley-Anne who have been stellar intellectual comrades and, in whose company, academic trust has many names. To Carol-Anne, Encarna, Monisha, Felisa and my intellectual collaborators at this university, JC, Willy and my UFS colleagues, the young adults who stayed at our place, and students, past and present: thanks. A massive thanks to the present *CriSHET* team as well, especially Deronique, and those who associate with us.

The colleagues at the University of Pretoria, by chance, were a great scholarly community and, in acknowledging my work in the human rights field outside of academia, offered me an adjunct professoriate not long after I completed my PhD. The open-mindedness of Johan Beckman and Jan Nieuwenhuis stumbled upon me by accident, and I, in true plastic fashion, started reconfiguring myself in relation to the academy. A new career path then started by chance towards the end of 2008 and the beginning of 2009, when I joined the University of Fort Hare, one of my great teachers... where the students, Mvuyo Tom, Kimberley Porteus, Brian Ramadiro, Denise Zinn and Xoli Mtose provided great guidance and camaraderie.

This new career path came with its own insecurities, doubts and struggles, and many confidence-eroding instances.

Let me stay close to the idea of thought radically mixed up with chance, as Edward Said<sup>10</sup> observed about Michel Foucault: it is closer to social reality than the discourse of self-generated achievement and self-proclaimed excellence.

Jonathan Jansen<sup>11</sup> gave me a flexibility of thought, experimentation and praxis to grow my academic track at the University of the Free State and to get involved in the executive economy of the university. At Nelson Mandela University, first Derrick Swartz, and now Sibongile Muthwa, and their respective Deputy Vice Chancellors and executives (especially Prof Leitch as my line manager) and many other colleagues here at Nelson Mandela University, in such dexterous fashion, provided affirmation and support in conventional and non-

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<sup>10</sup> Said on Foucault, p26.

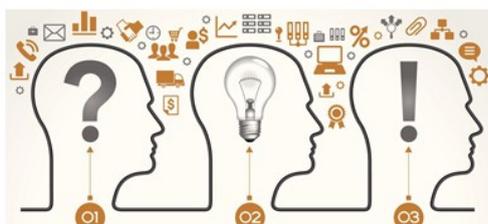
<sup>11</sup> There are many others in the UFS environment: students, the masters and postdoctoral cohort, Lis Lange and other members of the executive.

conventional academic forms; and they view my work prior, in and outside my academic career, as an integrated package ... indivisible from each other. In fact, it is regarded as a strength and asset. I was lucky to have crossed their paths at the time that I did ... I am grateful.

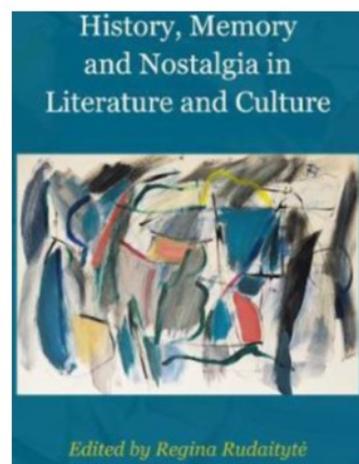
Prof Muthwa's finesse, acumen and flair in holding massive processes together in rightful directions, has been generative. From this flows her commitment to the scholarly and pragmatic project of higher education transformation in whose slipstream I am now operating. In addition, she has a pleasant, witty sense of humour and has, from time to time, made fun of this lecture title and the idea of being the Vice Chancellor of a *plastic university*.

I am thankful.

### Categories of Self-Understanding/ History, Memory, Nostalgia



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Change the World

Between chance and design, between history and memory, between nostalgia and heritage, lies the responsibility of self-understanding and self-clarification: to try knowing oneself, and working on the self. On an institutional level, one has to acknowledge that the *inaugural* is key in a set of legitimating practices that ensure the distribution of scholarly and other privileges, and authority, according to historically determined patterns of inclusion and exclusion. The rupture of that history that gives me a chance, at this moment, should not undercut our general acknowledgement of the reproductive impulses of social institutions.

To make sense of this, one has to reflect on one's own making within the professoriate – not through self-indulgent reflections, soft biographical reinventions or manufactured histories – but, to make it more personal, through excavating the historical and political

conditions of my own production. To disclose, to myself, ‘the categories of self-understanding and social derivation of thought’<sup>12</sup> that I employ. That is, I have to reveal, for myself, forms of narcissism and self-interest that steer me, in addition to questioning my sense of a social-justice-politics that must, always, appear better than that of others. That is, I consciously need to work against what I regard as the penchant of critical scholars, like myself, to think we are always better in the know<sup>13</sup>, and that our work surpasses, simply by being critical, those of others. This form of ego is the generator of new dogmas, and is anti-intellectual. Its logical architecture is identical to that which it opposes.

But, how does one learn to renounce oneself, or this or that part of the self?<sup>14</sup>

In the professoriate, for most, self-admiration and egocentricity comes as part of the cost-to-company package folded into the desire for self-preservation, and the attainment of social and academic power.

If I know this to be true, the question is then: ‘do I want to abdicate, renounce *the professor?*’ No, I desire it (or aspire to it). Not simply to authorize myself, but to be able to play the game... to have a feel for it so as to be complicit in its power... to work against it.

The norms<sup>15</sup> that form the professor consistently act on me, they orchestrate me: playing into the desire for prestige, distinction and authority. To understand this is to understand ourselves as agentic, as plastic. That is, one is acting and acted upon, simultaneously. What Butler<sup>16</sup> is arguing here is that to acknowledge that one is acted upon, is to know that one can act ... one have agency, *you* are agentic.

‘Do not claim a fluffy free agency’, I instruct myself most of time, because I may use it as a stratagem to avoid the hard work one has to do on oneself, to identify that which needs renouncing, so that I know how to carry academic and regulatory authority in the best possible way.

Thus, I am accepting and refusing *the professor at one and the same time*’, as a transformative gesture, as a form of working on oneself, made possible by the plastic processes

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<sup>12</sup> Bourdieu, P. (1988). *Homo Academicus*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, pxii.

<sup>13</sup> See Hoy, D. (2004). *Critical Resistance: From Poststructuralism to Post-critique*. London: MIT Press.

<sup>14</sup> See Foucault, M. (1988). *Technologies of the Self*, MIT Press: Cambridge.

<sup>15</sup> See Butler, J. (2015). *Senses of the Subject*. New York: Fordham University Press, pp1-16.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*.

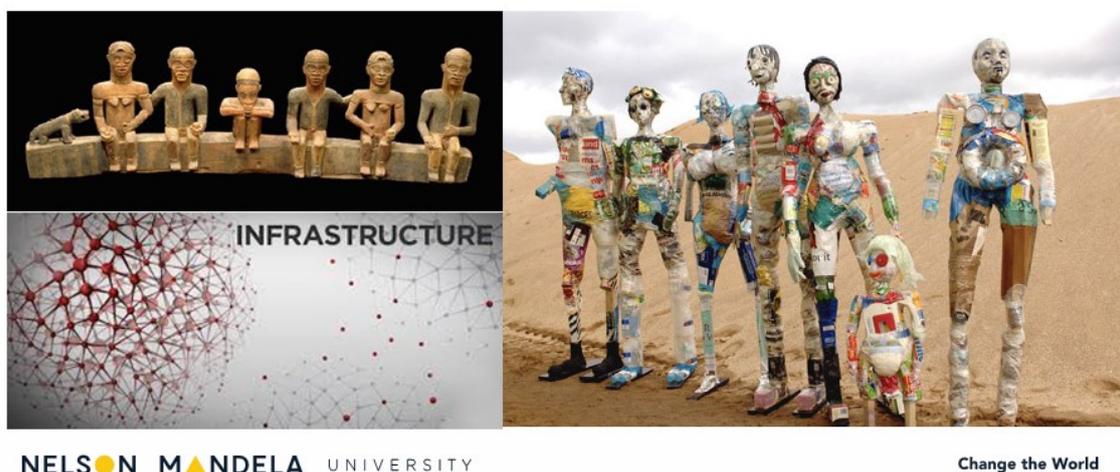
of subject composition, de-composition and re-composition as a never-ending journey. 'Plasticity [thus] provides a self-transformative conception of being'<sup>17</sup>.

Moreover, plasticity makes the deciphering of the subject possible.

How am I to decipher myself? Maybe, as Butler<sup>18</sup> so powerfully argues, one breaks from a history but that history keeps installing you, that history is sitting here 'and so I am not really thinkable without that formation'. The idea of this 'André' is not cognizable without those historical arrangements.

'At the same time, nothing determines me in advance—I am not formed once and definitively, but continuously or repeatedly. I am still being formed as I form myself in the here and now [...] I am never simply formed, nor am I ever fully self-forming'<sup>19</sup>. That is, I am plastic and although I have agency, it is not free-floating. The very notion of plasticity suggests a flexibility of form, and a resistance to forming. We work this quality of plastic on a daily basis: on knowledge, material, our bodies, thoughts, actions and psyches within and outside the university.

## Agency and Emotional Infrastructure



<sup>17</sup> Gratton, P. (2010). Review of Malabou, C. *Plasticity at the Dusk of Writing: Dialectic, Destruction, Deconstruction*. Translated by Carolyn Shread. New York: Columbia UP. (2010b). <https://www.csc.org/2010/06/26/catherine-malabou-plasticity-at-the-dusk-of-writing> [accessed on 2 May 2018].

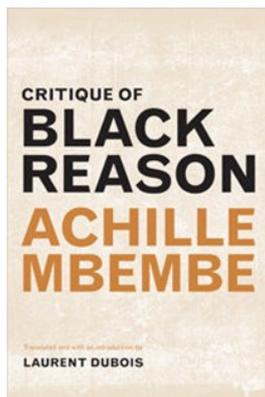
<sup>18</sup> Butler, *Senses*, p6.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.b

To act, I am in need of support. I need an emotional infrastructure<sup>20</sup> to survive at the edge of my vulnerability, at the interface of structure and self. That support is coded into one's family, friends, colleagues and places.

In this audience is Anneline, Ché and Ethan, my mom, Caroline, my cousin-aunt, Louise, my mom-in-law, Eileen, some of siblings, Willy, Sonia, Julian, Neil, Lorraine and Shiela, and other family members, Vernon, Burton and Allazei<sup>21</sup>. They represent the plastic collapse of generations in this one space ... giving and receiving form in an infinite exchange of love, sanction and moderation. A massive thanks to them permeates this entire inaugural, from beginning to end. Both the competencies and courage for self-decoding are produced with them. Anneline (to whom I owe much), Ché, Ethan and I also worked the post-1994 South African space together as a young family up in Johannesburg and I am 'sorted' to have them as my partner and immediate friends and comrades. Johannesburg is a master educator... a plastic city of note ... giving and receiving form. Then there is Kylemore<sup>22</sup> close to Stellenbosch, my hometown, where, as all of you who come from rural and small towns know, one needs fewer words and actions to get by because your historical and cultural codes are forever present.

## Maropeng, Mbembe, Mandela



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Change the World

I am trying, and I hope it works, to bring the topic of my inaugural in respectful conversation with a critique of its performance; in dialogue with my attempt at self-

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<sup>20</sup> Butler, *Senses*, p7.

<sup>21</sup> There are, obviously, many others ... too many to mention here.

<sup>22</sup> Thank you, to this entire community, its structures and its churches; and the many friends in this space.

deciphering; and in discussion with those plastic human subjects who have and are playing such an important part in my life. For the rest of my address, I will attempt at integrating these into the idea of the ‘plastic university’.

Before I start with these sets of arguments let me first simply state that I view ‘critique’ as an act of fidelity, commitment and renewal. The critique of the academy is first and foremost a self-critique, a critique of myself. Critique is the opening up of categories, to open up space for critical programmatic work.

Because I am organized, like everyone else, around time in a speech like this, I needed to package some of my key arguments as proxies. Maropeng in the Cradle of Humankind up in Gauteng stands proxy for the massive work being done on our Continent as part of excavating her dignity, whether linked to her history, intellectual traditions, social organization, science, archaeology, and so on. In the shadow of Maropeng, I do not have to make arguments on knowledges, epistemes and social practices in relation to our Continent. I take them as part of our everyday understanding of place.

I am also, without permission, delegating Mbembe, via *Critique of Black Reason*, to speak for me on the human subject as plastic, in relation to the immense struggle and hope of Black people across the world. Amidst the hardship of the Continent and her people, historical and otherwise, Mbembe<sup>23</sup> argues that the black body, ‘in spectacular reversal, [...] becomes the symbol of a conscious desire for life, a force springing forth, buoyant and plastic, fully engaged in the act of creation and capable of living in the midst of several times and several histories at once’.

I could have asked the work of some of you, and others, and especially those of my students, including some in this audience, to stand in for me, but my time is limited. My apologies.

If Mbembe is the wordsmith for plasticity, then Mandela is its shape. Thus, if ever we want to put an image to human plasticity at this historical moment, Mandela will undoubtedly appear as a social figure: a figure of ‘working-towards-justice’. Though this is a topic for another discussion, I simply have to say it like this, here and now, since the perpetual plastic

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<sup>23</sup> 2017:6.

reconfigurations he and so many others of his time were called upon to perform is testimony to the self-transforming capacity of the subject we claim for ourselves today.



## 'The Plastic'

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Change the World

Judging by the way in which they were teasing me about the title of my lecture, some of my colleagues may have had some plastic buildings in mind with Engineering, the Built Environment and Information Technologies at the forefront of building a plastic faculty and university; Health Sciences preparing themselves for 'plastic surgery'; and other disciplines working around plastic arts and performances. Environmentally speaking, a few thoughts on the battle against plastic, a substance that seems to overwhelm the globe, probably also entered some people's minds.

A key image that may also have emerged may associate plastic with that which is not real, that is, the plastic university as an imitation of the real thing. However, far from it, this lecture puts forward the plastic university to be imagined as a self-transforming machine, with infinite possibilities for doing just, and doing right.

'Plastic is a household name, linked to ordinary speech'<sup>24</sup>. In Roland Barthes's essay 'Plastic', in *Mythologies*, he says that plastic is 'in essence [...] the stuff of alchemy' and that 'plastic is the very idea of its infinite transformation'<sup>25</sup>. This suggests that, as a material, plastic

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<sup>24</sup> See Hope, A. (2014). The future is plastic: refiguring Malabou's plasticity, *Journal for Cultural Research*, Vol. 18, No. 4, p334.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

is very much the locus of a complex set of relations between discourse and figure, that it is its own idea as a ‘constructed’ material<sup>26</sup>.

## Plasticity

**Maria Naita: Sculpturing her heart to the world**



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Change the World

Between 2005 and 2017<sup>27</sup>, Catherine Malabou, *the* social theorist of plasticity, brought the material and concept together in an impressive range of studies. In doing so, she has captured ‘the spirit of the time’<sup>28</sup>, putting plasticity forward as more than a concept but as a ‘motor scheme’: ‘it is one of the inescapable means through which we think, understand, and model the world’ [...] It has ‘gradually asserted itself as the style of an era’<sup>29</sup>.

In *Plasticity at the dusk of writing*, Malabou (2010b:1) declares the book a portrait of the concept of plasticity, generally viewed as her signature concept, as referring to ‘mutability, change, exchange, morphing, metamorphosis, transformation’ (Galloway, 2012). Plasticity is a well-known concept in the scientific disciplines<sup>30</sup>; for instance, the scholarship of Mark Solms<sup>31</sup>, a South African psychoanalyst and neuropsychologist, features prominently in

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> The interpretive and pragmatic possibilities around transformability and transformation have been given new impetus in Malabou’s formulations of plasticity since the publication of her first book *The future of Hegel: Plasticity, temporality and dialectic* (2005). These possibilities have since been taken through and advanced in *Plasticity at the dusk of writing: Dialectic, destruction, deconstruction* (2010b), *The Heidegger Change: On the Fantastic in Philosophy* (2011), *The new wounded: From neurosis to brain damage* (2012) and *Before Tomorrow: Epigenesis and Rationality* (2016).

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Shread, C. (2011). Catherine Malabou’s Plasticity in Translation, *Du système en traduction: approches critiques*. Volume 24, numéro 1, p128.

<sup>30</sup> Moser, W. I. (2007). Integrative comments - Plasticity: More than memory. In Roediger, H.L., Yadin, D. and Fitzpatrick, S.M (eds). *Science of Memory: Concepts*. New York: Oxford University Press.

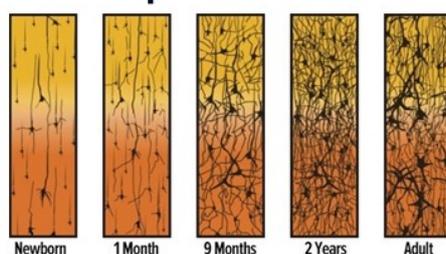
<sup>31</sup> Solms, M. & Turnbull, O. (2002). *The Brain and the Inner World: An Introduction to the Neuroscience of Subjective Experience*. London & New York: Other/Karnac.

Malabou's work. Her work also provides analytical resources in various spheres of study: the 'natural sciences', law, education, the humanities, the social sciences, and so on.

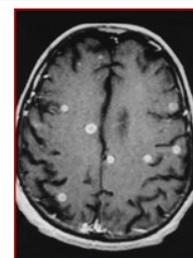
'Plasticity connotes both the giving and receiving of form [...] Plasticity thus works in terms of both hard and moldable materials: the marble to which the sculptor gives form, or the clay the potter molds. Of course, many of the techniques used in the plastic arts combine processes of giving and receiving form. Plasticity is also associated with modern technological interventions on the body, as in plastic surgery'<sup>32</sup> to which I referred earlier.

In addition, via the neurosciences and the plasticity of the brain and its regenerative possibilities, Malabou develops 'plasticity' as a basis for social and political analysis. She 'reads recent scientific research to suggest [...] that the organizational structures and functioning of the brain offer us, above all, a model of freedom'<sup>33</sup>; but also a model of destruction, 'that is, to blow up or bomb using plastic explosives'<sup>34</sup>.

## Four plasticities



- Developmental
- Modulational
- Reparative/ regenerative
- Destructive



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There are, arguably, four fields of action for the plasticity of the brain: developmental, modulational, reparative and destructive<sup>35</sup>. The destructive here refers to brain traumas that may sometimes split the subject's history: 'an unprecedented persona comes to live with the

<sup>32</sup> Shread, *Plasticity*: p129.

<sup>33</sup> Shread, *Plasticity*: pp129-130.

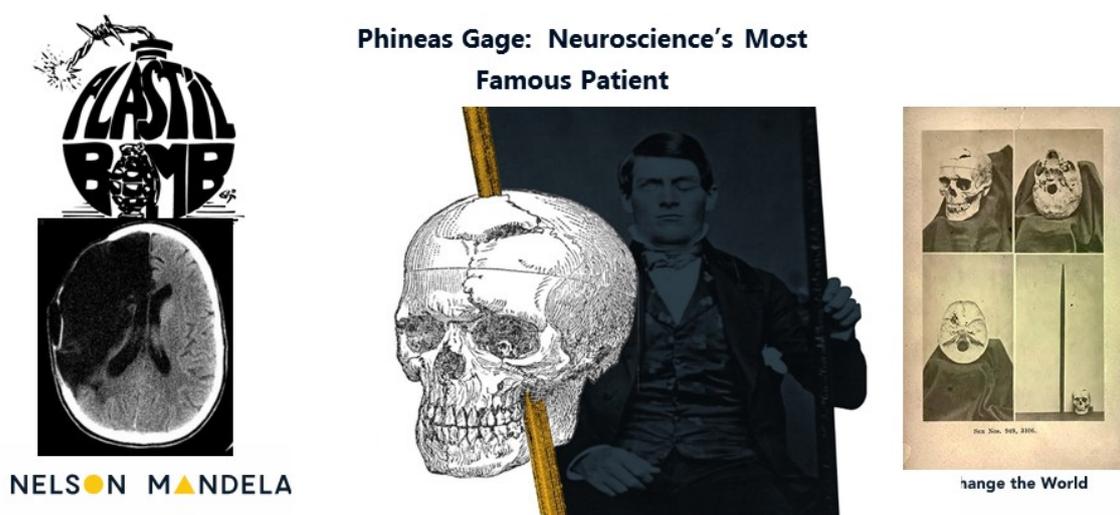
<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> See Malabou, C. (2008). *What Should we Do with our Brain?* New York: Fordham University Press and Malabou, C (2012). *Ontology of the Accident*, Cambridge, Polity Press.

former person – an unrecognizable persona whose present comes from no past and whose future harbors nothing to come'<sup>36</sup>. Such may be the case of victims of Alzheimer's disease and other brain traumas.

In Malabou's battle with Freud, she is critical of the impossibility of erasure in mental life. For Freud, the 'the primitive stages can always be re-established; the primitive mind is, in the fullest meaning of the word, imperishable'<sup>37</sup>. But, this is not the case with victims of destructive plasticity.

## Destructive/ Reparative



Phineas Gage<sup>38</sup> is an American construction worker who, in 1848, survived an accident in which an iron rod, driven through his head, destroyed much of his brain's frontal lobe. 'Some scientists argued that Gage recovered after his accident and resumed something like a normal life—a possibility that, if true, could transform our understanding of the brain's ability to heal itself'<sup>39</sup>.

In contradistinction to this reparative capacity of the brain, Annah Mkhonto from Nkomazi relayed her story in April this year when the community wanted to burn her mom as

<sup>36</sup> Malabou, *Ontology*, pp1-2.

<sup>37</sup> See Ruda, F. and Hamza, A. (2018). Interview with Catherine Malabou. *Crisis and Critique*. Volume 5, Issue 1, p443.

<sup>38</sup> Cherry, K. (2018). 'Phineas Gage's Brain Injury - His Injury Led to New Discoveries in Neuroscience' <https://www.verywellmind.com/phineas-gage-2795244> [accessed 26 June 2018]. See also Saplakoglu, Y (2018). 'Part of This Boy's Brain Was Removed. The Rest of His Brain Made Sure He Wouldn't Notice'. <https://www.livescience.com/63216-brain-plasticity-lobectomy.html> [accessed on 7 August 2018]. I became aware of this case as after the delivery of the inaugural address.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

a witch in response to the new, strange persona occasioned by the Alzheimer's disease with which she was afflicted<sup>40</sup>. In this respect, 'a new, unprecedented persona comes to live with the former person, and eventually takes up all the room', as Malabou argues in *Ontology of the Accident*<sup>41</sup>.

My apologies for this example; I could find no other way to explain the destructive plasticity of the brain as linked to the annihilation of form, identity, as is the meaning in reference to the power of the plastic bomb.

Malabou's argument, in social theoretical terms, is that the 'impossibility of oblivion coincides with the inability to change, with the tendency to restore an earlier state of things, and with the deadly mechanism of the compulsion to repeat'<sup>42</sup>; this is a state with which we are all too familiar in the academy.

## Teaching, Knowledge, Disciplines



If this is true, the psyche of the university will always want to return to its imperishable self, making transformation work futile. However, it is probably more accurate to think of the possibility of 'destruction' (not destruction itself) as the condition of transformation, as the university 'between the emergence and destruction of form'<sup>43</sup>.

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<sup>40</sup> Maseko, C. (2018). 'Alzheimer's patients misunderstood and mistreated'. <https://www.health-e.org.za/2018/04/25/alzheimers-patients-misunderstood-and-mistreated/> [accessed on 19 June 2018].

<sup>41</sup> p1.

<sup>42</sup> Malabou, Interview, p444.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

The notion of ‘plasticity’ provided a sort of think pad for me in my work on higher education transformation. I believe that the capacity for transformation drives the ontological vocation of the academy through its knowledge project. That is, the ‘origin’ of the university, from which it has detached itself, is plastic: flexible, with an inscribed transformative ability rooted in the ‘nature’ of the knowledge and the disciplines with which it works. The university’s essence is transformability. As our ways of disciplining the university have concealed this essence, the decolonial turn, with its circulations, in my reading, is a call to excavate the plasticity of the university...a kind of unburdening of epistemic freedom as a key notion in any definition on the decolonisation of knowledge.

The concealment of this ability has more to do with how academic practices and behaviours, via disciplining, came into being than with the nature of knowledge itself. How this capacity is stifled and mummified would demand studies in critical institutional ethnographies, and the subjects formed by these.

In discussions with Anneline, whilst she was heading the Social Work Department at the University of the Free State, and through our partnership as academics, the idea of interpreting institutional culture as consisting of a network of seven economies took shape. They are management, administrative, material, socio cultural, affective, intellectual/epistemic and political economies. Of course, I draw on other resources as well.

I argue that the social structure of the academy, though embedded, is disclosed in equity patterns, promotions, privileges and sanctions; the way in which scientific authority is distributed and transferred; and the constitution of university committees, such as disciplinary, ethics and research committees, and so on, as well as the regulatory, material and discursive power and authority assigned to them.

That is, I came to view the social structure of the academy and the institutional culture of universities as co-constituting each other. They became the steering mechanisms of our social practices. I have done some of this work for the 2015 Higher Education Transformation Summit<sup>44</sup>, which is readily available, and which I cannot share in detail here.

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<sup>44</sup> This can be found at [http://www.summit.dhet.gov.za/Docs/2015Docs/Annex%2010\\_Keet\\_Institutional%20cultures-Environments.pdf](http://www.summit.dhet.gov.za/Docs/2015Docs/Annex%2010_Keet_Institutional%20cultures-Environments.pdf)

My objective was simply to apply the ‘economies’ thesis as a critical interpretive scheme for making sense of how we understand ourselves and how we do our work, because these economies are instrumental in directing our conscious and unconscious mental structures, which are converted into social practices.

Stated differently, the ‘economies’ thesis presented me with one way of explaining how the university has lost its plasticity.

In the context of present debates on knowledge and curriculum within South African universities, the idea of plasticity signifies a decolonial undertaking, an excavation of sorts. Such shovelling is an uneasy and awkward task given the present over-proximity of the decolonial discourse<sup>45</sup>.

Over the past few years, I built, self-referentially, on my previous attempts to style Catherine Malabou’s notion of plasticity<sup>46</sup> into a useful tool for university transformation praxes in South Africa. On this basis, I argue for an interpretive orientation that can grasp and re-animate the university’s originary position as plastic. Not as an exercise in fruitless thinking, but to disclose, to itself, ourselves, the university’s intuitive aptitude for deep transformations.

I joined, formally, the university sector in the late 2000s after spending fourteen years in the fields of human rights and human rights education. In “Does human rights education exist?”<sup>47</sup>, I tracked my shifts in praxes over these years with an interest in the renewal of social practices, traditions and institutions as I came to experience and appraise human rights education as inherently conservative and uncritical in relation to ‘human rights universals’.

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<sup>45</sup> Keet, A. (2017). An Awkward, Uneasy (De) coloniality (editorial), *Education as Change*. 21 (1).

<sup>46</sup> Malabou, C. (2000). "The Future of Hegel: Plasticity, Temporality, Dialectic." *Hypatia* 15 (4): 196-220. doi: 10.1111/j.1527-2001.2000.tb00362.x.; Malabou, C. (2005). *The Future of Hegel: Plasticity, Temporality, and Dialectic*. New York: Routledge; Malabou, C. (2008). *What Should We Do with Our Brain?*. New York: Fordham University Press; Malabou, C. (2010a.) "The Future of the Humanities." *Theory@Buffalo*, no .14, 8-16; Malabou, C. (2010b). *Plasticity at the Dusk of Writing: Dialectic, Destruction, Deconstruction*. New York: Columbia University Press; Malabou, C. (2011). *The Heidegger Change: On the Fantastic in Philosophy*. Albany: State University of New York Press; Malabou, C. (2012). *The New Wounded: From Neurosis to Brain Damage*. New York: Fordham University Press; Malabou, C. (2016). *Before Tomorrow: Epigenesis and Rationality*. Chambridge: Polity.

<sup>47</sup> Keet, A. (2017). Does Human Rights Education Exist? *International Journal of Human Rights Education*. 1 (1).

In a set of four written pieces in 2014<sup>48</sup>, I, in a much firmer way, started relating plasticity to renewal; the abbreviated references to these, in this address, are: ‘Plasticity’, ‘Epistemic Othering’, ‘Plastic Knowledges’ and ‘Refractions’. I linked these writings to the university transformation space, and the renewal of knowledge.

I also delivered talks on ‘Plastic Education’ and, some time ago, at one of HESA’s (Higher Education South Africa, now Universities South Africa) leadership workshops, I presented my thesis on the production of institutional culture via teaching and learning, research and community engagement, and its sculpturing effect on the university.

In ‘Epistemic othering’ I tracked the history of disciplining knowledge and the rapid expansion of disciplines in the twentieth century as linked to the history of the university. From a transformation perspective, this tracking was necessary because the disciplines, more so than any other social, intellectual or administrative arrangement, permeate and rule the life of the university<sup>49</sup>:

Accepting that disciplines are regarded as the architectures for producing and organising knowledge, we are, socially and conceptually, disciplined by our disciplines; they help produce our world (Ellen Messer-Davidow, David R. Shumway and David J. Sylvan, 1993: vii)<sup>50</sup>. Apart from the generation of knowledge, academic practices associated with disciplines are all part of a system of strategies that produce and maintain the rules of scientific recognition. It follows that the disruption of the disciplines will contribute to dislodging the rules that generate the existing patterns of rewards and sanctions within the academy.

Precisely because of its disruptive possibilities, the system, in typical self-preserving fashion, converted the decolonising of knowledge project into curriculum ‘chatter’ and ‘clutter’, aimed at turning decolonisation into a metaphor. This is the cautionary note that I capture as ‘decolonial circulations’ in the sub-title of this address.

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<sup>48</sup> Keet, A. (2014). Refractions: Social Theory, Human Rights and Philosophy. *Acta Academica*; Keet, A. (2014). Plastic knowledges: Transformation and Stagnations in the Humanities. *Alterations*; Keet, A. (2014b). Epistemic ‘othering’ and the decolonization of knowledge. *Africa Insight*; Keet, A. (2014). Spectacles and spectators: Higher education and the ‘disappearance’ of democracy. *South African Journal for Higher Education*; Keet, A. (2014). Plasticity, hope and human rights education. In Bozalek, V., Leibowitz, B., Carolissen, B., & Boler, M. *Discerning critical hope in in educational practices*. London & New York: Routledge;

<sup>49</sup> Epistemic Othering, p29.

<sup>50</sup> Messer-Davidow, Ellen, David R. Shumway, and David Sylvan. 1993. *Knowledges: Historical and Critical Studies in Disciplinarity*. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia.

Tuck and Yang<sup>51</sup>, some time ago, in 2012, were already troubled by this development towards a manicurist and veneerist application of the decolonial as an abstract, an aesthetic: ‘One trend we have noticed, with growing apprehension, [they say], is the ease with which the language of decolonization has been superficially adopted into education and other social sciences’<sup>52</sup>.

The present South African higher education scene resembles the images embedded in this quotation. The reproductive schema at work is obvious. I have pursued this line of reasoning in ‘Epistemic othering’ through the critiques of post-structural, post-colonial and African studies, and their colonising complicities, by mobilising the work of Zeleza<sup>53</sup>, Gikandi<sup>54</sup> and Ndlovu-Gatsheni<sup>55</sup> (2013).

My aim was not to dismiss these intellectual trends and scholarly contributions, but to demonstrate how they, as knowledge formations, can inscribe that which they criticise. I tried to show, via the nature of the disciplines, that ideology is registered at the very point at which science is articulated upon knowledge<sup>56</sup>.

The task of decolonising knowledge may thus not be able to escape the hold of ideology over science; and, as such, it runs the risk of re-registering existing epistemic injustices and inventing new ones.

While in ‘Epistemic othering’ I argue that decolonising knowledge would be a demanding task, in ‘Plastic knowledges’ I suggest that knowledge itself holds transformative reserves that should find institutional expression within universities.

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<sup>51</sup> Tuck, E and Yang, K. (2012). "Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor." *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 1 (1): 1-40.

<sup>52</sup> p.2.

<sup>53</sup> Zeleza, P.T. (ed.), 2007. *The Study of Africa. Volume 2: Global and Transnational Engagements*. Dakar: Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa; and Zeleza, P.T. (2009). African Studies and Universities since Independence: the challenges of epistemic and institutional decolonization. *Transition*, Volume 101, Issue 1.

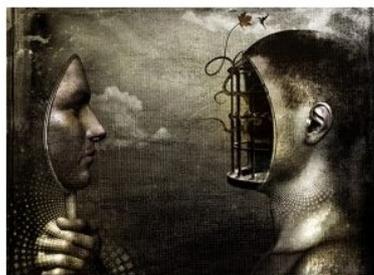
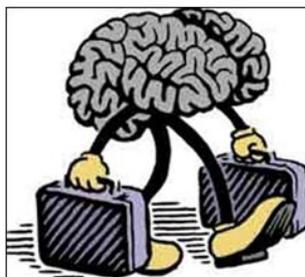
<sup>54</sup> Gikandi, S. (2002). Globalization and the Claims of Postcoloniality. *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, Volume 100, issue 3.

<sup>55</sup> Ndlovu-Gatsheni, S.J. (2013). *Coloniality of Power in Postcolonial Africa: Myths of Decolonisation* [e-book]. Dakar: Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa. Available at [http://www.codesria.org/IMG/pdf/2-Coloniality\\_of\\_Power\\_Ndlovu\\_Chapter\\_2.pdf](http://www.codesria.org/IMG/pdf/2-Coloniality_of_Power_Ndlovu_Chapter_2.pdf) [Accessed 20 November 2013].

<sup>56</sup> Foucault, M. (2013). *Archaeology of Knowledge*. London: Taylor & Francis, p204.

Yet, I maintain that knowledge transformations would be challenging because there is sufficient empirical evidence to suggest the regularity and predictability of reproductive social practices within universities, even as we claim otherwise.

## A critical ontology of ourselves



The challenge relates to our weak categories of self-understanding; we do not know ourselves. And, generally, we tend to resist the findings of studies on the academy itself. The academy has become too accustomed to modes of life and thought ‘which remain opaque to [it] because they are too familiar’, as Bourdieu<sup>57</sup> argued some time ago.

This suggests a link between the will to know and the will to power, which in the end disallows analyses of the individual and collective defence mechanisms of the academy (Bourdieu, 1988:xiv). You would probably have a hard time getting ethical clearance to study the historical production of the professoriate linked to the political construction of the disciplines at any university in South Africa; *we do not want to know*.

In short, we, in the academy, first, lack a critical ontology of ourselves<sup>58</sup>. Second, we lack the methodological and intellectual dispositions and tools to study the hidden determinants that constitute our own practices<sup>59</sup>.

<sup>57</sup> Bourdieu, P. (1988). *Homo Academicus*. Stanford: Stanford University Press. pxi.

<sup>58</sup> Foucault, as read by Malabou (2010a).

<sup>59</sup> Wacquant, LJD. (1990). Sociology as Socioanalysis: Tales of *Homo Academicus*. *Sociological Forum*. Volume 5, Issue 4: pp677-689.

I am deeply implicated in this. Guilty, believe you me ...; thus, I always have to return to the *politics* of my work.

The *politics* of plasticity is formulated by the interplay between love and justice as competences<sup>60</sup> in our attempt to tackle the massive social justice challenges of our society and institutions. Working within the motor-scheme of plasticity is for me a critical *politics*, because ‘now that capitalism, political liberalism, and techno-science have become the chief modes of thought’<sup>61</sup>, the humanities, social and [natural] sciences need to recover their plastic reserves to be able to engage with these developments. Working against seemingly inevitable forms imposed upon us by capitalism, Malabou argues for opposing the ‘ontologico-capitalist form of transformation with a counterform’, that is, being-as-change<sup>62</sup>.

Thus, ‘plasticity’ presents itself as one of the productive tools within the broad body of critical thought for my own processes of deciphering and self-clarification, as well as for how to think and do transformation work in order to advance social solidarity through and within universities. In its emergence, the ‘plastic university’ has been imaged in multiple ways in the various speeches that the Vice Chancellor, Chancellor, the Chairperson of Council, students and others have delivered over the past few months and was, in the listening campaign, expressed with great clarity as the plastic interface between self and structure.

Within the general description of the work of the Chair, which I hold at present, is a simple premise: the transformation of the university in socially-just directions is intrinsically tied to knowledge and pedagogy, and the constant plastic reconfigurations of ourselves and our social practices and its expression in real, programmatic work. Information about the work of the Chair, including its research programme, is accessible on our website<sup>63</sup>.

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<sup>60</sup> See Boltanski, L. (2012). *Love and Justice as Competences*. Cambridge, UK: Polity, see especially pp153-159.

<sup>61</sup> Skafish P. (2011) Translator’s Foreword. In: Malabou C *The Heidegger change: on the fantastic in philosophy*. Albany, NY: New York State University Press. pxix.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> <http://crishet.mandela.ac.za/>

# Agency and Plasticity



To conclude, where does this leave the agent with agency you may ask?

If our disciplines discipline us, then the organisation of knowledge structures us. We are literally our disciplines, and we title ourselves according to our disciplines; and authorise ourselves via our disciplines ... 'I speak as this or that'. This is not a critique, simply a statement of observation.

Malabou argues that the borders of all sciences are plastic<sup>64</sup>. That is, plasticity, as the character of the brain, is woven into the disciplines, from the start. I had this logic in mind when developing the arguments for 'Plastic Knowledges' and followed it up with example-driven arguments in 'Refractions', with a focus on the pragmatic possibilities of knowledge transformation as key to deep change within universities.

In some of my work I explored how one can reimagine a whole cluster of the present humanities and social sciences disciplines under a new plastic arrangement of 'Social Praxes', and I considered reformulations for the study of human rights and law. There are colleagues at this and other universities who thoughtfully work on the Africanisation of their disciplines, in the natural and social sciences. They are shovellers – shovelling, excavating, scooping out the plasticity of knowledge to reveal the university's innate capacity for transformation.

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<sup>64</sup> Malabou, 2010a.

Unearthing, digging up the epistemic injustices resident in knowledge, and reform it... in true plastic fashion. The work of these colleagues is premised on plasticity and the transformation of the knowledge project as key to change in higher education. We have seen other examples of this in various disciplines around Black Studies, and the scene is set to explore a radical decolonial critical theory or, as Rabaka<sup>65</sup> would have it, an Africana Critical Theory.

I have also, at a different time, explored, with the help of Nabudere's work on Cheikh Anta Diop, how transdisciplinarity has been a 'natural' orientation of the sciences, which has been disciplined out of existence<sup>66</sup>. With it, are buried the transformative plastic capacities of knowledge that need to be recovered.

There are more and more practices that present avenues of disciplinary resistance and for new paths to open up; arguing that undisciplined knowledge together with the fracturing and re-/ de-disciplining of knowledge are becoming standard concepts and actions in our daily practices as academics<sup>67</sup>.

These practices show that 'every situation can be cracked open from the inside'<sup>68</sup>, even if institutions are so obviously powerful.

We simply need to give better expression to the fact that we are plastic human beings, engaged with plastic knowledges, building a plastic, self-transforming university and higher education sector.

Thank you

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<sup>65</sup> Rabaka, R. (2009). *African Critical Theory, reconstructing the black radical tradition, from WEB Du Bois and CLR James to Frantz Fanon and Amilcar Cabral*, Lanham: Lexington Books.

<sup>66</sup> See Keet, A. (2010). A Philosophical Rationale for Transdisciplinarity. Unpublished paper, University of Fort Hare.

<sup>67</sup> See for instance, de Souza, A. and Purpura, A. (2012) *Undisciplined Knowledge*. In *African Art, Interviews, Narratives: Bodies of Knowledge at Work*, ed. Joanna Grabski and Carol Magee. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

<sup>68</sup> Rancière, J. (2011). *The Emancipated Spectator*. London: Verso. p49.

## **André Keet**

### **Congratulations by Professor Denise Zinn**

*Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Teaching and Learning, Nelson Mandela University*

Good evening ladies and gentlemen. Molweni. Goeie naand almal.

On behalf of the Nelson Mandela University, all the academics, friends and colleagues who have travelled from far and wide, and on behalf of all of our students assembled here this evening, I would like to extend our congratulations to Prof André Keet on the occasion of his inauguration into the ranks of the professoriate at our institution.

In all the inaugurations in which I have congratulated our new professors, I have stated the following: “becoming a Full Professor is the highest academic rank or standing one can achieve in the Academy”. André adds to this achievement in his academic career by also holding the first Chair of the newly formed programme on Critical Studies in Higher Education Transformation (*CRiSHET*). It is a Chair of such significance that its launch, which takes place tomorrow, is included in the university’s celebration of the Centenary of Mandela’s birth.

Both the addition of this professorial achievement and the establishment of this Chair are part of Nelson Mandela University’s claim to be ‘recognised for its leadership in generating cutting edge knowledge for a sustainable future’. Having just heard André’s inaugural address, there can be no doubt about just how ‘cutting edge’ his mind is. He is able to put together ideas in completely innovative ways, and so put a new spin on things, enable us to see phenomena, taken-for-granted things, in completely new ways – for example, the topic of his inaugural: “the Plastic University”. And there are several of these ‘uniquely André’ spins on concepts over the years, that we have come to expect of him – one example is his conceptualisation of Policy as ‘the perfect crime’ – one just needs to take a look at his many publications and keynotes, to see many other such incisive twists in thinking that he offers us, in a language that is often as complicated as the way he thinks. André has a lexicon of big words, which can leave you desperately googling under the table for the hidden depths in what he is saying.

Tonight he has put an interesting and constructive twist on universities, by adding the meaning and property of plasticity, in its definition relating to its flexibility, as well as its ability to be mouldable and pliable. So very different from the usual, nothing as boring and clichéd as

‘the new normal’ or ‘business unusual’, no, ‘Plasticity’. For me, it immediately conjured up the idea of neuroscience and the brain, neuroplasticity, that is, the ability of the brain to change throughout a human being’s life. After all, is the university not often seen as the location of the brains in a country?

How critical this conceptualisation is, how relevant to these times is this argument that Prof Keet makes, when, more than ever before in the history of our times, we need to embrace the idea that ‘the university’s essence is its transformability’ – rather than a notion of its conservative immutability. As with this ability of the brain, he posits the idea that we have as part of our intrinsic nature and function, the capability to ‘grasp and re-animate’ and, in accepting this about ourselves, we can and should embrace ‘our aptitude for deep transformations’ at a university.

André has gone further to even subvert, interrogate, and put the André ‘spin’ on the nature of *this* occasion, the inaugural lecture, as well as the notion of what it means to be a professor. True to form, Prof Keet has critiqued ‘the inaugural as performance’ as well as ‘the professor as authorisation of voice’ – turning on himself, and his role and function, the lens or gaze through a notion of plasticity, flexibility. There is a recognition that if he is to show up in this institution that has to demonstrate its ability for deep transformation, how then does he, at the helm of a Chair that studies Higher Education Transformation, himself demonstrate that quality of plasticity? How does he, and *CriSHET*, become a “useful tool for university transformation praxes”? In particular, to what extent can and does this become a ‘decolonial’ undertaking, where we dig into the nature of our performance as a university, and as the professoriate, searching to unearth the essence of our role and function?

At this point, what comes to mind is a poem by struggle stalwart, Victor Wessels, written in the 1970s:

*I want to mine the dark  
The colour of location days  
Unearth the image  
Glowing underground  
Incandescent  
With defiant fire  
Distil the spirit of the slum  
Corrode with acid breath  
The sterile form of proper poems\*  
And then  
Make verses that  
Will tell this*

*Our time  
And this  
Our land*  
(\*in this context, substituted with 'proper universities')

So, all of you professors, and professors-to-be out there, watch out: Prof Keet has arrived, and he is going to ask of you, and of us all to 'shovel away' with him, especially through the work of the new Chair, on what he has called this 'uneasy and awkward' task, given the present "over-proximity of the decolonial discourse in South African higher education." So, prepare, dear colleagues, if I may use my own less erudite turn of phrase, to 'get down and dirty' as we explore how we as universities and academics need to get ourselves into the work that is required of us in this changing context of higher education.

On this very prestigious occasion, we also want to pay homage to Prof Keet's family: his beloved partner and wife, Anneline, and his two sons, Ché and Ethan, his mum and mum-in-law, as well as his siblings and extended family here this evening. It is one of those unique moments of celebration, which comes once in a lifetime for most, it may be more for André. And so, on behalf of Nelson Mandela University, with whom you now share him and his significant work, we'd like to acknowledge the support from your family in enabling him to make this contribution.

I have known André since our years together at Fort Hare. He was someone with whom I could share my deepest thoughts, most puzzling challenges, and biggest questions. I could always depend on the best listening ear ever, the most measured responses, and the kindest confirmations – all of which enabled me to go away thinking constructively and deeply. The most gratifying gifts one gets from knowing André is his ability to make one think, and think some more, and then think differently – to make one question and, most endearing of all, to make one laugh, in serious situations, at ourselves, and at how seriously we take ourselves.

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*Top Left:* n.d. “Bounded Awareness And Decision Making”.

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*Right:* 2018. Rudaitytė, R. (Ed) (2018). Cover - *History, Memory and Nostalgia in Literature and Culture*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

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*Bottom Left:* 2018. Vision India Foundation. <https://visionindiafoundation.com/policywatch/> [accessed on 8 July 2018].

*Right:* n.d. Saatchi Art [Gallery]. “Seven Wasted Men Sculpture by Michelle Reader”. <https://www.saatchiart.com/art/Sculpture-Seven-Wasted-Men/56220/480881/view> [accessed on 8 July 2018].

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### **‘The Plastic’**

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