

## **The Plastic University**

*Knowledge, Disciplines and the Decolonial 'Circulations'*

André Keet

The 'origin' of the university, from which it has detached itself, is plastic: flexible, moldable, pliable, with an inscribed transformative ability rooted in the 'nature' of the knowledge and the disciplines with which it works. That is, the university's essence is transformability. As our ways of disciplining the university have concealed this essence, the decolonial turn, in my reading, is a call to excavate the innate plasticity of the university. Building on my previous attempts to style Catherine Malabou's notion of plasticity into a useful tool for university transformation praxes in South Africa I argue, in this lecture, for an interpretive orientation that can grasp and re-animate, in decolonial terms, 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.

In the context of present debates on knowledge and curriculum within South African universities, this idea 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 in South African higher education.

The idea of the plastic university is folded into the plastic nature of knowledge, and the human subject as plastic, giving new meaning to both our responsibility as knowledge workers and university educators to clarify our social practices and its consequences to ourselves. Using himself as example, André refers to the social accountability to work on oneself with a respectful and, hopefully, a productive critique of *the inaugural* as performance, and *the professor* as authorization of voice, as an attempt at self-deciphering; to disclose a self-transformative conception of being.