The Play-Space of the University
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The entrepreneurial university, to borrow from Pierre Bourdieu on the ludic logic of the field, can be described as a game in which “[p]layers agree, by the mere fact of playing, … that the game is worth playing” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 98). Driven by the stakes of aspirational careerism and audit-driven restructuring, academic and professional staff, students, and other workers collude in this social illusion. While academic and student protest at the University of Auckland (2011-14) moved the administration to play within the rules of the university game by adjusting its program of casualization, myself and others in the Liveable University project want to change the rules by playing the university game differently, by making the rules the object of collective deliberation and “deformance” (after McGann & Samuels, 1999) and making the endgame of the university about more than credentials and cultural capital.

Taking our lead from Paolo Virno (1998), we would argue that play forms the decisive link between rules and their application. Play is not just the deliberate exercise of rules that constitute a game; it is the pliability or “give” – the play value – of an operation or organisation. The play university – one which has give, or “freedom of play” (Derrida, 1983, p. 19) – allows for both the value of its workers/learners and the value that they place in their work/learning and in the university, and gives room for new possibilities in the “play-space” (Heidegger, 1996, p. 75) of the university. It responds to Jacques Derrida’s (1983) call for a university that is more than a means to an end, a university that aims to “to transform the modes of writing, approaches to pedagogy, the procedures of academic exchange, the relation to languages, to other disciplines, to the institution in general, to its inside and its outside” (p. 17).

References