

Conversations with Complexity: Making a Meal out of a Mountain

Oliver Bates and Ben Kirman

o.bates@lancaster.ac.uk

[Presented at BDiGRA 2025](#), 20-21 May 2025

Keywords: *research through design, game design, conversations, complexity, systems*

We are game designers who make games with people about politics, futures, complexity and real issues. Meal Deal is a card game about gig working delivery riders. It is not a “good game”. It is unfair and the delivery algorithm and police can be unjust to players. But this is a central dynamic of the real systems under which couriers work.

In our work we are exploring game design as a form of research through design, where we do research, glean insight and create knowledge through designing, making, and playing games. Through this process, conversations are necessary to confront the gritty reality of real-world systems, making visible the complexity of systems, the complexity of our lives, and the complexity of unknowable futures.

Meal Deal is not a neat product that proposes a solution, or has a specific pedagogic aim, but an artefact of a game design process that engages a dialogue with the dynamics of the system.

How do we, as researchers, value the process of game design as a way to generate knowledge, without falling into the trap of making games that are shrink wrapped products that smooth out the jagged and uncomfortable edges of the systems they represent?