

# JAY MARGALUS

## PERSONAL STATEMENT

Faculty Director, Idea Realization Lab  
DePaul University

### Introduction

My work as a designer addresses the dynamics between play, making, and the flat ontological nature of objects. This work is informed by my efforts as the Director of the Idea Realization Lab, the principle of a well-established makerspace in the south suburbs, a leader in the global maker movement, and as a game designer who develops physical, interconnected game platforms for public exhibitions and conferences. These industry experiences give me the opportunity to field test different methods of teaching, making, and learning that I incorporate into my work at DePaul.

Maker pedagogy helps us understand objects through the physical acts of making and tinkering. A maker comes to understand the nature of things by engaging with object qualities and moving beyond the abstract nature of observation. By moving beyond observation, we are able to move beyond preconceptions, allowing the interaction between individual and object to shape thought. It is this very tension between individual and object, and indeed, of any object interactions, that shapes knowledge in making.

My philosophy of making is informed by several different fields, chief amongst them: object oriented ontology (forwarded by Harman, Bogost, and others), constructionist thinking, and maker-centered learning theory. Also notable is that research in this area spans across design from game design to architecture. In my own work, I explore this through the design of digital artifacts, primarily embedded, interconnected platforms for play. With the ability to develop, fund, and release physical games now easier than ever, the possibility for non- and less-technical designers to leave their impact on the physical games landscape has grown tremendously. Indeed, the same tools and processes that have spurred growth in the maker movement have also activated a budding physical games community. The two fields share a striking resemblance in both form and trajectory.

As a creator, my work has been showcased at large hacker events and recognized in online maker publications. I continue to develop custom platforms for events like the upcoming *Thotcon 0xA*, with project funding typically ranging between \$30,000 - \$50,000 and project scope running at about 1,600 units. I look forward to continue connecting my work and philosophy into the broader DePaul community.

### Teaching

This academic year I have continued my work in the GAM program at DePaul while revising undergraduate EXP courses to prepare them for the coming Industrial Design BFA. While my course load has been dramatically reduced in order to allow time for the administration of the Idea Realization Lab, I have taught two course overloads in the past year, and continue to facilitate Independent Studies and Experiential Learning courses with my students.

I continue to incorporate maker-centered learning pedagogies into the classroom, which my students strongly connect with. As I develop my own philosophy of making in design, my ideas of teaching and learning have evolved to focus more on collaboration and tinkering with knowledge. While I strongly believe in the potential of this approach, it can sometimes lead to difficulties for students who are accustomed to more traditional ways of learning. I plan on addressing this over the coming year.

Another teaching success has been the development of an array of new courses for the Industrial Design BFA, which I am a collaborator on. Over the next year, I look forward to developing the syllabi and other materials for these courses,

One success in teaching that I'd like to highlight is my continued work in the Idea Realization Lab (IRL). The IRL hosts weekly workshops that teach students, faculty, and staff how to use the machinery in the space. As the director of the IRL, I collaborate with faculty to revise their syllabi to incorporate the space, and the philosophy of making, into their courses.

I view my work with students as an ongoing collaborative effort with reciprocal benefits. For example, as an advisor on Independent Studies, I have worked with my students to develop alternative game platforms for various conferences. Some of those students have then gone on to develop their own personal projects, one of which was recently accepted into GDC alt.ctrl, an alternative game platform showcase. The ideas that drove their project has then in turn informed my own work.

My teaching ethos focuses on three main ideas: students must learn to search for answers to problems, students must take agency over the designed world they live in and learn to explore possibility spaces, and students must share their work with their peers and the public.

## **Service**

My service efforts span across School, College, University, and Public efforts.

I am the Faculty Director for the Idea Realization Lab (IRL), where I oversee the development of partnerships within DePaul, corporate partnerships, budgeting for the space, setting broad goals and direction, and the development of a new student consulting group. My work at the IRL focuses on building student confidence, self-efficacy, and a sense of agency over their space through making. As part of my service through the IRL, I have also been leading an effort to develop a second makerspace on the Lincoln Park Campus, and connecting places of making on both campuses together.

My research and work in making has led me to be a keynote speaker at professional conferences hosted by Caterpillar, the American Medical Association's ChangeMedEd Conference, Chicago Public School's Googlepalooza + Techtalk, and more. I have also created and taught the "Thinking through Making" certification through our Professional Development program with Caterpillar, and am currently collaborating with Chicago Public Schools to bring this program to their teachers, administrators, and students.

I have collaboratively developed the BFA for Industrial Design (along with Nate Matteson, Eric Landahl, and Terry Steinbach), and anticipate its approval in the coming months. The Industrial Design BFA includes many of my thoughts on making, philosophy, and play, and I look forward to using these as differentiators for the program.

Additionally within CDM, I am the advisor for the DePaul Robotics Club. With these student groups, as well as Independent Studies that I am running/have run, I have secured space to showcase their work at DePaul showcase events, Chicago Southland Mini Maker Faire, and the upcoming Thotcon 0xA.

I serve as a member on the Game Design program committee and Experience Design program committee (EXP).

Publicly, I continue to serve as the Chair of Spacelab, a makerspace in the south suburbs of Chicago. Additionally, I serve on the board of Chicago Southland Mini Maker Faire and Chair the Mokena Mayor's Technology Committee along with industry professionals like Tim Ozinga (Ozinga Brothers), members of the Pipefitters Union, and local trustees.

## **Conclusion**

I have learned much in my last four years as a faculty member at DePaul, and look forward to continuing my learning and growth at this institution. I am honored to serve as the Faculty Director for the Idea Realization Lab, and will continue to focus on its growth and self-sustainability. Even more than that, I hope to continue serving our students and facilitating their growth as designers and human beings.