PHILIP TAN: Again, some of this might be familiar to folks that have taken CMS 611, but I revised this stuff so that I can give you more board game examples. I just want to go a little bit on the kind of aesthetic thing that we're talking about in Assignment 2. We'll go more into things about user experience over the next couple of weeks.

But so far, we've been talking about this kind of aesthetic. It came up in the *NDA* paper, where we've been talking about mechanics, we've been talking about strategies that come up and the dynamics of the game, coming up. The way your rules play out to be able to give you a sense that some games are about subterfuge, and some games are about pressing your luck. There are some games about just dealing with random things that happen to you, and some games about dethroning the king. These are what a lot of your games have been about.

Some games are about feeling smart. it's like when you make a set, it's like, oh, I feel really smart about that. And those come out from your rules. That's what Assignment 1 was all about.

You've done a great job with that. But of course, that's not the only thing that's involved in the aesthetic of a game. We're talking about these things as well.

All right, we already talked little bit about game bits with the Donald Norman discussion. But also things like the tone of the writing in your rules. In Assignment 1, it was fairly straightforward. But you could imagine writing everything in Ye Olde English or-- I think Space Alert is a game where the rules are written as if it was a cadet manual, only a cadet manual that is setting you up for a mission that is doomed to failure.

Space Alert is actually a really good example of sound as well, and I'll play some tracks from it. It's a game that has an accompanying CD. But what other games have really distinctive sounds, like board games, card games, casino games? Like what are the sort of things that you--

AUDIENCE: Operation.

AUDIENCE: Operation.

PHILIP TAN: Operation? Yes Bzzt. Yeah.

AUDIENCE: Sorry.

PHILIP TAN: Sorry? Because you say sorry?

AUDIENCE: No, I think the whole thing is--

AUDIENCE: Yahtzee?

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

AUDIENCE: Yahtzee?

AUDIENCE: Taboo?

PHILIP TAN: Taboo has a buzzer. But also a lot of-- It's a dialogue game, so that's also an accompanying sound that's coming out of everybody's mouths.

AUDIENCE: Gestures

PHILIP TAN: Gestures?

AUDIENCE: Gestures.

PHILIP TAN: Oh, I haven't played that one.

AUDIENCE: It's like charades, only that you've got a timer. And the timer has a really loud tick to it.

PHILIP TAN: Oh, so it ticks down so you can hear it running out of time.

AUDIENCE: Jeopardy.

PHILIP TAN: Jeopardy. [HUMS THEME] OK.

AUDIENCE: Poker, where they shuffle the chips all the time.

PHILIP TAN: Oh, yeah, yeah. That's the little tinkle of the chips and--

AUDIENCE: Slot machines.

PHILIP TAN: Slot machines, of course. Yeah Or rather, a whole bank of slot machines. You very rarely hear a single slot machine operating by itself. Electronic slot machines, obviously, have a slightly different tone to it than mechanical slot machines.

Roulette, I find, has a very, very distinctive sound. Just that gold ball bouncing all over the pumps. So definitely think a little bit about that, about the sound of a game. Especially if you're making a game that is about conversation or about over-the-table. exchange.

Taboo is a game that is punctuated with a lot of ums and ahs, whereas something like charades, the sound of that is a lot of shouting, usually. Everyone just saying random things, the first thing that comes to their mind. It's a free association game.

And, of course, the look of your game. That should be taken for granted, and we've got a couple of examples of various boxes that you take a look at. And of course, that's what people normally associate with storytelling and games. But, it could also be thought of as world building in games.

What's the theme of your game? What's the plot and the characters in the game? Are you making instead of the Trivial Pursuit game, the *Twilight* Trivial Pursuit game, or something like that. And you've got the setting, you've got characters, even though the game mechanics are all the same. But the games that integrate better with the game mechanics and rules and art direction, and games that do a poorer job, we've got some examples of that.

So, let me see. Let me talk about a few of these games. How many of you play Forbidden Island? How many of you play Pandemic? OK, so Forbidden Island is by the same designer, and it still has a lot of the same cooperative feel.

First of all, you have this metal tin that makes you think that this game is worth more, and you could be paying more for it. But you've got this nice little art, and because you have to open up this metal tin, makes think a little bit about an opening up a treasure chest. Inside, you've actually got these nice treasure pieces. A goblet. This kind of translucent crystal. They're all plastic, kind of rubberized plastic so that they will last a little bit longer.

But you can see that this has got [INAUDIBLE] lion, griffin, or something. You know, its got some of that old world, here's some sort of mystic civilization. And when you look at the cards, you've got the choice of the fonts. You've got these kinds of very serifed and a little bit broken-up text that looks like an old letter press. And, of course, all the art that's on every single card.

The game mechanics of this game are about various parts of an island turning into water. And they don't actually have different illustrations when they get flooded. They just have the same picture, only bluish. It's cheap to print this because its monochromatic. I guess it's not really monochromatic because they have a color token at the bottom.

But it gives you the idea that, when you play this game, everything looks nice and colorful. And then as the game goes on, things start turning bluer and bluer. So it gives you the sense that there's more and more water surrounding this island as it keeps flooding.

And all these pieces, which represents-- each one is different players' token, doesn't necessarily need to be shaped human. But it makes you think that there is a human head on the piece. All this adds cost to the production of this. Of course, the metal tin also adds a cost to the production of a game like this.

But it goes a long way to making you feel like, I'm not just moving pieces on the board. I'm actually exploring an island and robbing it of its treasures. But it's trying to get that. This is actually a counter of the flood levels.

And the game mechanics stuff, says novice, normal, elite, and legendary. So it sets you up with a difficulty level when the game starts. But you have a water level that goes from bottom to top, as opposed to top to bottom. You can imagine this counter working just as well going downwards or upwards.

But since it's about flooding, it goes from bottom, and then the water level rises and rises and rises. And of course, on top, they have a skull. It's not just that the game ends. It's the game ends and everyone dies. Let's just be clear about that.

So it does a nice job of getting that across. It actually is a cooperative game and does a pretty good job of taking all of these ideas, the setting of the waterlogged island, the art direction of what happens to the pieces as you flip them over. And then, of course, the rules that determine when the water level rises and how much space you've got to navigate and how you deal with those problems.

I'd like to describe all of the stuff that we've been talking so far as systemic aesthetics. So these are the aesthetics that the system is creating. All the things that have to do with art style, writing tone, the sound, the pieces that you're holding, more or less stylistic aesthetics.

And then there's the fiction. The fiction will be the story, will be the characters, will be the setting of the game. But of course, it's a blurry Venn diagram, because there's a lot of things that come in-between.

So, for instance, the way your board looks. It's, obviously, a combination of the mechanics that specify the information that you need to be able to put on the board. But also the style of how do you display that information and how that reinforces the setting that you want your players to be in. The kind of feedback that you give people, like the Taboo buzz, for instance.

The sound of that buzz is in here. But obviously, the rules are set up so that, the moment you hear that buzz, it's kind of like it's as jarring and nerve-wracking as possible, because you're trying to concentrate on not saying the wrong thing. And the moment you slip up, another player will buzz it, and then you get the shock of your life. That's all intentional.

For art direction, and for style and fiction, those tend to be things that people have less trouble thinking about. How realistic do you want your setting to be? There's a game called King of Tokyo, which is really, mechanically, it's everyone ganging up on the leader.

And this is a game where you're trying to be a monster taking over Tokyo. And there's a lot of other monsters who want your spot. And once you are on top of the mountain, everyone's trying to take you down. That's what this game is about.

But you can see, it's got this goofy, not quite anime style. But still evocative of old Japanese movies. You've got a little picture of Tokyo being on fire here. You can actually see the monsters in here, you see a lot of helicopters and everything, see all the collateral damage you're doing. I believe it's mostly a dice-rolling game.

AUDIENCE: Yahtzee, basically.

PHILIP TAN: Yeah, it's Yahtzee. So the mechanics are all about, you roll the dice and you try to roll well. So they put in a lot of effort to try to piece that mechanic inside this aesthetic and fictional elements to make it a little bit more engaging and, frankly, a lot more saleable. This is Richard Garfield, who's also the designer of Magic: The Gathering the original designer of Magic: The Gathering. So it's got a good pedigree.

In between the systemic and the fictional elements, you can do things like events. Twilight Struggle, another excellent game, is about the Cold War, basically. And you've got cards in here that remind people of real things that actually happened.

They don't necessarily happen in the order that they happened in real life. There are things like the Space Race. There's things like various precedents, and various Soviet and US leaders from the Cold War. This one specifically says 1945 to 1989. And so while you're playing this game, there are mechanical results for all those cards that you're flipping over, right? Because they also have pictures and names of the actual events that, hopefully, this is largely targeted at people who have lived through this era, or at least remember things that happened from that era.

And it's trying to be evocative of that. Whereas it's a fairly mechanical-- I guess it's not quite a war game. It's more like a politics game. Balance of power game. But they use events to remind you of what the setting of this game is.

I call it fiction. But of course, this is not fiction. This is based on what actually happened. It's still a setting.

Roles and abilities. Back to Forbidden Island, every single character that you play in Forbidden Island has a different set of abilities that you've got. You're taking on a different role, like an explorer or a diver. I can't remember what all the roles are. There's no indication on the box on what you can be.

But since everybody has different abilities, that hearkens back to the unique defining things of the character that you're playing. And you try to think in that role. If you are a pilot or something, and then you try to think about rescuing people.

If you're a diver, you are trying to forge ahead and going and you can stay close to the water mechanically. But also puts you in a fictional position in your team to be able to be closer to risk, because other people will just drown if they're too close to the water. I think that's how the game works, if I recall.

So for Assignment 2, we want you to be thinking about all of these things. Obviously, it's difficult to do this on the amount of time and the budget that you're working with. But we want you to consider how you game looks, how your game sounds, the setting that your game is in.

We've already had a couple of things like the spies game, for instance. Could this have been a formation of a game about hidden variables? But then you have this layer of being an agent of an unknown country. And sometimes fiction can actually help people better understand the underlying rules that you've got.

I know that this game, the level of the game started off as a building construction game. And to a certain extent, some version of those rules might actually help people understand your rules easier. But sometimes it gets in the way because your fiction may not necessarily match up with the way that your rules are evolving.

I'm not saying that you should let aesthetics necessarily constrain what you can do with rules. But if you're going to change your rules, then you're going to have to iterate on your rules to make your game playable, and do everything that you've done with Assignment 1. You want to make sure that your aesthetic is coherent with that, so that you don't have things in your storyline or your character design or your art style that are outright contradicting what your rules are trying to tell you.

This is a game about friendly cooperation, and you're saying all of you are on this island together and trying to save yourselves. But really, the way your rules work out is every man for himself. That would be a contradiction.

This is an interesting game. Who's played Ticket to Ride? OK. Box design and title can play a very, very large part in setting that expectation. So it wouldn't solve something I stressed so much in the first assignment, what's your title of your game.

But in the second assignment, the title of your game can sometimes be the first clue of what your game's all about. It's a rail building game. You can see from the back a picture of the board, and you're building these tracks.

But if you actually read the box, it says, "October 2nd, 1900, 28 years to the day that north London eccentric Phileas Fogg accepted and won a $20,000 bet that he could travel around the world in 80 days. Now at the dawn of the century, it is time for a new impossible journey. Travel across the United States. The impossible journey.

"So some old friends have gathered to celebrate Fogg's impetuous and lucrative gamble, and to propose a new wager of their own. The stakes: $1 million, and the winner takes all competition. Your objective: To see which of them can travel by rail to the most cities in North America in just seven days."

It's interesting, because, at first glance, you look at the game mechanics. And the game mechanics actually feel more like you're building railway connections, rather than riding the rails. But if you look a little bit closer at the strategies of this game, what this game really comes down to is blocking other people from completing their routes across America. Which I think is closer to, I think, the theme that it's suggesting.

It's not about who can complete. It's not about, is it possible for you to complete a route around America in seven days? No. It's who can do it fastest, which means how do we slow down everybody else?

And that's actually what high-level strategy in this game turns out to be. So it's about all these tickets that you're picking up, and you're going from place to place. You're trying to compete routes, and you're trying to prevent other people from completing their routes.

One of the interesting things about this game is that you've got all these people that are on the box. And, of course, the assumption is that you are one of these people. And that's deliberate. The board game designers wanted you to select someone on the spot that you could personally identify with and says, I want to be this person who looks like [INAUDIBLE], or this person who looks like Phileas Fogg because I like those folks.

But then, when you actually play the game, there is no real embodiment of any of these characters. There's a little piece that you place down that says, I am this person. And the only sort of level of fiction that's represented in the rules are the tickets and the routes that you're taking, not the people.

So they've gone to this very, very large effort to make you think that this is a game about people, just because they thought that games about people tend to sell better than games about trains. But the games are really about trains. So I guess [INAUDIBLE].

Let's see. You want to talk about these other games?

RICHARD EBERHARDT: So Alien Frontiers. Does anybody know the term worker placement? Worker placement game where you have a limited number of resources that you're just basically applying to different sections on the board, which give you points or do things for you. It's a great game about colonizing this world.

So a lot of really good, old-style '50s and '60s style of science fiction art. Lots of rockets, spaceships, things like that. And your actual bits, and the reason I'm using this one is because this is a game that starts off with a plasticky Euro style. So cubes and things like that. They don't really represent anything.

Your bits, your ships are these dice. You buy a rocket, you roll the rocket, it gives you a number. And then using those numbers, you can apply it to various different places on the board.

So [INAUDIBLE] are actually pretty good, because you can put the piece down, it stays there. If it gets moved around, it doesn't really matter if it changes number. Because if you use that number just when you're placing down the piece, the number is no longer relevant anymore.

One thing we see in a lot of student games, people using dice as counters. A little bit easier with die 6 because its squared. But once you start using, like, the d20s as a counter, they've got really small facets. And they're going to roll and you're going to lose your place. Also, the amount of time it takes to go from one number to the other number really increases the times it takes to play the game.

But one thing they've done, it started off with these little chips. Now they've added more plastic bits. Special powers you can get to move around that look zany. Little alien pieces of technology. And colonies, you can play, they kind of look like colonies now.

I don't have it here, it's not released yet. But it's on order. They actually made the rockets dice, so the dice in the shape rockets. So imagine this as an oblong shape that's kind of curved with cut faces on it.

One thing I'm curious is, how is it going to roll They've made it so that it feels more representational. Like it feels more like part of the theme, but it might actually take away from the actual feel of rolling dice. It'll be interesting seeing how that plays out when I play that comes out.

PHILIP TAN: When you actually role the dice, it has its own distinctive sound that is shared among people have positive associations with that sound.

RICHARD EBERHARDT: And then the other one, a game about trucking.

AUDIENCE: Heartland.

RICHARD EBERHARDT: The Great Heartland Hauling Company. So on the box, you see a semi truck carrying little squares. On the back, you see semi trucks and squares.

But the squares are in a map. But the squares don't really fit on the trucks. So, actually, I brought this out thinking, that's a great way of saying it's not-- Kind of like the other one, they're showing something on the box that doesn't actually exist in the game.

But I found out, and I actually took it out and opened it, they have cards where you put your bits on. So you are kind of carrying things around. But there's a disconnect between where things are on a map and where things are on your truck. And then where your truck is actually placed on the map.

So your eyes are going to different places when you're actually playing out the game. Largely done because of the commercial manufacturing constraints of it. As you can see, it's basically just two decks in a small box. You'll see a lot of these games, they want-- If it's a game I want you to play in a short period of time, it's likely going to have a smaller box than a game that's going to play longer. It's a code for how complicated the game is, or how much of your time the game is going to take.

PHILIP TAN: So definitely pay attention to how your pieces feel. Again, we're not asking you to go completely to town, like laser-cutting pieces or anything like that. That's not necessary. Just that every time you think of the pieces in our box, or we decide to glue two pieces together or to build, make it a different shape or something, think about what that's communicating over to the player.

Think about what the box may be, or what the art in the rules is conveying about how the game is supposed to be played, and try not to mislead your players into thinking that this game is really about stacking things on little plastic trucks when it really isn't. It's about stacking things on cards. That sort of thing.

So, yeah. Any questions about Assignment 2?

AUDIENCE: And then on the assignment, it's not asking for polished art?

PHILIP TAN: Yep.

RICHARD EBERHARDT: So think about the materials, think about the textures. It's still a short assignment, so don't think about that kind of art.

PHILIP TAN: Yeah.

RICHARD EBERHARDT: More which kind of pieces you decide to use. Really think about the title. It's really, really important.

PHILIP TAN: Yep. The title is something, writing, it's something that you can spend-- you can get a lot out of a little bit more time investment. The tone of your writing and your rules can go a long way. But still, looking for rules that are easy to read. So don't use Shakespearean styling or something like that. That might make things a little bit tricky, unless you're very, very consistent with it throughout, and you're only using it for nouns or something, which could work pretty well.

Sketchy art is fine. Just like a hint of what you are trying to get across with your art. We're not judging anybody on your ability to draw. But we are interested in your thought process and how you consider, how you represent your game. All right.

AUDIENCE: So the first line of the assignment [INAUDIBLE]. Do we get to choose the experience that we want to--

PHILIP TAN: Yep. And that comes down back to the overall aesthetic. All of these things are working together to generate a player experience. And we'll be going through some examples of other games that generate the user experience of panic. The experience of close shave cooperation.

Again, remember, mechanics and aesthetics. The aesthetic thing is the player actually experiences. And that's true for any definition of aesthetic. The question is, what are all the things that you can do to hopefully generate that. Of course, you only know whether they're hitting that [INAUDIBLE].

AUDIENCE: Is it supposed to be a quick game?

PHILIP TAN: Do we have a time limit in the--

RICHARD EBERHARDT: I think I just copied it over. 20 Minutes.

PHILIP TAN: 20 Minutes So aim for that. It's a little longer than the last one. But yeah. So, yeah.

And the reason for that is largely, we want it to be able to grade these things and get your grades back to you. So if you made a two-hour long game, and everybody makes a two-hour long game, we're never going to finish grading this. So short games help. And short games are easier to test.

RICHARD EBERHARDT: And for the first question, on Monday, we'll be talking about how to choose an experience [INAUDIBLE]. We'll do that right before we get into brainstorming and team forming.

PHILIP TAN: Cool. All right. I guess we're ending a little early today. All right. Thanks, everyone.

Don't forget to sign in if you haven't already.

RICHARD EBERHARDT: Just about everybody did.

PHILIP TAN: Thank you. Oh yeah. Please hand in your