

What does a transition mean?

Louise A. Hitchcock

What a module means, then, depends on answering the questions For whom? and For What End?
—Donald Preziosi

This brief contribution is inspired by a 2003 essay by Donald Preziosi, 'What Does a Module Mean?'¹ which referenced some of the issues in his later published PhD research on the design of the Minoan palaces in Bronze Age Crete (c. 1900-1450 BCE).² To paraphrase and lead on from the conclusion of Preziosi's essay – just as specific modern assumptions are made about modularity and measure, so too are certain modern assumptions made about transitions in both the present and in the past. As our mentor Donald Preziosi continues to make his transition from student to professor to elder statesman in the field of art historical, architectural, and social theory, it gives me great pleasure to meditate on this theme as it relates to his transition, to the concept of transition, and to my current research on the transitions from the Late Bronze to the beginning of the Iron Age in the Mediterranean, c. 1177 BCE.³ The twelfth century BCE was a time marked by widespread social collapse and transformation in the Mediterranean, and the emergence of iron working as the highest level of technology reached in the region. My own background, as a result of Donald's mentorship, is characterized by a transition from empiricist to structuralist to post-structuralist, and from Near Eastern to Classical art and archaeology, recursively returning to an interest in the entangled, transcultural interactions between the two regions.

In *Minoan Architectural Design*, his increasingly influential book, Preziosi sought to demonstrate that all elite and many vernacular Minoan buildings on Crete were carefully planned using different versions of the Egyptian cubit, thus laterally projecting from Egypt and backward from Greece and Rome an idea of modularity onto Minoan buildings, a hallmark of the culture that has been called 'Europe's First Civilization'.⁴ Subsequent research on the architecture at the site of Akrotiri (c. 1614

¹ Donald A. Preziosi, 'What Does a Module Mean?', in Robert Laffineur and Karen Pollinger Foster, eds, *METRON: Measuring the Aegean Bronze Age, the 9th International Aegean Conference*, Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut, April 18-21, 2002 (Aegaeum 24), Liège/Austin: Université de Liège/University of Texas at Austin, 2003, 233–237.

² Donald A. Preziosi, *Minoan Architectural Design*, Berlin: Mouton, 1983.

³ See Eric H. Cline, *1177 BC: The Year Civilization Collapsed*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014.

⁴ Colin Renfrew, *The Emergence of Civilization: The Cyclades and the Aegean in the Third Millennium B.C.*, London: Methuen Publishing, 1972, xxv; Louise A. Hitchcock, 'A Near Eastern Perspective on Ethnicity in Minoan Crete: The Further Tale of Conical Cups', in Philip P. Betancourt, Vassos Karageorghis, Robert Laffineur and Wolf-Dietrich Niemeier,

BCE) on the neighboring island of Thera – known as the ‘Pompeii’ of the Bronze Age Aegean based on volcanic preservation of Minoan style structures preserved to the second and third story⁵ – has confirmed much of Preziosi’s work. Yet, the ironies of imposing rigid categories onto the Minoans have been pointed out, showing that Minoan architecture was dynamic, constantly undergoing material and functional transformation,⁶ and that builders exhibiting varying degrees of skill and training might not always adhere to the rigid plans developed by Minoan architects.⁷

In his above-referenced retrospective on modularity, Preziosi⁸ reflected on the influence that the specter of training in Classics and Classical Archaeology has had on the study of Minoan Crete, including his own research. My own experience with the rigidity of this discourse was marked by encounters with hostility, both to theory and to viewing Greece as a culture that was networked into and entangled with the wider Mediterranean (Mediterraneanization)⁹ rather than as the ‘font of European civilization’. With his identification of the use of the Egyptian cubit in Minoan architecture, Donald Preziosi’s own research¹⁰ contributed to other pioneering studies of the interconnections between the Aegean and the East.¹¹ In addition, he supported my own interests in more broadly studying interconnections between Greece and the Near East (primarily in Cyprus and in the southern Levant).

Preziosi’s reconsideration on modularity raised an important question on boundaries: how do systems of measurement and planning influence our ways of thinking about this issue? One way to conceive of these systems (as with all forms of

eds, *Meletemata. Studies in Aegean Archaeology presented to Malcolm H. Wiener as He Enters his 65th Year* (Aegaeum, 20.2), Liège/Austin: Université de Liège/University of Texas at Austin, 1999, 371–379.

⁵ Clairly Palyvou, *Akrotiri Thera: An Architecture of Affluence 3,500 Years Old*, Philadelphia: INSTAP Academic Press, 2005.

⁶ Ilse Schoep, ‘Assessing the Role of Architecture in Conspicuous Consumption’, *Oxford Journal of Archaeology*, 23:3, 2004, 243–269; Ilse Schoep, ‘Looking Beyond the First Palaces: Elites and the Agency of Power in EM III-MM II Crete’, *American Journal of Archaeology*, 110, 2006, 37–64.

⁷ Louise A. Hitchcock, ‘The Best Laid Plans Go Astray: Modular (Ir)regularities in the “Residential Quarters” at Phaistos’, in Robert Laffineur and Philip P. Betancourt, eds, *TEXNH: Craftsmen, Craftswomen and Craftsmanship in the Aegean Bronze Age* (Aegaeum 16), Liège/Austin: Université de Liège/University of Texas at Austin, 1997, 243–250.

⁸ Preziosi, ‘What Does a Module Mean?’, 233–234; also see Ian Morris, ‘Archaeologies of Greece’, in Ian Morris (ed), *Classical Greece: Ancient histories and modern archaeologies*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994, 8–47.

⁹ E.g., Ian Morris, ‘Mediterraneanization’, *Mediterranean Historical Review*, 18:2, 2003, 30–55; Peregrine Horden and Nicholas Purcell, *The Corrupting Sea: A Study of Mediterranean History*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2000; Martin Bernal, *Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization, Vol. I: The Fabrication of Ancient Greece 1785–1985*, New Brunswick NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1987.

¹⁰ Preziosi, *Minoan Architectural Design*.

¹¹ See Helene J. Kantor, *The Aegean and the Orient in the second millennium B.C.*, Bloomington IN: Principia Press, 1947.

categorization) is as a concept of transition, from inside to outside; a *parergon*¹² whose status is always ironic because frames metaphorically set up new systems of exclusion that can be subjected to critique. Transition always carries particular assumptions about boundedness and it operates at different scales: transitions might be cultural, stylistic, geographic, and/or technological, and these affect our systems of chronological transitions. Transition also implies change. It represents dynamism rather than a static state, simply marked by the passage of time. In the early Iron Age (c. twelfth to nineteenth centuries BCE) of the Mediterranean, this dynamism often resulted in the ethnogenesis of new cultures, which themselves were in a state of flux, entanglement, and transformation. Modern scholarship has categorized some of these early Iron Age cultures as Phoenicians, Greek *poleis* (city states), Hellenized Cypriots, Israelites, and Philistines – my particular research interest at the moment. However, the concept of transition from Bronze to Iron Age is ironic in character,¹³ with no clear temporal boundary of change or even clearly identified site of origin for the development of the iron technology that spread throughout the region.¹⁴

A close look at the cultures listed above as discrete entities does not bear up under scrutiny. For example, Greekness is now seen as something that emerges within a context of diaspora and overseas colonization; the further Greeks settled from each other, the more Greek they became,¹⁵ while the Philistines and Cypriots seem to be an entangled mixture of cultural elements from surrounding regions.¹⁶ Exactly what these elements are remains an area of robust debate, as scholars attempt to move away from equating pottery styles with ethnicity, a so-called pots equal peoples approach. This is seen in the gradually shifting scholarly emphasis on the production of Mycenaean style pottery outside of Greece, particularly in Cyprus and in Philistia, as an indicator of Greek colonization. In the case of the Philistines who inhabited the southern coastal plain of what is today Israel and Gaza, there has been emphasis on their ‘Greekness’ or ‘Aegean-ness’,¹⁷ while neglecting to address the Canaanite, Cypriot, and Anatolian traits in what is finally being recognized as

¹² Jacques Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, translated by Geoff Bennington and Ian McLeod, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987.

¹³ A. Bernard Knapp and Sturt W. Manning, ‘Crisis in Context: The End of the Late Bronze Age in the Eastern Mediterranean’, *American Journal of Archaeology*, 120:1, 2016, 99–149.

¹⁴ Adi Eliyahu-Behar, Naama Yahalom-Mack, Sana Shilstein, Alexander Zukerman, Cynthia Shafer-Elliott, Aren M. Maeir, Elisabetta Boaretto, Israel Finkelstein and Steve Weiner, ‘Iron and bronze production in Iron Age IIA Philistia: new evidence from Tell es-Safi/Gath, Israel’, *Journal of Archaeological Science*, 39, 2012, 255–267; Jane C. Waldbaum, *From Bronze to Iron: The Transition from the Bronze Age to the Iron Age in the Eastern Mediterranean*, Göteborg: Paul Åströms, 1978.

¹⁵ Irad Malkin, *A Small Greek World: Networks in the Ancient Mediterranean*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.

¹⁶ A. Bernard Knapp, *Prehistoric and Protohistoric Cyprus: Identity, Insularity and Connectivity*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008; Knapp and Manning, ‘Crisis in Context’; Aren M. Maeir, Louise A. Hitchcock and Liora Kolska Horwitz, ‘On the Constitution and Transformation of Philistine Identity’, *Oxford Journal of Archaeology*, 32:1, 2013, 1–38.

¹⁷ Aegean is commonly used to refer to the temporal boundary between prehistoric Greece and the emergence of classical Greece.

mixed or entangled culture¹⁸ where objects were drawn into symbolically charged transnational meanings, which can only be understood through context.¹⁹ The spatial inscription of meaning as constructed by contextual relations between objects, which require interpretation, breaks down the boundaries of transitional space and formal categorization. Instead, it introduces a Derridean notion of difference (or *différance*) where meaning is dispersed among a chain of objects with symbolic meaning, which no context can contain in resisting interpretation.²⁰ Examining the meaning of identity of cultural groups in this transitional period through transnationalism, transculturalism,²¹ object biography,²² and entanglement and appropriation,²³ offers a fluid and dynamic way ahead that is unfettered by strict categorization.

Yet, methodological transition can be as blurred and unbounded as cultural transition. At the recent re-excavation of the short-lived transitional site of Pyla-Kokkinokremos (inhabited for approximately fifty years at the end of the thirteenth beginning of the twelfth centuries BCE) in Cyprus, there remains a failure to engage with the mixed nature of the material culture. There, the cultural material includes a broad variety of cultural traditions such as Cypriot style architecture, Canaanite storage jars, locally produced Mycenaean-style ceramics, Cypro-Minoan inscriptions,²⁴ and Minoan heirloom decorated jars, yet the excavation director continues to interpret the site as founded by refugees from the Aegean.²⁵ Given the

¹⁸ See Assaf Yasur-Landau, 'The Role of the Canaanite Population in the Aegean Migration to the Southern Levant in the Late Second Millennium BCE', in Joseph Maran and P.W. Stockhammer, eds, *Materiality and Social Practice: Transformative Capacities of Intercultural Encounters*, Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2012, 191–197.

¹⁹ Aren M. Maeir and Louise A. Hitchcock, "'And the Canaanite was then in the Land'": A critical view on the "Canaanite Enclave" in Iron I Southern Canaan', in Israel Finkelstein, ed., *Alphabets, Texts and Artefacts in the Ancient Near East*, Paris: Van Dieren, in press; also (more generally) Douglas E. Ross, 'Transnational Artifacts: Grappling with Fluid Material Origins and Identities in Archaeological Interpretations of Culture Change', *Journal of Anthropological Archaeology*, 31, 2012, 38–48.

²⁰ Timothy Yates, 'Jaques Derrida: "There is Nothing Outside of the Text"', in Christopher Tilley, ed, *Reading Material Culture*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1990, 206–280.

²¹ Louise A. Hitchcock and Aren M. Maeir, 'Beyond Creolization and Hybridity: Entangled and Transcultural Identities in Philistia', *Archaeological Review From Cambridge*, 28:1, 2013, 51–72.

²² Aren M. Maeir, Brent E. Davis, Liora Kolska Horwitz, Yotam Asscher and Louise A. Hitchcock, 'An Ivory Bowl from Early Iron Age Tell es-Safi/Gath (Israel) - Manufacture, Meaning and Memory', *World Archaeology*, 47:3, 2015, 413–438.

²³ Philipp W. Stockhammer, 'The change of pottery's social meaning at the end of the Bronze Age: New evidence from Tiryns', in Christoph Bachhuber and Gareth Roberts, eds, *Forces of Transformation: The End of the Bronze Age in the Mediterranean. Proceedings of an International Symposium Held at St. John's College, Oxford, 25–26 March 2006* (Themes from the Ancient Near East BANEA Publication Series Vol. 1), Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2009, 164–169.

²⁴ Cypro-Minoan represents a Cypriot adaptation of the Minoan Linear A script. Both scripts remain undeciphered; see Brent E. Davis, 'Cypro-Minoan in Philistia', *Kubaba*, 2, 2011, 40–74.

²⁵ Vassos Karageorghis, 'Summary and Historical Conclusions', in Vassos Karageorghis and Athanassia Kanta, eds, *Pyla-Kokkinokremos: A Late 13th Century BC Fortified Settlement in*

politically divided situation in Cyprus between Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots in the present, the scholarly desire to see an early Greek colonization of what has always been a bridge between cultures²⁶ is neither innocent nor neutral. Indeed it has been proposed that any critique of contemporary archaeological views on the Hellenization of Cyprus must be examined against the background of traditional art historical and archaeological methods used, as well as by the occupations, first by the Ottomans (1151-1878) and later by the British (1878-1960).²⁷

Preziosi²⁸ presciently notes the ethnocentric lines around which battles for land have been drawn for four thousand years (and undoubtedly more!) in Europe and the East (compare modern atrocities by ISIS to both material and human culture, and the resulting flood of refugees from the east to the west, turning modern borders into violent fictions). Yet contemporary theories that have come into use by part of the archaeological community following Donald Preziosi's work on the Minoans, points a way out of ethnocentric assumptions that have framed art historical, anthropological, and archaeological practice. More fluid approaches to the world using entanglement, network theory, liminality, Mediterraneanization, and the recognition that ancient cultures don't neatly conform to modern political boundaries, are replacing the boundedness of simplistic binarisms: us/them; east/west; old/young.

In asking why we should care that the Minoans planned their buildings systematically, carefully, and rigorously, Preziosi²⁹ attributes scholarly concern to our institutional training as academics. Caring becomes an outcome of our socially and institutionally produced context that is situated and contingent. Academic transitions from student to senior scholar are no less of an institutional construct. They represent a culturally constructed form of transition. Preziosi's discussion of the meaning of modularity recognizes that the final product of the Minoan architect represented a negotiation with landscape, functionality, and other factors. Similarly, our bounded notions of what constitutes a transition need to acknowledge that their recognition also represents a negotiation of the space-time-culture continuum. Thus, as a life-long student and a life-long teacher, Donald Preziosi's own transition is characterized by negotiation and irony, which is fluid, dynamic, and prolific rather than something fixed in a moment.

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Cyprus: Excavations 2010–2011 (Studies in Mediterranean Archaeology 141), Uppsala: Åströms Förlag, 2014, 155–162.

²⁶ See Knapp, *Prehistoric and Protohistoric Cyprus*, with further references.

²⁷ Anastasia Leriou, 'Locating identities in the Eastern Mediterranean during the Late Bronze Age-Early Iron Age: the case of "hellenised" Cyprus', in S. Antoniadou and A. Pace, eds, *Mediterranean Crossroads*, Athens: Pierides Foundation, 2007, 563–591, esp. 567–568.

²⁸ Preziosi, 'What Does a Module Mean?', 234.

²⁹ Preziosi, 'What Does a Module Mean?', 233.

interconnections and entanglements at the archaeological site of Tell es-Safi/Gath in Israel.

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