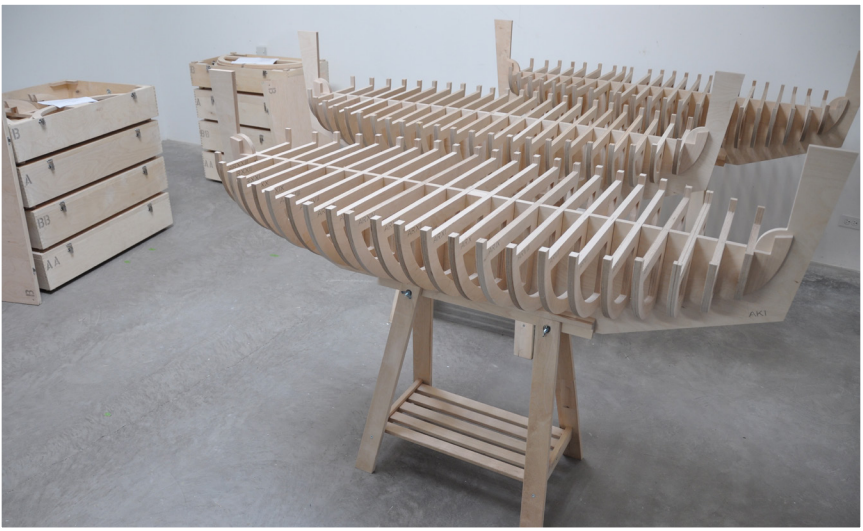
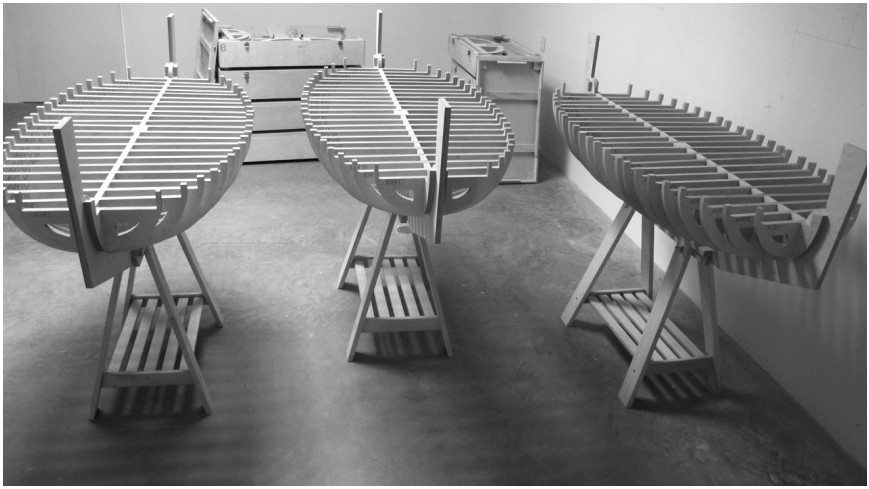


***Theoris*: a paradox**

Ian Carr-Harris

Given: a paradox
Given: a ship named *Theoris*
Given: a kit: how many is *Theoris*?

A User's Guide 2018



An Introduction to "*Theoris*: a paradox": a Thought Experiment

THESEUS AND THE MINOTAUR:

In the mythic telling of Athens' history, King Minos of Crete, in order to avenge his son's death at the hands of King Aegeas of Athens, extracted a regular tribute of 14 young men and women to be fed to the Minotaur (the Bull of Minos) in the famous Labyrinth. Eventually, Aegeas' son, Theseus, elects to join the latest tribute in order to slay the Minotaur, sailing with the doomed victims on a ship with black sails. Aided by Ariadne, King Minos' daughter, he succeeds in negotiating the labyrinth and killing the Minotaur. Returning in his ship, the *Theoris* (θεωρίς), he forgets to substitute a white sail for the black as a signal to his father of his success. Seeing the black sail, King Aegeas throws himself into the sea, thus named the Aegean Sea, leaving Theseus to now become King of Athens, free of the fearful tributes to the King of Crete.

ATHENS AND THE *THEORIS*:

Athens had from ancient times participated in annual games to celebrate the God Apollo on the island of Delos, Apollo's birthplace. To honour the memory and celebrate Theseus' victory over the Minotaur, the Athenians had preserved and maintained Theseus' ship, and it was the *Theoris* that carried the embassy each year to Delos. Notably, during the ship's absence from Athens, the city was purified and no executions could be performed. According to the 1st century biographer Plutarch, the *Theoris* remained in service until the time of Aristotle. As can be imagined, the ship – being constructed of wood – required constant repairs, to the point that sooner or later not a single scrap of its original fabric remained on the *Theoris*.

THE *THEORIS* AND THE PARADOX OF IDENTITY:

Plutarch is credited with reporting on a puzzle discussed by the Greek philosophers Heraclitus and Plato with respect to the identity of Theseus' ship – a puzzle arising from the constant replacement of parts in order to maintain the ship. Is the *Theoris*, in the course of time, still the *Theoris*, or is it no

longer: is it the same ship that Theseus sailed, or something else? At what point could it be said that the ship was – or was not – the same ship?

To this question, the English philosopher Thomas Hobbes added another and related question, or thought experiment. Hobbes speculates that the workers, instead of discarding the material they removed from the *Theoris*, carefully placed it in another area and part by part put the old material together in exactly the same positions as on the ship under repair. At a certain point, the *Theoris* would exist in its repaired state as well as in its original unrepaired state. There would therefore be two ships with legitimate claims to being the *Theoris*. Or, to put it another way, which ship is the *Theoris* – which is Theseus' ship?

Description for "*Theoris*: a paradox" (2018)

"*Theoris*: a paradox" is an artwork designed to offer a material and historical engagement with problems of identity and the nature of our own selfhood. This is further elaborated later in the guide. This section is concerned with a description of the work.

Conceived as a paradigm or exemplar for situations in which an appeal to some originating thing or entity runs into complications, the work builds on Plutarch and Hobbes to suggest a further reference to the Infinite Regress, that familiar phenomenon in which one thing leads to another ad infinitum, or as in the case of the mirror, the image that repeats itself to infinity.

Paradigms are examples serving as a model or pattern that cohere the idea of a thing in such a way that it can be used to effect action. Paradigms are what we learn in school as models for definition, articulation and even moral behavior. Paradigms are what we buy when we go to a toy store and pick up a plastic model of the Titanic, a Harley Davidson motorcycle, or some such iconic object. We usually call such a paradigm a kit.

Simply put, then, the work is structured as a kit comprising the parts required to build a model of the ship that would answer to its evasion of a stable identity.

The kit consists of 4 individual models contained in 8 boxes. Each model requires 2 boxes in order to distribute the weight of the ship, and the IKEA trestle that supports the ship in the installation.

Parts list for each model:

Note: all plywood is Russian / Finnish ¾" Birch.

- 2 plywood sections for the keel, with 2 IKEA cylinder nuts with 2 x ¼" Allen or hex head bolts @ 1 3/8" long, Allen / hex head wrench (in supplied plastic envelope), and medium slot screwdriver.

- 23 plywood ribs, including the centre rib with stabilizing plywood sleeve and two ribs (first and last) with attached plywood sleeve to provide anchor points for attaching planking to bow and stern sections of the keel.

- IKEA trestle sections required, with hardware and separate instruction manual.

Note: the 'A' & 'B' ships are represented by the keels and ribs only.

Assembling the work

As noted in the description, the kit for "*Theoris*: a paradox" consists of 8 boxes of various dimensions, 2 boxes to a single unit. The instructions for the work are identical for each of the 4 units that comprise its final assembly, so while this guide references only a single unit, the same instruction applies to all 4 units. Please note, however, that for the installation only 3 units are to be unpacked. One unit will remain in its boxes, with the lids open to show the contents.

Boxes are identified as "Ship A" or "Ship B"; the two boxes for "Ship A" and one box for "Ship B" are to be opened and the contents installed. One box for "Ship B" will remain opened but not unpacked.

THE FOLLOWING GUIDES YOU THROUGH UNPACKING AND ASSEMBLING ONE BOX FOR "SHIP A".

Each box is closed with two ¼" Allen or hex bolts and latches. Open all the boxes with a ¼" hex key wrench and set the bolts aside. Release the latches.

Start with the largest box containing the keel section and a set of 16 ribs including the bow and stern ribs (with curved sleeves) and the middle rib (with straight sleeves).

Remove the ribs to access the two keel sections.

Place the keel sections on a flat surface (it is important that the surface be a raised table or counter that is dead flat) and bring the two parts together so that the adjoining parts synch with one another. This is important because the middle rib fits into the slot that defines the edge of each of the two keel sections.

To join the two sections tightly together, there are two large holes in one section adjacent to two small holes in the other. A ¼" hole in each section's edge connects the large and small holes. Insert a hex bolt into the large hole in the one section and an IKEA cylinder nut in the other section's small hole. Using a slot screwdriver, rotate the nut until

the hex bolt finds the thread; screw the hex bolt into the nut, but do not tighten it down. Do the same for the other bolt and nut until both sections are loosely connected. Making sure to align the two sections properly, ensuring that they are both flat on the surface and seamlessly matched, tighten down the hex bolts until the two sections are firmly fixed and there is no slack or bending between the sections. The keel is now ready to be fitted into the IKEA trestle.

Unpack the box containing the IKEA trestle and remaining 7 ribs, and follow the IKEA instructions for assembling the trestle. Do not tighten the large bolts that hold the trestle's two top plates together, leaving enough loose space (1" approx.) to accommodate the keel section

Place the keel section between the two top plates of the trestle; centre the keel so that the joint between its two sections is about at the middle of the trestle. Tighten down the two large bolts securely.

Slot the rib sections into the keel, matching the numbers on the ribs to the numbers on the keel. Start with the middle rib (#XII) and the bow and stern ribs (# I & # XXIII). See illustrations. When this is completed, the ship is ready for installation.

Close the 2 boxes with the Allen bolts supplied and fasten the latches.

Apply these instructions to the other two ships (Ship B and the second Ship A)

With all 3 ships (A, B, A) mounted on their trestles, **arrange the ships according to the conditions of the installation space.** Recommended is that all three be placed roughly beside each other – side to side – with about a 20" to 24" gap between ships.

Stack all eight boxes in proximity to the arrangement of the ships. They should be stacked as two 'blocks', with the open boxes for the second (un-installed) Ship B on top of the stack. **Ensure that the User Guide included in the open boxes is visible.**

Illustrations showing details of installing ribs #XII and #I / #XXIII

Completed Assembly

Disassembling the work

Follow the assembly instructions in reverse. See illustrations.

For each ship, begin by removing the ribs; next, free the keel from the trestle and placing it on a flat surface, remove the hex bolts and IKEA nuts holding the two sections together, setting them aside in the supplied plastic envelope along with the hex key.

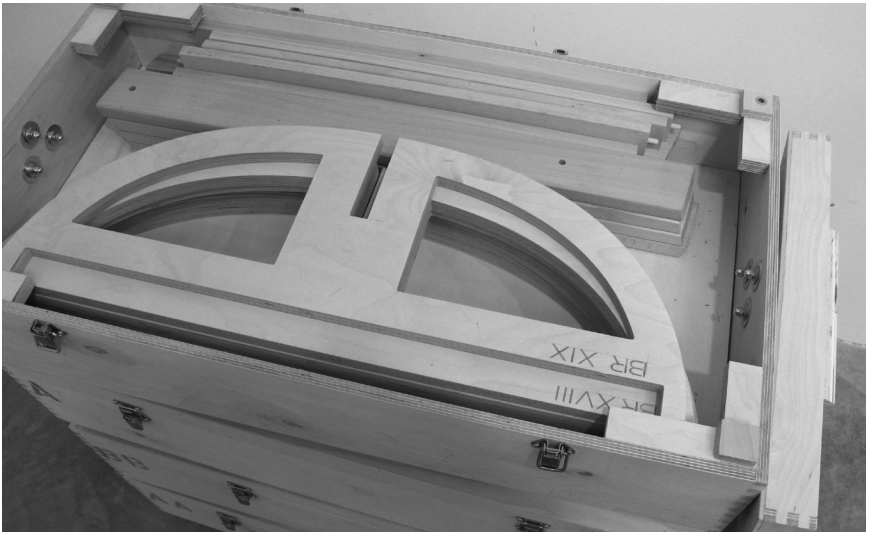
Starting with box 1, place the keel sections on the bottom and stack ribs V through XI opposite; stack II through IV, & XX through XXII as shown. Place rib # XII on the keel sections with ribs I and XXIII (the bow/stern ribs) on top of # XII. Before closing the box, place the User's Guide on the top.

Stack ribs XIII through XIX in box 2, as shown, and the IKEA trestle with the IKEA guide on top. Close the box with the hex bolts and latches.

Repeat for each ship. The second Ship B (not removed from its boxes) will simply need to have its boxes closed with the hex bolts and latches.

All parts of the kit should now be in their 8 boxes ready for storage or transport.

Packing the boxes



A brief guide to paradoxes

We are all drawn to magic, and a paradox is like a magic act. When the rabbit is triumphantly pulled from the hat, we applaud the spectacle precisely because there is a trick. And that trick has made us think or question how it was performed. The rabbit's appearance appears to be a simple act of being pulled from the hat. And the hat appears to be just a hat. But the conclusion that there was a rabbit lurking in the magician's hat seems preposterous. Unacceptably absurd. Hilarious, of course.

More soberly, Mark Sainsbury, a philosopher of Language, has remarked that a paradox is 'an apparently unacceptable conclusion derived by apparently acceptable reasoning from apparently acceptable premises', and the analytical philosopher Willard Quine adds that ' a paradox is just any conclusion that at first seems absurd, but that has an argument [strong or compelling] to sustain it'. The tired rabbit has launched the search for a compelling argument for its surprising appearance.

But we are not finished with our unfortunate rabbit. Related to the paradox is the concept of antinomy, which the eighteenth century philosopher Immanuel Kant employed to identify limitations to reasoning, and when claims to truth are justified or not justified. Examples of antinomy can be readily found. The frequently used phrase "There is no absolute truth" can be considered an antinomy due to its suggestion that there is indeed an absolute truth since it simultaneously proclaims to be one itself. There is an ancient Greek paradox that similarly engages this antinomy: "I am a rabbit. All rabbits are liars. Therefore I am a liar." There is no way of trusting the speaker's statements; for the sentence to be true, it must be false, and vice versa. Do we in fact have here a rabbit? Is this rabbit for real?

The magician's greatest feat is to investigate the degree to which we can trust our senses when what our eyes see appears to defy their logic. The magic performed intercedes with our normal ability to trust cause and effect, to trust our power to reason. We are induced into a realm of doubt. We are forced to depend on a form of faith – that somehow there is a rational explanation, an obscure cause–effect relationship that remains for the time being at any rate inexplicable.

While eventually an explanation may be provided, in the moment of the performance and the paradox of a live rabbit pulled from a hat, what we have experienced we call art.

The French writer and critic Roland Barthes, in discussing the film stills of Russian filmmaker Sergei Eisenstein, makes a distinction between 3 levels of meaning. The first and second have to do respectively with simple or informational meaning on the one side, and symbolic or referential meaning on the other. But it is the third level of meaning that produces the experience we can associate with magic – and with art. This level he calls 'obtuse' for the fact that it defies obvious analysis – it is the level at which the representation cannot be represented. This, Barthes suggests, is where meaning interrogates itself, is open to masquerade, disguise and derision, the level of discontinuity, of the erotic, of operating between the suture and the fissure of meaning. It is performative, often comedic. It's operation is paradox, informed by the root meanings of the word: from the Greek prefix para- (beside, against) and doxa (knowledge, especially common knowledge). In effect, 'unexpected' or 'incredible'. Like a magic act.

An equation of sorts could be constructed that links together doubt and paradox through a series of terms that invite the consequences of both. This equation might look like this:

DOUBT – UNCERTAINTY – AMBIGUITY – AMBIVALENCE – RESISTANCE – CRITIQUE – TRANSGRESSION – COMEDY – PARADOX – UNCERTAINTY – AMBIGUITY – COMEDY – AMBIVALENCE – RESISTANCE – CRITIQUE – TRANSGRESSION – DOUBT

A particular example of a paradox that centres on doubt is the concept of the Infinite Regress. We are familiar with its visual phenomenon, the receding image in opposed mirrors. But it is easiest to appreciate the problem it poses by using a simple example. In an infinite chain of the same ship, let us say, the question must be which is the 'first or original ship'? But there is no first ship in an infinite chain; consequently there is no chain based on a first ship – the chain is an illusion and does not in fact exist. The very existence of the ship is in doubt to the point that it is impossible to conceive. It remains paradoxical in the sense that despite our belief in its existence, it cannot exist.

The example is of course the Ship of Theseus itself, a ship lost in the mists of myth and storytelling. The question of the ship's real existence, that is the 'original' ship Theseus is said to have sailed, remains in doubt. That there was a ship historically ascribed to the mythical hero is not in doubt. But the reality of the ship must be deemed suspect. If both Theseus and his ship are imaginary, the ship that was brought into port to be fixed must have been brought into port in an infinity of time. Taken at the level of the Infinite Regress, it must be concluded that there never was a *Theoris*, and that no image or structure purposing to be the *Theoris* can exist.

But of course the ship does exist – as an idea, and here it runs into the paradox of its materiality. It must be repaired to be able to exist. But in the thought experiment, the *Theoris* starts to multiply. How many times need it be repaired, and how many identical *Theoris*es must result? There are compelling arguments for two different conclusions: that both ships are one and the same, the original ship *Theoris*, or that they are not the same – or that in fact it doesn't even exist at all! We are left therefore with a dilemma.

Dilemmas are products of identification and the attempt to assign fixed identity to things – whether objects or ourselves. In the case of the Ship of Theseus paradox, there is an opposition between identities – the identities of the two ships. In the paradox, the attempt to assign identity is frustrated by the dichotomous character of the arguments – that there can be a resolution of the confusion based on an 'is / is not' structure. One resolution proposed – the so-called Four-Dimensionalist position – argues that with the element of time built into the paradox, the ship remains numerically identical to itself despite the fact that the ship's individual moments-in-time, or time-slices of itself, differ from each other. The ship remains numerically identical to itself across time.

A further argument takes the position that the two ships can trace their identity to an original, and are as such identical with one another – they are a single ship existing in two locations at the same time. This argument is based in the transitive relations of equivalence: A (the original ship) = B (the repaired ship) and A (the original ship) = C (the unrepaired ship) such that B (the repaired ship) = C (the unrepaired ship). Then again, a counter argument against this position is that while both ships are identical to the original ship that came into dry-

dock, they are not identical to one another. This argument, however, is complicated by its denial of a key logical concept – transitive relations.

As these arguments may suggest, paradoxes produce arguments. A paradox like the Ship of Theseus produces arguments that produce arguments – which is to say that a resolution that would produce a winning argument does not arise. While an unresolved paradox might clearly threaten our trust in reason, this would be a mistaken assumption. Like our failure to understand why the magician was able to pull a rabbit from the hat, our failure to resolve the paradox incites a curiosity about meaning and its construction. The ship of Theseus conundrum reveals much about how we understand the identity of a physical object, but more broadly it invites us into the realm of argument and the search for justified belief. There have been many coherent attempts to resolve the paradox, both commonsensical and philosophical. None have ended the debate, and this is the tantalizing value of a paradox: what is achieved is the realization that there are many ways in which to view a problem – the problem is in effect a mirror to ourselves.

Another interesting venture into the paradox of identity is Jorge Luis Borges' story "Pierre Menard, author of the Don Quixote". In Borges' story, the fictional writer, Pierre Menard, sets out to rewrite Cervantes' famous novel line by line, to 'translate' it into a contemporary mode. After a lifetime of labour, he succeeds only in finishing a part of his project. But what is notable to those who read his draft is the fact that it is line by line identical to the Cervantes. We are assured, however, that it is indeed a new and exciting version of Cervantes book. Why? Because Menard's re-writing came with his greater experience of world events subsequent to Cervantes writing in the 17th century. The new "Don Quixote", while identical to the original in every respect, nonetheless is different for the fact that its re-writing occurs centuries later. To the reader of Menard's re-writing, the novel would be infused with allusions not available to Cervantes. So, two books, each an 'original', both one and the same – and different.

Harvard psychologist Daniel Gilbert has remarked that 'human beings are works in progress that mistakenly think they are finished.' The mistake in question arises from language itself, specifically the verb 'to be'. When I say "It is" or "I am", I freeze that entity – an object, or my selfhood – in time. All the processes that engage the object or myself are eliminated, and a false version of identity is constructed. Is

the Cervantes I experience today the same Cervantes I experienced a decade ago? Who am I at any one time, and am I different at another time? What would constitute an original me, and how do my present and future selves relate to that original – if indeed I could ever hope to recapture it? If I am a copy of that original, how many copies have constructed my present self? Paradoxes, positioned not on the verb 'to be', but on the verb 'to become', direct us to consider not ourselves, but our selves in transition. The *Theoris* not as it is, but as it is in its becoming. Suspended.

Footnote: According to a note in the Wikipedia entry, "a 2010 psychology study reported that 20 members of the public considered the restored ship to be the original, while 24 considered the reconstructed ship to be the original."

"*Theoris*: a paradox" (2018)

Where does an artwork come from? Does it have an origin or some influential event or model by which its identity can be traced? Can it be registered on a scale of productions that suggest a pattern or trajectory?

The work for which this guide is made can be seen as part of a history of works that investigate knowledge – how we come to it, what it is we find within it, what we do with it. In the course of examining that history, we could isolate a number of elements that have become principal strategies for individual productions. The blackboard, for instance, directs our attention to the acquisition of language and the complexity of linguistic structures – the alphabet, the building block of articulation, tenses, which open up time, nouns and verbs, which enable the subject's active relationship to the world of things and other subjects, and speech – the means by which to communicate meaning.

Other works, such as a series of pop-up pieces, have examined the mechanics of surprise and delight and their ability to re-interpret classic works through an engagement with the physicality of the text. The structures of theatre and its relationship to issues of time and the world of objects through which we move have also surfaced in work that has constructed an equivalence between the space of the work and the space of the viewer.

But rather than search for such a history, perhaps it is better to consider two particular aspects of how we come to know the world and our placement in it. We are all familiar with models, or what are called paradigms in philosophy. A paradigm is an example or pattern that is typical of a given structure, in a sense an archetype. It forms the basis for assembling our structures of knowledge. Paradigms, or models, lay the groundwork of certainty that permits us to act confidently and purposefully. Armed with models for action or argument, we enact structures that command authority derived from those models.

Paradigms in themselves, however, lack an essential dimension. A model can describe or inform, but it cannot challenge that information or counter its description. It cannot represent itself to itself. This calls for another dimension of thought, and that requires that a conflictual relationship exist between equally admissible paradigms. That relationship we can call paradoxical, and paradox is a key structure that

provides the critical relationship we need by which to interrogate the models or arguments we use and to build a more secure foundation for what we think we know. Unlike the paradigm, the paradox confuses the question of truth, calls it into question, even subjects it to parody and derision. It calls into question what appear to be even the most obvious truths we unquestioningly assume on an everyday basis.

"*Theoris*: a paradox" offers a playful introduction to the complicated business of determining the dynamics of truth. Conceived as a kind of kit, something that can be trotted out and put up whenever convenient, "*Theoris*: a paradox" addresses the questions: 'what is an object', 'who am I', and 'how did I get here?'

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As with any manual, any discrepancies or errors are solely the fault of the author.


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