A Lasting Provocation

Matthew Goulish and Lin Hixson

L: Hello everyone. Welcome, and thank you for coming. My name is Lin Hixson, and I am the director of Goat Island. This afternoon we will present the first work in progress of a new performance. We started work on this piece in June 2005. We hope to premier it in the fall of 2007.

M: Excerpts from Lin’s introduction for the June 4th 2006 presentation at the Chicago Cultural Center of the piece we eventually titled The Lastmaker—

L: We began by researching the lifespan of Istanbul’s Hagia Sophia, a building that began as a Byzantine church, became a mosque, and then a secular museum. We wondered what alterations might have been made to the space to accommodate these uses and what kind of a performance we might make in response. In the space of our work, we wanted to consider these changes not as conflicting theologies, but as movements encountered on different planes. But we lacked the funds to travel to Turkey, and instead found ourselves researching a building in Zagreb, Croatia, where the tour of our previous performance took us—a round building that was a museum, then a mosque, then a museum again.

We introduced a second directive to the process, a directive we have come to call lastness. It derives from the decision that we have made as a company. This piece, our ninth performance, will be the last Goat Island piece. After we have completed creating and performing it, the company


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will end. This decision comes from the challenge that all artists face: How to continue to grow, to venture into the unknown. We intend this end to present itself as a beginning. We have considered what comes after Goat Island. We will do what we can to help sustain and multiply the practices that the 20-plus years have brought us. Our attitude as we arrive at this decision is one of gratefulness. We end Goat Island in order to make a space for the unknown that will follow.

We have initiated this change ourselves, not in response to internal or external adversity, but creatively. We want to provide an example of ending, of lastness, but it is an example we have not yet defined. We hope to discover that example through the two-year process of making this performance. Our lastness is no more and no less significant than our study of buildings.

M: So you’re stopping because your work is finished. A journalist said that to me. That’s not at all what I said, I said. I could not make her understand, or communicate some understanding of the unknown, its importance. We stop precisely because our work is not finished. In order to continue our work, we must pursue the unknown. We capture an ending before an ending captures us—there is some truth to that. What began as a dream becomes responsibility, said William B. Yeats. Then it becomes a machine, it seems, a machinery. The work starts to work the artist, to push the unknown to the margins. Those margins call us now. Leave “the work” behind, aside, ended. It’s the name more than anything. No matter how far afield you try to stray, as long as you do so under the umbrella of the name, you cannot escape. One cannot begin without ending. So we say we are ending before we end, to absorb the end into the work, in the form of the last. You watch the performance now, as if it has already ended. In the twilight margin, some unknown appears, a captured force. Excerpts from Lin’s directives to the company—

L: So I ask: What if making a last performance becomes one of our directives for making a new one? Last is an adjective in the sense of being, coming, or placed after all others; final like the following film titles: The Last Waltz, The Last Picture Show, The Last of the Blonde Bombshells. Last is a verb in the sense of continuing in time; surviving; remaining in good condition. Lasting is the adjective that comes from this verb, like the lasting in the following book titles: A Lasting Peace; Lasting Visions of X—The Haunted Artist; Landscaping with Roses: Planting Rose Gardens of Lasting Beauty. Last is a block or form shaped like a human foot and used in the making of shoes. And last (chiefly British) is a unit of volume or weight varying for different commodities and in different districts, equal to about 80 bushels, 640 gallons, or two tons. A directive: Construct a last performance in the form of a human foot that weighs two tons and remains in good condition.

M: The one thing always still there at the end is the end. By end we might mean reason, or we might mean that which obdurates, hardens over the duration. Durus, hard; durare, to last. These are the insistent roots of the words that echo as we water them.

A gardener tends an awkward plot with such persistent care, one would think the universe had settled itself there.

L: Who said that?

M: I did. I think lastness is less a subject and more a direction.

L: In what sense?

M: As director, you set us off in some direction. Lastness is that, a point of the compass. A lastmaker makes a form, and around that form a cobbler makes a shoe. One removes the original shoe to allow others to fabricate other shoes that conform to the form of the last. The removal allows the continuation; the continuation necessitates the removal. This is what I wanted to say, not to say last, but to say next to last. The last is the void made solid.

L: The Egyptians had a scale to weigh souls. Exactitude was symbolized by placing a feather on the scale. If we are more exact in our thoughts, in our actions, in our souls do we shed pounds? I amend the directive: Construct a performance in the form of air, a last performance that weighs nothing.