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persia

**days of entropy.**  
**ben slater**

It's been over ten years since Gareth Evans and myself edited **Entropy**, a self-styled experimental arts magazine that ran for six issues between 1997 and 1998, published out of a basement flat in Bristol. It was barely two years of our lives, but it was what you might call a “defining experience.”

The following is only my version.

## I often think of going back to Ashgrove Road.

Making the walk all the way up the wide pavements of Whiteladies Road - the long artery that pumps traffic down to the centre and up to the Downs. Then I'd take a right opposite the church and the sad, little library. Or I'd go the hilly back way up St. Michaels Hill and down again, past where Meir Agassi used to live - a place where I might pause for a breather. And then up again, ignoring Chandos Road, with its warm bakery and costly restaurants, turning right, then up the steep bit, and finally down the few steps that reached the doorway of 15 Ashgrove – The Garden Flat.

The first time I visited Ashgrove was in 1994 when I was a student. That academic year was over, and there was one more left to go. I'd chosen, unwisely, to stay in the city for as much of the summer as possible. I was in love, and it was a bad situation – the worst I'd ever known. She and I had met up again at the start of the break and spent an empty afternoon getting nowhere. Then she left town for a while, and I haunted the streets, hoping that something would happen. Eventually, after a few weeks, it did. We bumped into each other. She was with a group, including her boyfriend. A stiff hello was exchanged and we all walked away. I phoned Gareth from a call box and explained that I was in a state and he said to come over. We'd been students together for a year, but I'd never been to where he lived.

Gareth is a listener, a damn good one, and I sat on the sofa in the neat but compact basement flat and indulged myself. Through the living room window you could see into the lower part of the garden hanging above. Sometimes the legs and feet of the landlady's husband would appear as he watered some plants. Being below ground helped me relax. It felt like I was safe from everything, up there in the world.

Gareth made tea with great care. He showed me his bedroom and I noted that among the prodigious piles of books, magazines, newspapers and notes, he kept a mug with his toothbrush in it.

I left his flat an hour or two later. The next day I took a train out of Bristol and went back to my Mum's place – home – where I'd smoke hash out of the bedroom window on chilly nights until the new term began. I wouldn't return to Ashgrove for two full years, and although I would never live there, nor even spend one single night, it would, eventually, come to feel like home.

How that transpired is the story of **Entropy**, friendship and all young men's wild dreams of 'making it' in the world.

I was sure I would be moving into Ashgrove.

This was just after finishing a Masters degree in a small Yorkshire town, an often painful experience. I'd gone back to Mum's to write my thesis and realised, once it was submitted, that there was no place else to go but Bristol. Gareth had spent his year in the Garden Flat, writing poetry. Then he'd decided to head to Wales to pursue his own Masters. He invited me to take over Ashgrove; both he and his flatmate, Joe, were leaving and he knew I was keen to return.

After graduation I was particularly smug about leaving Bristol; noting all the graduates who stayed and bummed around, trying to re-ignite the sparks of student life before they got bored, broke and moved to London. But one year later I was 23, with two degrees, no plans, and a vague sense of personal wreckage. Returning to Bristol, I thought, the town where the good times had begun, would be nourishing for my soul. Ashgrove, which I remembered well from that one afternoon, could be refuge. All my hopes were pinned on the place.

Gareth called me every few nights to fill me in on the latest. He'd managed to enrol on a part-time course with some complicated grant arrangement. Then, suddenly it was all off. He was staying put. The only alcohol in the house that night was gin, I made a strong one with tonic and watched **Eastenders**. The plotline was something melancholy and I began to sob. I've never drunk gin since, and when I'm offered it, which is reasonably often in Singapore, I always think of that night.

So, one particularly cold Halloween, Ben Davies, my good friend of many years and another Bristol graduate, and I, drove back west in a battered old car that nearly broke down on the single-lane iron flyover beside Temple Meads. High above the city, with traffic trailing back for miles, smoke coughed from the bonnet. We drove on, and once the AA had done their magic, spent the following days flat-hunting and sleeping on a narrow range of friend's uncomfortable sofas. By Guy Fawkes, we'd landed ourselves a tiny second-storey flat just up from the sad, little library on Whiteladies Road. It was grotty, but we didn't care. It was cheap and a five minute walk from Ashgrove.

There followed a halcyon period, which in memory seems to stretch out for years, but in actuality was probably three or four months. We were all unemployed - Ben, Gareth, Nick, another student friend who had replaced Joe as Gareth's Ashgrove flatmate, and myself. We signed on the dole, did the best we could with Housing Benefits, and let the days slip gloriously by.

It was all very domestic. Getting up late, pots of tea, fresh loaves of bread from Chandos, rolled-up cigarettes, copies of both the Guardian and the Independent, two quid bottles of tarty red from Somerfield. It was winter and dark nights were luxuriously extended - most of them spent at the more spacious Ashgrove, with communal meals and comedy on TV. During daylight hours there were long walks everywhere. Missions to second-hand book shops in further-flung Bedminster and over to Gloucester Road, a crumbling strip of Salvation Armies, Scopes, Oxfams, Minds, Sue Ryders and other, less charitable, bric-a-brac floggers. We got skilled at picking rare gems from shelves otherwise packed with Benchley, Archer and Collins. Much of it was quirky sci-fi, but there was the occasional triumph - mine was a first edition UK paperback of a minor Kerouac, found in a Church book sale for 60 pence.

There were no better days than these.

Other perambulations had no real purpose except to take in the air and enjoy the spaces of the city. Around the Victorian abodes of Clifton, up to the Suspension Bridge and back across to the Downs. We rapped crazily about films, music, books, theatre, riffs on conspiracy theories such as The Bristol Hum and the Marconi Affair, outlandish speculations about the other walkers.

It was an idyllic existence in many ways. There was no urgency for anything and plenty of time ahead. The fortnightly awkwardness at the Dole office was a small inconvenience to pay for bliss. But I was lucky; although I asked for little, my father, living in Cypress, happily sent me cheques, and was too far away to nag me about what the fuck I was doing with my life. Gareth survived jobless on whatever resources he had, but Ben and Nick needed to get jobs, and signed up with temping agencies. The work was dismal, tedious and they cared nothing for it. One thing changed – now it was just Gareth and me on the walks.

Very quickly 1996 became 1997. The century was fading out fast, and the Tories, who had ruled Britain since I was five, were falling apart. We'd been looking forward to this moment our whole lives.

Nick's temp job turned permanent. Ben was using my PC to write application letters to local software companies.

Finally, on a walk on the downs, Gareth and I spoke about our ideal magazine, one that covered all the things we liked to talk about. Nothing like this existed at the time (and still doesn't). I like to think it was me who said – “maybe we should do something about it.”

The idea persisted into the pub later that evening. All four of us discussed making a ‘fanzine’, a DIY project, hand-created; now, with computers, these things could be done easily. We talked about what we'd want to include – films, music, books, conspiracy theories, and Gareth said poetry I'm sure. At this fragile stage, the whole dream-like notion could easily have drifted away.

Gareth found out about a scheme, hatched at the fag-end of the Conservative era, to allow people of little or no experience to apply for small arts grants. It was money-for-everything. This wasn't big bucks, but to us five thousand smackers was a whole lot of something. Gareth took the magazine idea and converted it into a pitch: It was the end of an era, forms and ideas were breaking down and fragmenting, you needed a place to showcase the beautiful disaster in its most creative manifestations. Ben gave us a title - a leftover from his Physics degree– ‘Entropy’. We knew instantly it was right.

We spent a week working on the application and then held our breath. Or rather I did, Gareth was steaming ahead, acting like it was a done deal. My instincts have always been caution mixed with chronic negativity. Assume the worst; accept disappointment as default.

In contrast, Gareth's was suddenly and incredibly energised. We'd been hibernating on the dole, marinated in plonk, wondrously wasting our time, and I was happy to let that continue for a while, but Gareth wanted action and quickly.

It should be stated right now that the magazine would never have got to Issue One without Gareth's intense optimism and relentless will. I was taking it day-by-day and ready to drop everything when things looked bleak. Gareth, on the other hand, had a vision. This casual fancy, a walkers' daydream, was now of deadly importance, and I was strapped in beside him.

He came over to our flat and we spent a day or two drafting letters to writers on my PC – J.G. Ballard, William Gibson, Howard Barker, Iain Sinclair – each one personally crafted with the minimum of boiler plate, expressing our discerning admiration for their works, informing them of our entropic enterprise, and politely requesting a piece of original writing. We didn't know where they lived, instead Gareth had culled their agents' details from a writers' tome in the library. The last one we wrote to was a man called Peter Whitehead. Now, we *did* have his address, because it had been published in the London Review of Books, alongside a bizarre article by Iain Sinclair about Whitehead, his self-published novels and his 1960s legacy. I barely comprehended any of this, but Gareth was excited. Remember: no one we knew had an internet connection; this was before Google - a time when obscure figures were not easily tagged and sussed online. Whitehead was unknown to us, but we knew where he lived.

When the letter came announcing that we'd got the grant I was mostly thinking about all the work that had to be done, but I did feel that my existence had been faintly vindicated. Could this be the first rung on the ladder towards "making it" in the world? Our victory was slightly blunted when the local papers published a list of all the grant recipients in the area – basically every artist in town, along with a few other chancers who'd bothered to fill out the form. But we had the money. Gareth had been right.

Nick was promoted into middle management. With the raise he bought a computer, much more powerful than my crappy PC, and made it clear that this was his contribution to the magazine. We needed designers and software and printers and photographic scanners and all of this professional shit that we knew nothing about and which terrified me. Already I was nostalgic for the time when Entropy was going to be photocopied and hand-stapled. The stakes had, very quickly, soared.

Doodling on my computer, I created the magazine's masthead, which somehow stuck. Then Gareth met two would-be designers, Beth and Julia, while on some dole computer training scheme. He'd also charmed the woman that ran the course into giving us free access to their photo scanner. We had a design brief – **Bladerunner** meets **Brazil** with a hefty dose of Kyle Cooper's opening from **Se7en** – which sounded great, but was virtually impossible to realise.

And we also needed something to design.

Replies to our begging letters came. Sinclair was happy to help out in any way he could. Barker sent an unpublished poem. Ballard posted a photograph of his Shepperton back-garden with apologies scrawled on the back. Whitehead of course was the most enthusiastic. This man who neither of us had heard of before that year, began to inundate us with material – videos of films

he'd directed and compilations of Scandinavian TV interviews, his own books, newspaper clippings dating back to the '60s, and erotic black and white photographs. Generous evidence of his existence. We devoured it all.

Gareth pitched to me that the first issue should contain, as its major feature, a Peter Whitehead extravaganza. He was the perfect man to announce **Entropy**'s arrival – a living embodiment of the experimental and the mainstream, movies, music and literature, sex and art, myths and madness.

**Rule # 6: If you want advice about printing magazines, don't ever ask a rival small-press publisher or anyone from a 'print services' company.**

These people take great pleasure in making the process sound both incredibly complex and expensive. A vast Russian, whom we wittily christened ‘The Bear’, fronted a company that specialised in corporate brochures of the glossiest kind. He sneeringly informed us that with our budget and resources, the magazine would look like “a piece of shit”. We had a beer with the very earnest editor/publisher /designer of another Bristol mag (which turned out to be a regional off-shoot of **Living Marxism**). He was friendly, but described the printing process in terms that made it sound like a particularly tricky form of open-heart surgery.

Walking with Gareth up a Bristolian hill after one of these meetings I cried out in frustration – “How can this be? How can 800 quid not guarantee us something that looked half-decent?” I had taken a whiff of failure.

My real pre-life crisis occurred the day before our trip to meet Whitehead in Pytchley, Kettering. That was to be our first interview for **Entropy**, and something we’d been anticipating for weeks. I’d woken up defeated. Gareth came round, and we went over what we knew about printing, trying to figure out what the best solution might be. I began to mutter about how hopeless it all was, and was suddenly sobbing. “I can’t cope with this,” I said, “I want to give up.” I longed for the days when there was no heavy pressure looming over me, no expectation that I might actually do something. People didn’t use the word ‘stress’ much in the mid-90s, but I guess I was experiencing it. Not for the first time – school and university were pretty stressful, but they had a structure, safety-nets in place. **Entropy** felt big and scary and worst of all, it was all our own invention. This was real-world, and there were no soft landings, even in cosy Bristol. Gareth took me in his arms and smiled. His laughing blue eyes, made the panic subside. I calmed down and felt immensely foolish.

He left that afternoon to stay overnight with his girlfriend in London, and the plan was to meet me the next day at St Pancras to catch the midday train to Kettering. I came directly from Bristol, lugging an unreliable, big black tape deck to record the session. By 12.01 Gareth still hadn’t arrived at the platform. I stood just outside an open carriage door as the guard moved up the train, shutting us all in, whistle balanced between his lips. Recovered from the previous day’s wimp-out I’d entered a zen-like state of calm and acceptance. I’d go alone to Pytchley if need be, and let the apparently supernatural Whitehead do whatever he bloody well wanted to me.

Seconds before the whistle, Gareth did appear, bags and backpacks in every hand and hanging off every shoulder, jogging towards me despite the load, huge grin on his face. Safely ensconced on the train we drank beer on empty stomachs to calm us down.

Whitehead was there at the station. Sitting on a bench. Long, white hair unmistakable, clutching a mug of cocoa from the platform café. He greeted us warmly, a couple of nervy, twentyish weirdos off the train who couldn’t stop smiling. As we strolled out of the station, there was a young woman at a payphone with her back to us – short skirt and black thigh boots. Whitehead raised his eyebrows casually, and threw a dry line our way about the improved quality of the local talent. We’d never really met a true 1960s relic before – and we were levitating with joy.

He drove us home – a rambling set of two cottages knocked into one, and we climbed up to his ‘wing’, a suite of rooms complete with bedroom, living room, bathroom, kitchenette and a view of the Egyptian stone theatre he was gradually constructing in the garden. We were up there for three or four hours, sofa-bound, an audience with a master teller of tales. At one stage whisky was poured, I operated the recorder, which by some bloody miracle, worked (it never would again), and Gareth fired most of the questions. We’d done our homework, sketched out the biography, watched all the films, and I’d even read all the novels (a thankless task), but the real Peter Whitehead sitting before us took things to another plateau.

He rapped about technology, Egyptian gods, movies, death, women, rock stars. Our heads were buzzing. We’d been for so long mired in the dole world of the quotidian. Whitehead lifted us out of reality and revealed another style of life – messy, glamorous, sexy, mysterious.

Gareth rose to the challenge – probing Peter about patterns, arrangements, deeper structures and ‘the project’. This would become Gareth’s modus for almost all interviews – trawling for the bigger meaning beneath ripples of activity, and later he would often be disappointed. Very few people can give as good deep-down ‘project’ as Peter Whitehead.

We departed from Kettering on a high, and with fresh determination. The magazine would come out no matter what! Fuck the Bear and all his processes! We’d do it for Peter if nothing else!

He’d seduced us of course, like he did so many who are lucky enough to meet him along the way, and I think we knew it.

Not long after that, on an off-chance Gareth called up the University printers, an outfit more used to binding Phds, and they agreed to print **Entropy** for a very reasonable price and didn’t make us feel stupid.

Other articles in Issue One were mainly written by ourselves and close friends. We came up with names for columns and then found writers. My flatmate, Ben, took a pop science column called ‘Hotel Complexity’, and Nick was ‘The Thin Man’, intended to be Bukowski-esque tales of debauchery around Bristol. Gareth and I had two columns apiece. Mine were ‘Lostness’, a sober confessional of my various states of emotional fragility, with jokes; and ‘File 23’ a factually sound parody of conspiracy theories. Gareth’s were ‘Behind the Western Eye’, a mock Victorian psycho-geographical serial set in Bristol; and ‘The Ploughman’s Lunch’, an absurdist satirical thing that distilled some of Gareth’s wilder long-walk raps onto the page. Other bits and pieces were gathered from further afield.

It was clear from the get-go that Gareth and I had very different writing styles. I strived for lucid, sharp, clear and cogent and always within the assigned word-limit, Gareth preferred poetic, digressionary, frequently obscure, and he wrote until he was done. He had grasped, better than I, that **Entropy** was a rare chance to write freely and without inhibition. Why do it if you couldn’t experiment? Occasionally I’d question him on something indecipherable, pin him down when a sentence drifted against the rational, but generally he was on the right track. This was our magazine and we could do what we bloody well wanted. Since we never signed our own names to our own writing, **Entropy**’s editorial voice was charmingly schizo.

We got the call about a week before our launch party at the Arnolfini arts centre gallery (about as high profile as we could possibly get in Bristol). The University printers were pulling the plug on **Entropy**. They'd got as far as 'outputting' the document (creating a hard copy which is used to make printing plates), when some of their workers had spotted some nudity, and then they'd sat down to read the articles.

Rule # 11: Just as dealers shouldn't get high on their own supply, printers must never read what they print.

The University lot collectively refused to print the filthy thing and their managers wouldn't make them. The Chief offender was the picture of Whitehead laid out, naked, hand over genitals on a hospital bed, which was tactfully faint behind some text. In the official letter we received there was mention of an "unpleasant tone" throughout the publication. Our first critical feedback! They agreed to let us pick up the work they'd done, since we'd already paid for it. As we checked through the pages on site, one of the printers, who'd been all smiles a week before, stood and watched us in fuming silence. He looked ready to grab either one of us in a flying tackle if we tried anything. I gritted my teeth as Gareth deliberately dwelled on the 'offending' pages, gently stroking his hand over the semi-naked Whitehead.

We had a week to print the magazine or we were fucked.

Clutching the liberated document we took a bus to a small printing company on edges of semi-suburban Bristol. With quiet efficiency and no controversy, Issue One of **Entropy** was printed a few days later. And it looked fine. There were one thousand copies - a relatively modest number, but if you're distributing them all yourself (and hand-marking every single one), it's a vast amount. The launch party was a success, friends and family travelled from all over. Wine was drunk, magazines bought and backs slapped. Guest of honour Peter Whitehead didn't make it due to illness, but he left a praise-filled phone message – not a great surprise since that issue became something of a love letter to the man.

Although I was proud, the first issue underwhelmed me as I flicked through it for the umpteenth time. All that work, and yet so few pages. We were already busy on Issue Two.

Rule # 3:  
Distribution is a bitch.

In the magazine's credits distribution is attributed to 'The Own Fair Hand', which wasn't a joke. We printed out a 'Sale-Or-Return' agreement form to pass to stockists and then door-stopped bookstores, newsagents or anyone else who might have shelf-space in Bristol. Predictably this was a soul-destroying, largely humiliating task. After months of work making the magazine, we now spent our days haggling with bored managers, vainly trying to persuade them to take four rather than three copies. Surprisingly, people did stock it, and it sold in healthy if not spectacular numbers. Bristol was our principle territory, but Gareth rightly knew it had to be present in London to make an impact. Each time he'd take a week or more hauling an enormous mag-filled rucksack around dozens of outlets. I did most of Bristol, and later, pitched in for Cambridge and Brighton, but the capital was the killer, and that was all Gareth's.

I still don't know how he did it.

As Issue One moved out into the world, Issue Two picked up steam. We'd got enough right with the first to open up a few doors. Gareth seized on that, sending **Entropy** to publishers, culture publicists and art-marketeers; getting our names onto the right lists. Mail started to arrive at Ashgrove. Invitations to events we weren't likely to attend. Small-presses sent material, much of it atrocious, and phoned us up, gently hustling us to write features and reviews. Gareth also made a lot of calls, soliciting articles from old and new friends. We had 'editorial meetings', but these were rarely formal. **Entropy's** contents were thrashed out in cafes and pubs, over sandwiches, cappuccinos and pints. Often Gareth told me what he thought should go in, and I nodded along, sometimes batting him down, or questioning something that I didn't like the sound of. He was bursting with energy and ideas, and most of the time I had neither.

Issue Two's main spread was about novelist and myth-maker Iain Sinclair and film-maker, Chris Petit. This was a direct sequel to the Whitehead story since they had made a film about him for Channel 4, **The Falconer**. The presence of Sinclair, who had then-recently shifted from fringe cultishness to broadsheet respectability with his collection **Lights Out For The Territory**, would be totemic. He seemed to be a genuine connection point with a literary and popular avant-garde we had aspired to all our lives.

We met the two of them in London, first at Petit's flat and then over to Sinclair's mythical, Hackney house, where we arrived too late for the family sausages, and ate home-delivered curries. Slightly sloshed on beer, I sat in the garden in a quiet daze. Gareth and Iain traded references, quotes and anecdotes, and I was just happy to be in such pleasant company. Sinclair, it should be stated, was full of enthusiasm for **Entropy**. He made us feel like we were part of something new and cutting edge. I went back to my sister's place in Limehouse, and didn't sleep for hours.

Back in Bristol, Ben finally got a job, at an IT company in Bath. This, more than anything, marked the end of those halcyon days, those wine, tea and cigarette days. We moved to a nicer, if still problematic flat, in Kingsdown. A fifteen minute walk to Ashgrove going the back way. And I would make that journey often.

Nick's computer in Ashgrove sat in the dead-space corridor that separated the living room from the bedrooms and bathroom. This was the centre-of-the-action. When we were 'in production', the designers would sit there, tinkering away on our blagged floppy-disc copy of Quark. Gareth sat in the living room, sorting through press releases, taking and making calls, writing on scraps of paper, and when they weren't handy – his own hands and forearms, which were covered in scribbles fading and fresh, understood only by him. A new and more adept designer, Megan, came on board at this point, and Beth and Julia felt maligned. Julia disappeared, but Beth hung on until Issue Three. One afternoon, I found myself hugging her as she sobbed away on my shoulder - we had tried (and failed) to explain how a layout could be improved – and we all knew that this would be her final issue.

Over the next few editions, we partially cut loose from the London-based psychogeographical nexus that dominated Issues One and Two, although figures from Sinclair's extended universe continued to make cameos. **Entropy** had a rhythm now – talking, writing, editing, designing, proofing, printing, distributing and then repeat. That's not to say it became mundane; each issue breathlessly promoted our interests and obsessions, and that opportunity to indulge ourselves, and to know there were readers digging it, never got old. Plus, we were getting recognised for our achievements. A round-up of small-press activity in London's **Time Out** picked up **Entropy** as a major highlight. That was a huge thrill. Letters and emails of appreciation were coming through each week. When there wasn't much work to be done, I enjoyed sitting around Ashgrove, looking at the post, and catching up on who'd phoned and why. Even if we hadn't 'made it' yet, it felt like it was only a matter of time.

Gareth was less complacent. He began to see the possibilities of going further than the word on a page. '**Entropy** presents' events. The magazine was a 'brand' (although we didn't really know that term yet) and arts venues in Bristol, craving new ideas, were happy for us to do their work for free. It began with packed-out screenings at the art-house cinema, The Watershed, of Whitehead and Petit's stuff, with them coming down in person, and then we migrated across the water for readings at the Arnolfini. The latter events were Gareth's babies, having little to do with my contribution to the magazine. I began to feel more and more like a spectator.

Even though I wrote and edited a great deal of **Entropy**, it was clear to me that I was the follower and Gareth the leader. Most of the time I was happy in that position, it suited my temperament. Gareth could push things through, he was far less cautious and didn't worry about what other people thought. But it wouldn't always be such a comfortable fit and we did begin to argue over matters, mostly trivial and some more important. I started to fantasise about life after **Entropy**, imagining a glittering journalistic ascendance.

The first major opportunity that emerged from **Entropy** came from German arts-book publisher, Benedikt Taschen. Gareth had written, in retrospect very shrewdly, a Taschen primer before he came to lyrically appreciate Japanese photographer Araki's then-new tome, **Tokyo Lucky Hole**. Taschen had personally read the piece and thought it brilliant (this wasn't the only time the subject of one of Gareth's profiles was mind-blown). Since none of the work was signed, the Taschen people invited both of us to meet their head of marketing at the London Book Fair a few weeks later. The potential for **Entropy** to lead us to 'better' things suddenly seemed very tangible.

Shabbily besuited, we were taken out for a fine lunch and offered the job of writing English copy for Taschen's catalogues. Our dream— that Taschen would offer to publish the magazine and finance our future, was dashed – but at least we had paid work, and a month later we flew to Cologne for our first 'briefing'.

We were taken out that night by Bernard, the guy who actually wrote the catalogues. An improbably bequipped and bespectacled fellow in his 30s, we gradually surmised that Harold bitterly resented us for having been tasked with 'rewriting' his ploddingly dull German copy.

Gareth drunkenly whispered in my ear after too many glasses of schnapps, "He's trying to get us drunk" but by then it was too late. We spent the next day in the Taschen HQ, groggily hungover, chain-drinking sweet coffee in some enormous meeting room while a long line of very earnest editors came in and pitched their upcoming titles. If Bernard had intended to sabotage our concentration, his suffering was the greater – he arrived hours late and trembled until lunchtime. The whole thing felt both nightmarish and glamorous, but was probably ridiculous.

After Issue Two we talked a lot about continuing the magazine beyond Issue Six, the final issue that we had funding for – which now loomed ever closer. But these plans didn't get far. The obvious move was to turn **Entropy** into a website, and while this occurred to us, we couldn't get very enthused about the idea. Printed matter was so much more appealing and tangible – we hadn't a clue what the web could do. This was '97, '98 and the heady days of the dot.com boom were at least a year into the future. Kevin Williamson, the tall, fast-spoken founder and editor of the Rebel Inc publishing imprint, was in the area, and he thrashed us at pool during afternoon beers in a Bath pub while evangelising about Napster.

He merrily signed us up to do an **Entropy** book, but Rebel Inc folded before we'd even figured out the contents.

In truth, **Entropy** was a rather awkward entity, appearing just as the broadsheets' arts coverage was starting to be reduced and simplified. The very things that Iain Sinclair and others admired in us – our seizing of the last gasps of late '90s avant-gardism, the use of DIY publishing to resist the mediocrity of the mainstream – were also the reasons why we would be defunct by the end of the millennium.

Actually, I wasn't too fussed. I assumed that with the magazine as our resume we could stroll into a job at any major newspaper in the country. After all, both Gareth and I had freelanced for the Independent whilst editing **Entropy**, so how hard could it be? Two years later when I was unsuccessfully interviewed for a low-level website hack job at the **Guardian**, that foolish notion was laid to rest.

One side-project that now stands as a significant legacy of **Entropy**, was *radio on remix*, the short film by Chris Petit. Our idea, to bring Chris back to Bristol to revisit all the locations of his 1979 road-movie **Radio On**, was inspired by the planned demolition of the same iron-bridge that Ben and I had nearly broken down on our way back to Bristol. Gareth and I approached a local broadcaster with a one-sheet proposal that we had completely made up (I don't think Chris ever saw it), and they agreed to bankroll the whole thing. When Petit filmed

in and around Bristol, we hung out nearby while he shot things. Ending up in the cramped flat where **Radio On**'s memorable opening sequence (a long hand-held shot, scored by Bowie's **Heroes**) was composed. The occupants were thrilled that a film, no matter how obscure, had been made in their gaff.

The finished film was shown at dozens of international film festivals (and can now be seen on the BFI DVD), but we were far too naïve to figure out a way to exploit our status as 'Associate Producers'. We came up with a proposal for another filmic **Entropy** spin-off, **Obscura** - a fact-fiction video essay about Bristol conspiracies with a poetic voice over. It was fun to discuss, but it was, alas, never to be.

It was quite late on (between Issues Four and Five) that we visited an art exhibition down at the old docks and saw a minutely detailed imaginary museum of fictional objects, journals, painting and photographs, that seemed perfect for **Entropy**. We were introduced to the artist, Meir Agassi, an Israeli who had lived in Bristol for many years. He told us he used to edit an arts magazine himself in Tel Aviv. We asked him to let us publish some of his stuff, but instead he invited us round for tea.

Meir lived off the road between my place and Ashgrove. His house was one of those classic, ancient Bristol piles, three or four floors and a basement, overflowing with books and artworks. We pitched up one Saturday afternoon, and he led us up to a study, passing his son's room where they he and some friends played computer games, barely looking up at these two reprobates spending the afternoon with Dad.

Meir asked us about **Entropy**, and we gave him the story of its origins, by now well-oiled – art, experimentation, millennial tensions, forms, breaking down. We were used to people being impressed by this spiel, but Meir's expression didn't change. Out of a cabinet he brought his own magazine and talked about what it stood for. He gave us a hard time – "Who is your magazine really for? What is your intention?" I stumbled for answers, Gareth spoke eloquently, but even he was straining.

Meir was searching for something in us and didn't seem able to find it. I felt a pang of arrogance. Our magazine was doing well, people loved it, so what was this guy on about? Looking back I suppose that he was provoking us, seeing if we could handle the debate and stand up for ourselves. But there was no trace of mischief. He looked deadly serious the whole time. We drank the tea, ate the biscuits, and left after an hour.

"Well, that's that," I said to Gareth, completely perplexed by the experience, "He won't give us anything."

But Gareth smiled, "I think he will. Eventually."

I recall walking away and feeling envious of Meir, his wife, his son, his space, his artistic practice. This seemed to be a life worth aspiring to.

It wasn't long after that day - a few weeks or a month, but we heard that Meir was in a terrible car accident. The whole family were driving somewhere when the car collided and all of them were killed.

Some time later, as I passed Meir's road on the way to Ashgrove, I saw the furniture from his house being hauled out to a waiting van. I stopped for a while.

Issue Four featured my interview with Stewart Home. Another denizen of the Iain Sinclair factory of charming rogues and obsessive weirdos – Stewart was both. We ate vegetarian curry in Brick Lane then spent the rest of the evening in an empty megapub, with me running out of questions over beer. Stewart was so enmeshed in a world of political and cultural fringe activities that I didn't understand half of what he was doing or saying, and he hardly seemed to notice. Like Peter Whitehead he had a tendency to inundate anyone interested with material (books, 'zines, CDs), far more than you could ever absorb, and he had a potentially brutal opinion about everything. Somehow we got along quite well.

Later Stewart would plagiarise one of my **Entropy** pieces for an article he wrote – which was the ultimate compliment. He even stayed with me in Bristol a few times, and once we were taken out by a pair of idle-rich London-media types slumming it in the South-West. They and Stewart were mutually connected by an acquaintance with one-time KLF chart-topper and million pound incinerator Bill Drummond. She was good-looking, her man was self-loathing and loathsome. They got us drunk in a Clifton pub and took us back to their flat where the boyfriend promptly passed out. When the woman invited Stewart and me to join her in the basement, I knew it was time to leave.

The last two issues are blurry. I was restless in Bristol, and had less and less to do with the daily running of the magazine – the chores and errands that Gareth liked to call 'Dogwork'.

I started entertaining the idea of moving to Australia and getting a job on daytime soap, which seems shockingly banal, but was perhaps a reaction against the esoteric nature of **Entropy**.

Ben had a girlfriend now, I was single, on the dole, and **Entropy** would be over in a few months. The phone calls offering us groovy jobs in London weren't coming through. Pitching for freelance articles with the broadsheets seemed like a total, soul-destroying grind. The optimistic vision of my career I'd been entertaining was fading away, and returning to the innocence of those early days in Bristol was not an option.

Then, I got a real overseas offer. To go to Singapore for six weeks to make a theatre performance with some old friends from university. I left before Issue Six was even finished and even though, ironically (because I'm such a film freak), it was the 'Film Issue', I didn't feel that my absence was going to make much difference. That trip would profoundly change my life, and when I returned everything would be different.

# Rule # 1: It ends.

When I recovered from jet-lag I learned that Gareth had basically edited and distributed Issue Six alone. He'd even designed some of the pages. I don't think there were hard feelings. I figured that that was the way he preferred it.

The summer was closing, and even though the magazine was finished, there was one final **Entropy** event. Gareth had curated an afternoon of poetry and music, which included the deeply eccentric poet Aidan Dun, another 'discovery' of Iain Sinclair's, performing songs in a thick, affected West Indian accent. This offended the Bristol bohos who gave me cold looks in the bar afterwards.

The party was over.

Gareth stayed in Bristol for another few months, and then moved to London to live with his girlfriend. It was a shift he'd been delaying for a while. I'd been invited to programme films at a local alternative cinema space called The Cube, which we'd featured in **Entropy**.

Eighteen months later, Gareth was long gone, Nick had left Ashgrove and was living on the other side of the city, Ben had a flat with his girlfriend, and I was moving to Sheffield to take up my first (and last) proper paid full-time job.

The house on Ashgrove Road was occupied by strangers who had never heard of **Entropy**. They passed through that corridor, never to know that a little magazine had once been produced there. And that it had been so much a part of our lives and always would be.

It was the year 2000.

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