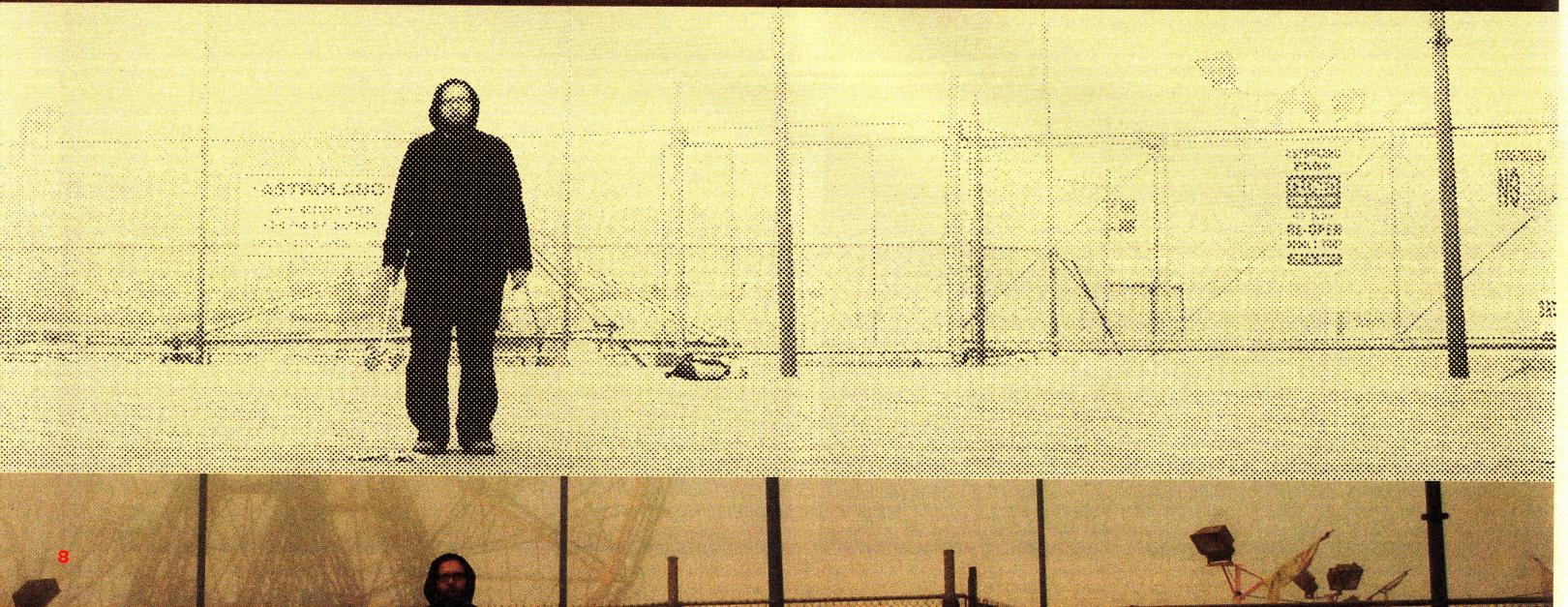


## BETWEEN SEVEN AND NINE HUNDRED WORDS ABOUT ANYTHING



## **By Daniel John Kitson**

Unfettered choice is not really where human beings tend to excel. Faced with boundless possibility we are generally less likely to feel liberated and more likely to feel a little stumped, frozen in opportunity by the inherent doubt of deciding. Now, making any choice that matters is naturally tricky. As, more surprisingly, are making most choices that don't matter. Any decision will involve a trailing sense of the choice not made, of what could have been, possibly should have been. Of the person we should have stayed with. Of the route we should have driven (literal, not metaphorical). Of the meal we should have ordered. Of the film we should have seen. Of the path we should have walked (metaphorical not literal).

We have more choice now than ever before. Clearly, the 'we' to which I refer is the amorphous and lazily inclusive 'we' that refers to the affluent west, there are, of course people with a crippling lack of choice, forced into lives of horrific brutal desperation against their will and beyond their remedy. I would suspect however, that there are fewer wry observations to be made about that. But 'we', we have been given the gift of choice. In all aspects of our lives. Travel, dress, lifestyle, food, car, medicine, television. We are told by companies that we have demanded more choice. And that they have considerably responded to our demands. Personally, I don't remember demanding more choice. I don't recall writing to C.E.O.s the world over insisting on busier television schedules, more extensive menus, or a greater number of colour options in my underwear. I may have done, I write a lot of deeply persuasive letters, so it's tricky to keep track of all the change I have achieved, so I may have done. But I don't think I did.

Of course some choice is good, it is good for example that the lactose intolerant can now ask for soy milk without readying an affable but firm explanation of their condition for a baffled barista. Now, soy milk is a viable option for tolerant and intolerant alike and the world (coffee shop) is generally a better place for it. But, personally, for me, too much choice can cripple the ability to decide. This is at its most frivolous and

consequently, its most frustrating in restaurants. When presented with an extensive and impressive menu, rather than seeing a master work of potential culinary wonder, I see little more than a cast iron guarantee of failure. How can I ever know, objectively fundamentally, provably, that I ordered the best thing? The right thing? I can't. I can't ever know that and so everything I order, must be, on some level, the wrong thing. I have tried the patience of many a kindly waiter with my ludicrous mind changing, my humming and ahing not to mention my ever present dilly dallying. And so now, I tend to over order. Thus I can try all the things I fancied and I walk home uncomfortably full and sickened by my own gluttony rather than saddened by crippling multiplicity of what could have been (eaten).

I think, that often, beyond the galling impotence of opportunity overload this spread of increased choice has eroded the sense of a shared experience. In the halcyon years of yesterday, there were a few TV channels. With few things on them. And we all watched the few things that were shown to us and then we all talked about them. Of course this commonality of experience was restrictive and unappealing to some. But it was something to be shared. Something to bring human beings together. Something to share in the vast, unfathomable world.

The truth is, often, the personalised, option saturated, decision heavy truck of choice is driven not by our demand, but by the desire of those providing the choices to control every corner of every market. To monetarise every inch of human whim and desire. They aren't benevolently catering to our demands. They are creating our demands, handing them to us, shrugging, and saying 'we'll see what we can do' before charging us heavily for not quite meeting them.

But the false basis on which choice is provided is nothing compared to the inaction these multifarious choices can often lead to. These choices tell us unequivocally, that there is always somewhere else we could be, some other meal we could be eating, some other person we could be loving, some other road we could be walking. This is the legacy of choice and the curse of the marginally self aware. It is only when hemmed in by restriction, by guidelines, by assignments that we can meet our demands and desires in a doubt free flurry of made decisions.

**Daniel Kitson can be seen in The Impotent Fury of the Privileged until April 13 at the Athenaeum Theatre as part of the Melbourne International Comedy Festival. He can also be heard on Triple R in the wee hours during the festival.**