

Live and Let Dial

Do any of you every have those hypothetical discussions, whereby one enjoyable thing must be given up in favour of retaining another? You know, things like: beer or wine, baths or showers, radio or television and sex or tinkering in the shed. All pretty tricky, eh? Let us though, concentrate on the penultimate. For me, there is no contest. I would, with a musical in my heart, slowly and methodically dismantle a television set into its individual parts (as a certified, though still at large nutcase might), and post each piece separately back to the factory where it was assembled, rather than live without radio. 'Are we able to watch DVDs and the like if we do give up television,' I hear you ask. Well, I've wrestled with this, and no, you may not. You may of course go to the cinema, if you like that sort of thing. Unless of course cinema was paired with sitting in the spandrel for three hours, scratching yourself. Preferable, I fancy.

When playing this 'game' the other week, my rather excitable paramour upped the stakes even further. 'Would you', she asked, 'give up radio or tea, forever?' So shocked was I by the difficulty of this choice I had to go for a lie down in the spandrel. Emerging a week later I asked if that included all tea or could I still have the odd cup of jasmine. 'All tea', she uttered senatorially, like a baddie from Star Trek. Quivering, I retreated to the safety of my consulting rooms, under the stairs. A life without tea! It was almost inconceivable. I mean, I'd have to give up cooked breakfasts for a start, another thing I'd gladly spend hundreds of pounds shipping bits of televisions back to Samsung instead of losing. But, life without radio! That *was* inconceivable. Sweating, hairy, and dehydrated, I gave my answer. 'T-e-a', I sobbed. Oh how I sobbed.

Unlike aching joints, hangovers and voices that cannot be there, the radio has always been with me, and so, employing the same rationale to radio (should it be given up) as I did to television, I would have to endure the agony of never hearing *Hancock's Half Hour*, *I'm Sorry I Haven't A Clue*, *The Goons* and many other cherished programmes which have been with me since I stopped using the potty, or six months before I bought my first scientific calculator.

When I started secondary school, I had a voracious appetite for these programmes. For some reason these programmes used to be on during the day, when I was at school learning maths and how to use the lavatory. Now bearing in mind this was an aeon before the advent of iPlayer, I would, before going to school, call on a couplet of elderly neighbours at dawn, stand in their threshold, and with a copy of the Radio Times each, they would circle in pink highlighter, the programmes I wanted. On my return from school, even before greeting my mother, I would call upon them, hopping and salivating on the doorstep, eager to receive my TDK 90. Then, come the night, I would settle in to bed after my supper ration of warm milk and toast (usually with Marmite) and would fire up the Walkman and chuckle in the dark.

Then as now, it has always been Radio 4. Sure, I've flirted with other stations, like, Radio 4 Extra, which is, I'm sure you know, a digital station. Now there is nothing wrong with digital radio per se, but there are plans afoot to convert entirely from analogue to digital radio, as there were in the bright, glorious, sadly missed days of analogue television. Remember? Remember when you used to be able to watch whichever programme you wanted, without the picture freezing, stamping your little feet, futilely reinstalling all the damn channels, then reaching for a DVD instead where the picture would freeze and you'd stamp your little feet and go to bed in a fume?!

For a lot of people, digital is not good, it is not better and for many it is a wholly insufficient replacement for analogue. Analogue televisions had their own problems, but nothing compared to digital and the grotesquely dismal network coverage on which it relies. We as consumers have been hoodwinked and forced to accept this fiasco with no recourse to justice. It was another case of an idea being in place before the technology was ready. Before allowing radio to follow the terrible route of its visual, deformed half brother, I would gladly have the skin flayed off my back like St Bartholomew, and on the vellum of my own rind, inscribe: 'I DARE YOU!', and flap it in the face of whoever's responsible, filling them orally with compressed air from my own anus, until they explode like Yaphet Kotto in that Bond film, where Bond has sexual intercourse with a croupier after a Butlin's holiday rep with a tin opener for a hand is bundled off a train after hiding in a sack. Remember? My brain hertz...