Free choice and other reasons for disjunctions

Disjunctive imperatives like "Post the letter or burn it" are generally thought to invariably grant the addressee the choice between the actions named in the individual disjuncts (leading to Ross's paradox). I argue that this is incorrect. Building on a propositional analysis of imperatives (Kaufmann 2012) and a compositional analysis of "depending on" I argue that all disjunctions denote sets of propositional alternatives that correlate with distinctions the speaker may or may not be able to indicate explicitly. Free choice arises as the specific case when the partition is induced by the preferences of the addressee. I discuss some ideas of why this is particularly natural for imperatives and performative modals. Moreover, I argue that the analysis of "depending on" shows that the individual disjuncts have to be accessible to the computation. This comes for free in a Hamblin-style analysis or in Inquisitive Semantics, but requires specific assumptions when relying on locally exhaustified classical disjunctions.