The Art of Complaining

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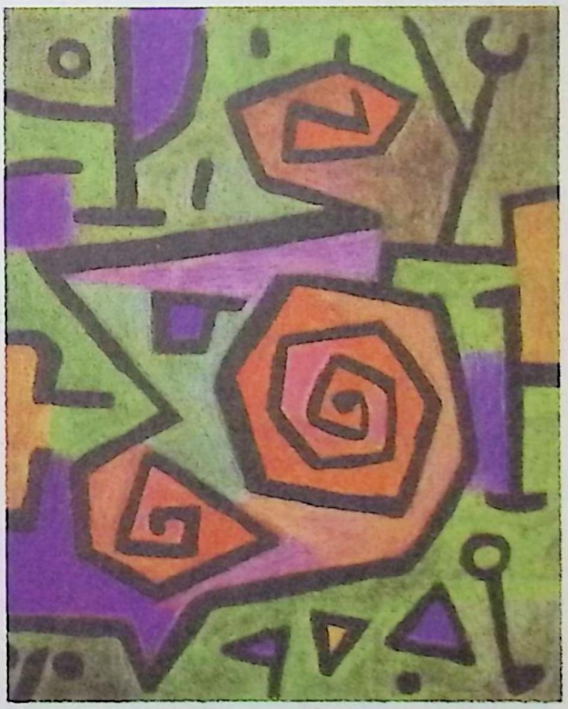
In Britain today someone complains once every 1.2 seconds. An unbelievable statistic even for the most finicky of a populace, but it is true! For the bombshell dropped by Daily Mail should merit credence. Even mathematics being a science of approximation, you have liberty with statistics, a wizardry based on the law of average.

Complaining has been taken to the level of an art in Great Britain, so it would seem. It is widely believed that a complaint issued in the right way can reap rewards. You secure money's or tax's worth in terms of services expected and delivered. If you were served a dish made of stale ingredients, you could remind the manager of the price of the item and pose the question: Would he have paid the price for such a rotten stuff? Such interactive intervention would have him taste the food as it were, and own it up with compunction to replace the dish.

A classic case was that of a person eating fish and chips in his van and then opening its door to drop the wrapping into the road. A gentleman told him that if he was not willing to find a bin for his litter, he would. To this the van owner shouted back expletives but the man keeping his composure said: 'I was trying to bring my children up to respect their environment, and that he had just made my job harder.' The bloke completely disarmed, turned around saying, "All right, mate. Fair enough." 'And picked it up himself.'

In politics we are tempestuous, in accidents we go on rampage, but in the context of higher prices we are dumb conformists. Bangladesh consumers by and large are a docile lot resigned to what is offered up never caring to be fully satisfied about the quality of it or whether it is date-expired or indeed it meets his or her specifications. So you end with tighter shirt, poorly textured trouser or salwar-kameez bound to discolour. Shy as you are to confront the seller to ask for either replacement or refund, you are left to rue your plight.

We are a bundle of contradictory traits. Highly critical of things but not complaining purposefully of anything. We would suffer high prices and poor quality service but at the other pole you see students, employees and crowds burning tyres and barricading roads with uncontrolled rage. This is their way of pressing their demands at the expense of compatriots' peace and mobility which are prerequisites of livelihood and pursuits. On the one hand we are a picture of patience and endurance at the hospitals and in queues for train, bus or cricket match tickets; on the other, we are squeamish in demanding civic services, including dignity of life and justice against criminal offences perpetrated on a silent majority, right, left and centre by the powerful.



Paul Klee
Heroische Rosen (Heroic Roses)
oil on canvas, 1938

So many years after independence, sadly, life is yet to be oriented to the weal of the average man and woman. The system creates the standards and determines the level of compliance, and that is where we are found deficient.

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