

## **Journalistic Integrity or Arbiter of Taste? The Case Study of Restaurant Critic**

**Peter Calder**

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### **Abstract**

In these times of interactive IT it seems that 'almost anyone' has the potential to become a restaurant critic. However, with growing public interest in food and dining out, the opinions of dedicated food critics are important because they sidestep the opinions of friends, advertising and marketing, and can convince potential consumers to either participate voluntarily as customers, or avoid a potentially bad dining experience altogether. In light of this, our paper illuminates the critical perspective of Peter Calder, one of New Zealand's most well-known restaurant reviewers. The discussion reveals the style of review adopted by Calder, as well as his *raison d'être*. Because this paper reflects the views and opinions of a single research participant, its generalizability is limited however the research provides a 'thick description' of Calder's reviewing strategy. Calder's work is fuelled by journalistic integrity rather than a preoccupation with dining out or the hospitality industry. This makes Calder's perspective unique. This paper distils how Calder creates his narratives that have,

over time, led to a loyal readership. This insight adds to our understanding of the importance of restaurant critics, and, within this case study, how critics view themselves.

Keywords: restaurant review; critic; journalistic integrity; online review

## **Introduction**

'Sir, I am seated in the smallest room in the house. Your review is before me.

Shortly it will be behind me.'

German composer Max Reger responding to a critic. (Dukore, 1994)

In choosing dining venues consumers are caught in a bind: do they rely on word of mouth, word of 'mouse' (online reviews), or take the plunge and try an unknown restaurant? This tension is exacerbated by the often negative and sometimes scathing feedback diners present (often anonymously) online. In New Zealand and Australia (*Bay of Plenty Times* 2014; Goodfood.com 2014), online reviews have come under scrutiny. This scrutiny reflects concern from restaurateurs about online review holders' unwillingness to take responsibility for online feedback and their reluctance to amend incorrect online information.

Typifying the online impasse while adding a note of reality to the situation, one Australian consumer commented: 'I do think that reviews on restaurants should have a shelf life! Menus change, staff change, even owners change, but the mud sticks forever it seems.' (Goodfood.com 2014, n.p.). Because online reviews are fraught with such difficulties we assert that this situation creates renewed interest in a restaurant review format that was once the 'final word' on restaurant quality: that is, the restaurant reviewer.

The power of the media is such that restaurants can be positively and negatively impacted on by restaurant reviewers. As the current online controversy attests, reviews that are professionally or publically generated have the ability to engender strong emotions in business owners, the media and consumers (Blank, 2007). However, restaurant reviews can be a double-edged sword, holding the potential for both doom or stardom, or the many points in-between. The potential for restaurant

stardom means that awards, recognition and high rankings from restaurant reviews are highly sought after by restaurants to bestow a point of difference in a highly competitive commercial marketplace. For most restaurants, the highest accolade is a Michelin star, with progression potential to three Michelin stars. Conversely, the potential downgrading of a Michelin star can be perceived as catastrophic, as the death by suicide of chef Bernard Loiseau of La Côte d'Or, in 2003, attests.

Competition for review and restaurant recognition and customer attention has increased in New Zealand and Australia as restaurant dining has undergone major changes in the past 50 years (Rowland, 2010). Where once dining out was infrequent for the majority of people, it has now become a major form of entertainment (Sietsema, 2010; Rowland, 2010). The marketplace now offers a wide variety of establishments and cuisines where, Sietsema (2010) suggests, dining out has become a fixation for many who regard themselves as 'foodies'.

Food consumerism has been mirrored by the significant growth in food-related media (Sloan, 2004). The growing media attention and public interest in restaurant reviews sits within a paradigm of rapidly escalating cultural attention to all things culinary (Williamson, Tregidga, Harris and Keen, 2009). In this environment, the opinions of critics are deemed important because they sidestep the opinions of friends, advertising and marketing, and yet can convince potential consumers to either participate voluntarily as customers, or avoid a potentially bad dining experience. To achieve this influence, Blank (2007) suggests that the validity of the restaurant reviewer's opinions is obtained through the building a relationship of credibility with their audience.

However, despite media influence, the sociological study of public food and eating remains a minority interest, with most research being conducted in the domestic and nutritional arenas (Wood, 1996; Williamson, Tregidga, Harris, Keen, 2009). Specifically, research on restaurant reviews appears limited to the criteria that reviewers use to reach their conclusions (Schroeder, 1985; Barrows, Attiua, Bosselman 1989; Clark and Wood, 1998; Steintrager, 2002; Titz, Lanza-Abbott, Cruz, 2004; Williamson et al., 2009), and therefore leaves discussion of the social impact of such reviews largely unexamined. Moreover, there appears to be a misconception

about, and little academic research on, the structure, function, role and power of restaurant reviews and reviewers.

Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to discuss the perspective of Peter Calder, one of New Zealand's most well-known restaurant reviewers. The paper also discusses the style of review adopted by Calder and his purpose in reviewing. Accordingly, this research bridges the gap between the restaurant reviewer, who is perceived as the purveyor of aspirant taste, and the realities of journalistic integrity.

## **Background**

### **New Zealand restaurant reviews**

The New Zealand media produces many restaurant reviews, published in magazines and newspapers, as well as on online review sites and blogs. Peter Calder reviews restaurants for New Zealand Sunday newspaper *The Herald on Sunday*, with his reviews published in *Living*, the lifestyle supplement of that paper. Of New Zealand's daily newspapers, only three — *The New Zealand Herald*, *The Christchurch Press*, and *The Dominion Post* — publish restaurant reviews. New Zealand's fourth daily newspaper *The Otago Daily Times* does not feature restaurant reviews. As an explanation, the *Otago Daily Times* wine and arts feature writer noted, 'Dunedin [the main city of the region] is too small to carry serious restaurant reviews and we don't consider the "my wife's chicken was very tasty" school of reviews worthwhile for our readers.' (C. Smith, personal communication, 7 May 2013).

Ewan Sargent of *The Christchurch Press* noted that his paper obtains weekly or fortnightly reviews from five different reporters (E. Sargent, personal communication, 7 May 2013). These reviews are written as 'connoisseurial' narratives. David Burton pens Wellington's *Dominion Post* reviews for the Saturday edition. Additionally, the *Dominion Post* publishes a café review each Wednesday in its *Life* tabloid supplement. Finally, newspapers published by APN News and Media in Auckland provide restaurant reviews from five different reviewers in three main publications: *Canvas*, a glossy magazine in the weekend *Herald*; *Viva*, a fashion and lifestyle magazine in Wednesday's issue of the *New Zealand Herald*, and *Living*, a magazine in the weekly *Herald on Sunday*. It is within this publishing stable that Peter Calder writes, specifically for the *Herald on Sunday*.

## Literature Review

The purpose of this literature review is not only to provide an overview of the literature relating to restaurant reviews, but also to contextualise the importance of restaurant reviewers and their reviews within contemporary life. To achieve this, we begin by noting the emergence of restaurant reviews, the development of their basic formats (procedural, connoisseurial and consumer-driven internet reviews) and go further to reflect on how restaurant reviews are more than simple narratives. We assert that restaurant reviewers offer a portal through which diners pass in order to gain, reflect and reproduce cultural and culinary capital, all within their wider search for identity. In short, our literature review connects the contemporary dynamics of identity through food. As part of this process, we underline the importance of the journalist/restaurant reviewer over and above the 'almost anyone' who can be a restaurant reviewer on the internet.

Arguably, and within Western constructs of restaurant reviewing, Grimod de la Reynière's (1758–1837) *Almanach des Gourmands* (Cordon Bleu, 2004; Newton, 2004) began the first public discourse establishing what effective food criticism should be. Since then, restaurant reviews have changed to a point whereby, via technology, 'almost anyone' can become a restaurant reviewer. While restaurant reviews are media-fuelled, by the 1970s they were suspected to be little more than self-serving restaurant marketing strategies. Craig Claiborne, the legendary *New York Times* reviewer, addressed this perception by promoting a structured framework for restaurant reviews. Claiborne's framework maintained strict anonymity between the reviewer and their subjects in order to promote reviewer trustworthiness (Sietsema, 2010), an important consideration for their readership. Moreover, Claiborne's trustworthiness as a reviewer was enhanced by his knowledge as a chef. As Blank (2007, p. 50) reminds us, Claiborne's new framework was designed to bring about 'a sense of integrity and advocacy' to the reviewing process.

Enhancing Claiborne's framework, Ruth Reichl, also of the *New York Times*, introduced a playwright's approach to restaurant reviewing (Sietsema, 2010). In doing so Reichl further promoted the use of the connoisseurial review style by adding an 'engagement of being'. Reichl achieved this by including commentary of table dialogue and fellow diners within the review as if she were a travel author. As Blank (2007, p.

32) suggests, the potency of connoisseurial reviews, exemplified by Reichl, is their ability to 'have some sort of impact ... to illuminate and transform our lives' by producing a style of review not dissimilar in style to a novel or descriptive essay. Ever since, and because of their approach, Reichl and Claiborne have greatly influenced restaurant reviewing.

It is on the back of a combination of Claiborne and Reichl's reviewing styles that contemporary restaurant reviewers have become trendsetting. This has encouraged their audience to participate in food blogs and the many other anonymous restaurant review feedback options available via the internet today (Mirosh, 2010). However, the changes Claiborne and Reichl promoted reflected wider socio-cultural trends, especially a growing public interest in all things culinary. Consequently, reviewers have taken on the task of informing the public about contemporary trends in dining. Review readers expect critics to give them details of the context where food consumption occurs, while at the same time making it sound mouth-watering (Sietsema, 2010). These changes reflect, as Williams (2002) reminds us, the identity/consumption nexus. This is exemplified by the shift in values and beliefs that restaurants and media reflect in their movement away from industrial mass production and the fuelling of common patterns of taste, towards values focusing on personal tastes, inclinations and identity (Bourdieu, 1984; Featherstone, 1991; Baudrillard, 1998).

Consequently, restaurant reviewers, whether they are *Michelin Guide* judges or restaurant reviewers, play a vital role in constructing themes of taste, culinary and social capital, authenticity and terroir/nationality. Despite their sometime denial of such power, reviewers, as Lane (2013, p. 342) reminds us, reflect and often promote 'the immediacy of pleasure and displeasure ... [within] relative preference[s] and standards for aesthetic discrimination'. In short, reviewers provide a portal through which their audience comes to know, understand and appreciate the subtleties between dining experiences ranging from epiphanic to the mundane and downright diabolical.

In this process, reviewers help and guide their readers in negotiating the dialectic tension that Rozin (1988) and Fischler (2001) note exists between consumer desire to try new foods (neophilia), and their fear that these new foods might be harmful

(neophobia). Reviewers negotiate the space between these concerns. This is achieved because reviewers write about their experiences of the new and 'suspect' in informed and knowing ways. As a result, Shrum (1996) suggests that reviewers, who are in essence judges of taste, contribute in very fundamental ways to wider socio-cultural development. In doing so, reviewers can further 'fuel' the development of commercial hospitality. This affirms that reviewers, their reviews and opinions attribute material, social and symbolic capital to the products and restaurants they review.

Consequently, restaurant reviewers (and their reviews), are well placed in Western societies because, as Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2001, p. 22) maintain, the contemporary emphasis on individuality suggests that each person needs to create a 'life of one's own' to construct an identity. This 'life' reflects a consumptive identity (Bourdieu, 1984; Featherstone 1991; Baudrillard 1998); a position supported by Giddens' (1991, p. 81) notation that as consumers and within identity creation, we have 'no choice but to choose'. In the case of restaurant reviews, these choices facilitate identification and identity, hierarchies and taxonomies specifically for the restaurant, its chef, the reviewer, and, most importantly, the reviewer's followers and potential restaurant customers. From this perspective restaurants can be considered as sites reflecting the identity, social status and lifestyles of their diners. This aligns with Morgan, Watson and Hemmington's (2008) belief that consumers select specific restaurants in terms of how they fit with, or boost, their real or idealised self-impression. In terms of lifestyle, Sloan (2004) suggests that commercial hospitality spaces are crucial points for exhibiting lifestyles, along with learning lifestyle conventions, a theme congruent to Bourdieu's (1984) construct of habitus. Thus consumer behaviour indicates a shift toward postmodern values whereby the quest for lifestyle has become a common contemporary, consumptive and commercial fixation (Sloan, 2004).

Randall (2000) suggests that it is the array of choices available in modern life that has caused consumers to become restless. In their restlessness they turn to the media for assistance in constructing and reinforcing identity. It is from these tensions that new identities have emerged, some of them fuelled by reviewers themselves. Possibly the most ubiquitous identity is the 'foodie'. This term emerged from an edition of *Harpers & Queen* in 1982, and, congruent with Bourdieu's (1984) themes of distinction, refers

to an individual who uses 'sophisticated culinary consumption as a means of social distinction' (de Solier, 2013, p. 7). Since then the 'foodie' has, like cuisine itself, been refined, and within that refinement other consumer identities formed. Of particular note is Johnston and Baumann's (2010, p. 205) 'kind of cultural consumer – the omnivore', and Stanton, Wiley and Wirth's (2011, p. 251) locavore (the person who prefers to purchase food from local sources, typically defined as 50, 100 or 200 km from home).

Mediating these varieties, Rose (1999, p. 142) proposes another category of food identity, one exhibiting a gustatory independence running contrary to the elitism ascribed the 'foodie' and, to a lesser extent, the 'locavore'. Rose's (1999) term 'chowhound'<sup>1</sup> offers its conscripts immediacy and gratification because, and as Naccarato and Lebesco (2012, p. 77) note, chowhounds 'seek out "deliciousness" across the culinary landscape, even if it takes them far, far out of their way'. For chowhounds, foodies are viewed with scepticism because 'they lap up hype about the "hot" new restaurant/cookbook/ingredient. They'll explore unfamiliar neighbourhoods, but only with their Zagat<sup>2</sup> securely in hand.'

Whether chowhound, locavore, foodie or 'regular' restaurant diner, de Solier (2013, p. 86) points out that dining out encompasses more than just eating for nutritional needs: 'in dining out, serious consumption does not simply involve the deployment of knowledge and skill in the restaurant; it also involves the acquisition of knowledge *before* visiting the restaurant (our emphasis)'. This is where a reviewer's influence becomes influential in feeding the culinary and cultural capital aspirations of food identities. Reviewers achieve this for their audiences within a basic binary construct; restaurant reviewing, simply stated, reflects 'what's hot and what's not' at any given point in time.

While this binary is simplistic, a reviewer's modus operandi is to inform their audience through permutations of this binary in a manner that educates the diner while facilitating immediate and aspirational experiences of food and restaurant dining

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<sup>1</sup> A 'chowhound' can also refer to a follower and/or member of [www.chowhound.com](http://www.chowhound.com).

<sup>2</sup> A restaurant guidebook.

knowledge. This task is an important one because it ties into Bourdieu's (1984) constructs of class distinction based on taste, as well as providing identity markers that Giddens (1991) suggests individuals actively engage, and, in the case of restaurant customers, in the self-ascription of food-related identities.

### **Review Methodologies: Connoisseurial and Procedural Methods and Interactive Options**

In reviewing restaurants and fuelling the development of food-related identities, reviewers use two basic review methodologies: the connoisseurial review, and the procedural review. While these formats can be used separately and in similar ways to how social sciences use qualitative and quantitative research paradigms, their combination, like a mixed methodology, provides information designed to satiate 'star'-counters and narrative readers alike. Their combination, Blank (2007) suggests, is the cornerstone of a 'real' review.

The etymology of the connoisseurial review derives from the Latin root for the word connoisseur – *cognoscere* ([to] come to know) – (Barnhart, 1970, p. 256). The *American College Dictionary* (Barnhart 1970, p. 256) notes that a connoisseur is someone noted as being 'competent to pass critical judgments in an art, esp, one of the fine arts, or in matters of taste'. The emphasis on judgment supports Blank's (2007, p. 29) view that connoisseurial reviewers present themselves in a 'believe my review because ... I am a particularly well-informed, experienced, and knowledgeable person; I am a connoisseur' way. Consequently, the key to the success of the connoisseurial review is that their audience accepts the expertise of the reviewer.

This suggests that despite a reviewer's work being subjectively interpreted by readers, essentially readers 'come to know' something through the expertise and knowledge of the reviewer. It is this 'coming to know' that feeds into the reader's identification with the reviewer's topic which again further fuels their need to know more. This process creates a cyclic dependency; readers, like the 'foodie', need the expertise of their reviewers; reviewers need the readership and following of their audiences; and restaurants rely on customers who, often prompted by reviewers, make restaurant food and beverage purchases that, in turn, generate business revenue and profit. For Blank (2007, p. 30), this cycle is represented within reviews through 'the criteria of

good writing [that is aimed] to interest and hold their readers [’ attention]’. As Reichl and Claiborne demonstrate, this is also achieved through embedding the assessment, designed to reveal the ‘complexities and nuances of the restaurant’ (Lin, 2004, p. 169) via its ‘servicescape’ (Lin, 2004, p. 164), in a narrative that enables the reader to feel as though they have ‘already been to the restaurant’. Clearly, connoisseurial reviews both inform and provide a level of comforting ‘knowing’ to their readers.

In contrast to connoisseurial reviews, procedural reviews quantitatively rate restaurant experiences. Often the rating awarded to the restaurant is displayed by the use of symbols, for example, stars, dollar signs or other iconography used to denote quality, or its lack. Most simply, a simple number rating provides ranking. The benefit of using quantitative ranking is that a procedural review uses impersonal processes in providing objective assessment that, as Blank (2007) notes, reflects a more technical reviewing approach. However, while procedural reviews are less subjective in their approach, they nonetheless still promote the importance and relevance of food over and above other factors, therefore the weighting of scores, often shown with iconography, may still hold bias. Essentially, procedural reviews rate the same consumer experiences that connoisseurial reviews do, however they express their findings numerically, or through icon use.

Clearly, the style a reviewer chooses to use is open-ended. Their choice depends not only upon their literary ability but also upon the wants and needs of their readership. While either style may be compromised by its readers’ subjective interpretation, connoisseurial reviews, unlike procedural reviews, rarely use ‘a consistent set of standards’ (Blank, 2007, p. 110). Consequently, connoisseurial reviews may hold advantage in heterogeneous environments like restaurants.

While connoisseurial and procedural reviews, or a blend of the two, dominate mainstream commercial media, specifically newspapers and magazines, the internet has created opportunities for ‘almost anyone’ to become a restaurant reviewer. The opportunity for ‘almost anyone’ to become a restaurant reviewer is realised within the widespread use of food blogs, websites and video server sites, as well as through the internet’s ability to facilitate live online interaction. Web-based review sites usually offer a combination of narrative and rating mediums where ‘almost anyone’ can upload

an opinion or provide a rating. These actions are predicated on the assumption that the users have both the ability to access the necessary technology, and the motivation to participate in the process. Rose (1999) believes that the internet reviewer reflects a move away from the structural reinforcement and social systems of control that a journalist/reviewer holds, towards a more neoliberal model of expression, one highlighting agency, individual freedom and choice. Rose's (1999) position is reinforced by Naccarato and Lebesco's (2012, p. 69) suggestion that 'new technologies enable laypeople to log on and sound off, thus seeming to render irrelevant the function of elite professional taste makers'.

Yet a distinction exists between the journalist/reviewer and the 'almost anyone' blogger. Gans (2007, p. 164) makes the point that the 'everyday newswriters [the 'almost anyone' reviewer, tends to] mix facts and opinions without making the distinction' between either. This contrasts, as Gans (2007) notes, the professional expertise journalists cultivate in order to gain authority, and reader credibility.

However, it is through Gans's (2007) perspective that we come to realise the duality inherent in blog and restaurant review websites. As Naccarato and Lebesco (2012, p. 71) remind us, traditional review formats uphold 'traditional hierarchies – of writers over reader; expert over novice; critic over consumer'. Earlier, Rose (1999) noted that IT use in reviewing added to the wider democratisation of taste, moving it away from Naccarato and Lebesco's (2012) binaries. While these authors reflect the positivity inherent in democratisation, not everyone believes that the democratisation afforded by IT, and the 'almost anyone' reviewer, is a good thing.

Exemplifying this, Marwick (2007), and later Sietsema (2010) in accord with Gans (2007), cautions that the quality of the opinions of the 'almost anyone' reviewer are suspect and stand in direct contrast to the more informed opinions of the professional reviewer. While this debate reflects differences in opinion over food and taste democratisation, the commonality between blogs and interactive websites over commercial and journalistic reviewing is that the former emphasises a moving away from the elitist journalistic model of reviewing towards one emphasising free speech. Consequently, we make the point that clear difference exists between the democratisation of taste and food and the cornerstone of democracy itself: free

speech. It is within this realm that the internet provides agency, challenging the structural rigidity of commercial journalism and a possible way forward for traditional journalist reviewers.

## **Methodology**

Within a qualitative research paradigm a case study approach best suited the discussion and presentation of Peter Calder's *raison d'être* because it enabled, as Marshall and Rossman (1999) suggest, rich descriptions and experiences to be gathered. This approach, in accordance with Denzin and Lincoln's (2005) recommendation, facilitated an in-depth and detailed study of Peter Calder's reviewing perspective. While case studies are often used to describe research focusing on 'a location, such as a community or organisation' (Bryman, 2008, p. 53), the study here reflects the views and opinions of a single research participant. The study of a single case within a contemporary real-life context is referred to by Yin (2003, p. 48) as a 'representative and typical case'. Consequently, through the use of semi-structured and conversational interviewing, this research reflects Bryman's (2008, p. 691) 'intensive analysis of a single case' and enables 'thick description' within the narrative (Geertz, 1973).

A conversational approach was used for the semi-structured interview in order to generate extended discussion of the research topic (Given, 2008). Two of the paper's authors conducted a single three-hour interview at Calder's home. The interview location and timeframe suited the participant's narrative recall, and having two researchers at the interview enabled a variety of emergent themes and perspectives to be explored which consequently enhanced the quality of the collected data. The interview was digitally recorded and later transcribed. Data analysis of the transcription was, as Yin (2003) recommends, guided by the theoretical orientation of the literature review. This, as Creswell (2007) suggests, enabled patterns and themes to be established with direct interpretation of the data allowing the emergent themes to be developed. By comparing literature to Calder's data, we were able to locate Calder's uniqueness as a restaurant reviewer. Complementing this process, and as Yin (2003) recommends, the transcript and initial data analysis were independently reviewed by each of the authors to ensure that all possible interpretations of the data had been explored. This process enhanced the paper's reliability (Yin, 2003).

## Findings/Discussion

In this section we illuminate our research findings on Peter Calder in two ways. Firstly, we contrast our data to the literature, and then we discuss how and why Peter Calder has enjoyed reviewer longevity in the relatively small restaurant market of Auckland, New Zealand. This latter point is an important one because in an age where ‘almost anyone’ can become a restaurant reviewer, we assert that it is through his expertise and connoisseurship that Peter Calder has remained popular with his audience. Within this section we not only contextualise Peter Calder within our discussion but also highlight his reviewing style by example.

While Peter Calder approaches his reviews using a connoisseurial style, he nevertheless feels obliged to give his readership a quantitative component, usually in the form of a star rating:

I put the number of stars before I start writing ... I shut my eyes and breathe deeply and think, yes, that’s the right number ... very much an intuitive feeling. Whereas the narrative is the place where I play, where I try to have fun and I just try to write something that I would like to read.

In providing ‘something that I would like to read’, Calder provides the impressions and flavour of an establishment for his readers, without getting bogged down in minutiae:

I aspire to give a feeling, a flavour of the place without plodding through the place ... a shopping list kind of approach [rather than a chronological listing of events and food]. I could draw up a chart and then calculate it on a little computer, and it comes out to 3.7 stars, but I never will. Stars plug into our whole hurried mentality, but I really hate them because I write for people who read, not for people who count stars.

This approach is illustrated in Calder’s review of a French-style restaurant in Auckland’s Newmarket precinct. Here, Calder expresses what many diners experience: being ignored and enduring clumsy service:

I was pointed to a table and ignored for more than seven minutes while the two waitresses and the chef had a business meeting – sheets of paper and animated conversation – at the bar. Later, one of the waitresses gave me menus and a wine list but said she would wait for my companion to join me before telling us the specials (and when she did so later she barged straight into our conversation). The idea that I might want to order something – much less merit a free glass of tap water – seemed not to have occurred to her.

The readability of Calder's prose, combined with his promotion of cultural and culinary capital in his reviews is appealing. Typifying this is his review of an upmarket restaurant on Auckland's North Shore. Here Calder sets the scene of having just been seated:

We had scarcely taken our seats at this small and well-reviewed Takapuna [the North Shore suburb] eatery before [the] owner [...] was beside us. Three glasses materialised on the tabletop, and he sloshed generous tastes of three different Chardonnays into them, all the while maintaining a rapid-fire explanation of terroir [location] or provenance or winemakers' CVs. Then he was gone. He seemed not at all abashed when we told him on his return that two of our trio were non-drinkers (I didn't have the heart to add that the third disliked Chardonnay).

Calder's language use is interesting because it assumes his readers are au fait with terroir, provenance and are sufficiently interested in wine to be concerned with a winemaker's credentials. In using this language, Calder caters to those readers who understand the terms, and to others who *aspire* to understand it. Either way, Calder is promoting culinary and cultural capital.

The following comment suggests that Calder's narrative style is congruent to Reichl and Claiborne's yet at odds with Blank's (2007) recommendation that a good reviewer needs to have culinary experience. Calder makes the point:

[I have] virtually zero [commercial culinary experience] ... I am an enthusiastic and pretty confident home cook. I have always eaten out, at least once a week on average, but in terms of an actual hospitality background, [I have] none whatsoever.

Blank's (2007) point reflects Schroeder's (1995) earlier suggestion that a lack of industry experience is detrimental to a reviewer's credibility, which Calder counters by suggesting that his reputation, as a reliable and impartial reviewer, is enhanced because of his deliberate separation from the social scene and the industry he reviews. For Calder, his lack of culinary credentials has no relation to his reviews:

My relationship with the [hospitality] industry is virtually zero. I like it that way. I no longer get invited to restaurant openings because I think everyone knows that I routinely decline these invitations. I have never been to openings ... [I] never go to industry functions because I don't believe that I should have any personal relationship with anyone in the industry. I don't believe I should be on first-name terms with or shaking hands with the proprietor ...

For Calder, his lack of culinary skill and his 'distance' from those in the food industry are justifiable because they reflect his priorities as a journalist. For Calder these 'deficits' enhance the importance of journalistic integrity over and above all else:

Journalistic integrity is about not accepting inducements and trying to remain anonymous ... I have seen people who were reviewing an opening night party but they were writing like they were reviewing a restaurant, and I think that's an utter disgrace. To be there partaking of the restaurant's hospitality (for nothing [free]), eating their food for nothing, and then writing a review of it, how can it [the review] be credible?

Clearly, journalist integrity has served Calder well, corner-stoning readers' validation of his role as reviewer that he suggests is the 'average middle-class foodie', and not the restaurant owner or industry. In doing so, Calder has maximised his integrity which, in turn, has contributed toward his popularity and reliability as a restaurant reviewer. But for Calder these attributes are not enough. Not only does he see himself as an integrity-driven journalist but he also reflects on his responsibilities as a consumer advocate:

I see myself as being in the consumer protection business. I'm a reviewer; I report on my experience of something and very much in the interests of the diner. ...

There is a certain level of public duty to the reader. I think my job is to look out for new places, or places that people tell me have gone downhill. Serve the reader ... look after their needs.

Calder is conscious of and driven by his responsibilities toward his readers, rather than to the restaurants. This has provided him a 'line in the sand' in rationalising his lack of relationship with restaurants and restaurateurs:

Yes, I have felt the pressure one way or another. People write in and say the restaurant is going to go to the wall as a result of your [review]. And that's part of the reason why I don't do this industry hobnobbing, because I don't want to know that you have mortgaged your house, or that your children aren't eating, and it's teetering on the precipice and one bad nudge from me and your whole life has gone down ... I don't want to know that. Our concern is that we report fairly, honestly and accurately.

In passively accepting Calder's penchant for journalistic integrity and his complementary role as a consumer's advocate it would be easy to overlook the suggestion that Calder is also a 'co-creator of elitism', or a source of cultural and culinary capital. In writing reviews, Calder is, in fact, subscribing to a structural lineage of ways of being and behaving attuned to Bourdieu's (1984) habitus, while running contrary to the democratisation afforded by the internet and the 'almost-anyone' reviewer. Calder's ascription of cultural capital is subtly realised within most of his reviews; it permeates his work, conveying symbolic and aspirational cultural capital. Calder is aware of this in two ways: the first is through reader feedback:

I am aware there is a kind of a cultural elitism that is implicit in the very idea of restaurant reviews but, on the other hand, so there is too when writing about the share market [but] ... I have occasionally fielded comments or emails from people who say 'What a lot of wank [pretentious rubbish] you write, about poached duck and so on and so forth, when us people out here can't even afford to do a scrambled eggs or mince on toast.'

The second is in how Calder perceives his readers/followers:

The person I see in my mind's eye when I am writing knows a bit about food but is not going to be an expert chef, so I will not define the word 'braised' for them but I will define the word 'sous vide' or 'molecular gastronomy'. I see myself as writing for a particular audience that goes out to dinner and even a smaller subset of that audience that likes reading reviews.

In this regard Calder subscribes to the cyclic nature of reviews and the notions of cultural and culinary capital they promote. This is best exemplified by Calder's negotiation of the neophilic and neophobic (Rozin, 1988; Fischler, 2001), and the promotion of cultural capital distinctions they evoke. Here Calder notes for his readers the excitement of something new:

An ortolan is a bird. It weighs a mere 25 grams, but eating it is regarded as a peak experience for gastronomes and gourmands. The poor wee things (vegetarians should look away now) are captured alive, force-fed until they are two or three times their normal size, drowned in brandy, plucked and roasted before being eaten, bones and all, preferably in a single bite.

Contrasting this, Calder describes, albeit in a stereotypical manner, the dangers inherent in some food experiences, and helps readers with a coping strategy:

It's a testament to the robustness of my immune system that I once spent three weeks in India without getting sick. Veterans of travel in the subcontinent had told me that Delhi belly was the price you paid for going there: you got it about seven seconds after getting off the plane, medicated it as best you could, ate a lot of yoghurt and smiled. But without going at distasteful length into the gastro-intestinal details, I can say that I had not so much as a tummy-rumble for the whole time I was there. And I ate, for the most part, from street stalls and small, cheap restaurants. My secret, in case you are interested, was never to eat anything I hadn't seen being cooked, and to eat with my hands (not utensils) after washing them with germicidal soap and bottled water (this was in the days before alcohol-based hand sanitisers were widely available).

Here Calder exemplifies Lane's (2013, p. 342) point that reviewers often promote 'the immediacy of pleasure and displeasure ... [within] relative preference[s] and standards

for aesthetic discrimination' that Sietsema (2010) suggests promotes reviewer trustworthiness. As well as this, Calder also satiates another modern 'need'. Through his ascription of 'capitals', Calder aids his readers in understanding the 'culinascape' (Morris, 2010, p. 6) and, in doing so, promotes their 'foodie' and locavore identities. Arguably, the contemporary popularity of all things culinary provides an easy and enjoyable way to create a consumer identity, one laden with aspirant possibilities and consequent 'room' for upward mobility.

In this sense, Calder mediates the journalist/internet nexus because he engages and promotes the cycle of dependency by creating a comforting 'knowing' for his readers, into which they can interact directly through restaurant visits and/or providing electronic feedback to Calder's reviews via a URL. This cycle is, as previously noted, self-maintaining and consequently places Peter Calder, for the foreseeable future, as the vox populi of contemporary New Zealand restaurant reviewing.

Calder's success as a reviewer resonates with his readership. This is not only reflected in his longevity as a reviewer but also in that Calder's narratives reflect his readership's own dining experiences. These reader-reassurances are intensified by Calder's 'distance' from the restaurant community and his self-acknowledged culinary inexperience. While these domains could be perceived as areas of shortfall, Calder reflects that his journalistic integrity and his self-ascribed consumer protection role compensate for this. Calder's positioning here reflects Blank's (2007) observation that in securing readership trust, the reviewing format must match what the reviewer writes and what their readers actually experience in a restaurant visit.

In relating his own restaurant experiences within the review format as 'something that I would like to read', Calder's work contributes towards filling the identity void modern consumers experience. In his reviews Calder makes the unknown known and in doing so instils an identity confidence in his readers that becomes manifest in their self-ascribed 'foodie' identity. These identities promote complementary cultural and culinary capitals.

These attributes differentiate Calder from the IT 'almost anyone' reviewer. The latter group, unlike Calder, add no identity constructs, nor do they (generally) speak from a

point of knowledge that adds currency to wider constructs of review of food, beverage or service. Rather, and depending on the site, they offer anonymous feedback, in stark contrast to Calder's equally, but named, up-front approach. However, Calder has embraced the electronic media that the *Herald on Sunday* promotes through online upload of his work, and the invitation for readers to give direct feedback. Calder's recognition of the role of the IT platform shows that a reviewer of reputation can successfully negotiate to advantage both print and electronic media.

## **Conclusion**

The contribution that this paper makes to the literature on restaurant reviewers is to show how and why a successful restaurant reviewer can endure in a relatively small hospitality marketplace. Calder's success is not based on spotting the latest trend, nor is it at all reliant upon relationship-building within the industry he writes about. Rather, Calder's strength as a reviewer lies in his detachment from the industry he writes about. In a limited marketplace saturated by online reviews where anyone can find instant notoriety as a reviewer, Calder's remoteness, coupled with the shared capital he holds with his readers have been the cornerstones of his reviewer success and longevity.

While this research has established these themes, an obvious area for future research would be to investigate the thoughts, feelings and opinions of Calder's readers/audience. Such an investigation would not only illuminate an alternative view of Calder's work but also relate a 'user's' perspective. This would be a valuable contribution to literature because it could include constructs of identity and how review readers perceive their 'food identities'. Until then, the final words are Calder's:

The reader has to get to know [me] and come to terms with [my] themes and tastes. I don't believe that you should take any notice of any reviewer until you have read them for at least a few weeks.

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