



EVERYONE'S A CRITIC YELP, TWITTER, AND THE END OF WESTERN CIVILIZATION?

By Brian Hieggelke

LAST CHRISTMAS, MY WIFE INCLUDED THIS NOTE WITH MY PRE-TEEN NIECE'S GIFT: "DEAR MORGAN: We did not get you the DVD of 'Land of the Lost' as you requested. Uncle Brian said it got terrible reviews and he refused to buy it."

I have a well-deserved reputation in my family for relying on critics to make a lot of purchasing decisions. That I've bet my career, in large part, on the value of the critic probably betrays my bias, but I am, in many ways, the person I am today in no small part to the cumulative wisdom of critics who, for better or worse, picked up where my formal education left off, introducing me to the worlds of theater, art, dance, cinema and cuisine. Life is short and money is precious, so why waste either on the mediocre, or worse?

But the future of criticism, at least as a profession, appears to be in grave peril. Barely a week goes by without the announcement that another long-term critic has been cut from a job, not for performance, but because the employer no longer can afford it, or considers it no longer essential to its mission. Most recently, the trade paper *Variety*, the bible of the movie business, laid off its esteemed film critic, Todd McCarthy, along with its lead theater critic, David Rooney. *Variety*, which reviews more than 1,200 movies a year, is usually the first voice on a film's prospects, both critical and financial, a voice that might at a time have influenced the movement of millions of marketing and distribution dollars toward or away from a movie it favored or fragged. Virtually the same day, *The Wall Street Journal* parted ways with its restaurant critic, Raymond Solokov, a well-seasoned veteran. And so it goes, and has gone, week after week, for the better part of the last decade.

The "villain"? The internet, of course. Not only has the *perception* that its rise means print's demise gutted newspaper and magazine ad revenues, forcing the draconian budgeting decisions, so has the rise of its new modes of "reviewing"—social-media applications like Twitter and amateur review sites like Yelp at the forefront—led to an increasing notion that old-fashioned criticism has lost its audience and its relevance.

The great fomentors of these notions? The newspapers themselves who, so unaccustomed to the vagaries of economic downturns have perpetuated a public cycle of suicidal hand-wringing in their pages. Whether they're right or not, no one really knows. A powerful case can be made for the vitality of print as a medium, but that is not the topic today. If, in fact, online venues are filling the void with powerful, homegrown critical voices dedicated to the craft, so be it. But if not, someone needs to hold a hand up in the air and say, "Stop!" Before we watch the underpinnings of contemporary cultural conversation disappear entirely, let's consider what we might be losing, what we're apparently replacing it with, and whether it really is a Darwinian inevitability. After all, since each and every one of us is spending thousands of dollars to prevent market forces from

exterminating the Wall Street bonus machines and the Detroit pollution-mongers, maybe, just maybe, our cultural future is worth, oh, spending a few hours or even days thinking about it.

A few weeks back, I was on a panel discussion hosted by the Department of Cultural Affairs on dance criticism, along with the lead dance critics or editors from the *Chicago Reader* and *Time Out Chicago*. Between the three of us, we were responsible for the lion's share of dance coverage in Chicago. (Neither daily newspaper has a full-time dance writer, in spite of the city's extraordinarily strong dance culture.) I was excited about the prospects for the event; a lively interchange between critics, dancers and dance professionals about what we do, and what we can do better. And likewise, for them. But as I looked out over the audience, I saw a depressing sight. Perhaps a third of the seats were filled and those, except for a couple of publicists who represent performance companies, were occupied by friends of the panelists and employees of the DCA. *No one even cared.*

It is not the critic who counts: not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles or where the doer of deeds could have done better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena..." — Theodore Roosevelt

Critics, as a class, have never been especially popular. Artists hate those who criticize them, and love those who shower them with praise. Many reflect the sentiment that the late novelist and critic John Updike articulated in a collection of his essays and criticism, "Writing criticism is to writing fiction and poetry as hugging the shore is to sailing in the open sea." It's easy to think that critics are nothing but a bunch of failed artists. And yet, the artistic canon we enjoy today might not exist for the practice and encouragement of critics. Chicago's legendary theater critic Claudia Cassidy, who lorded over the scene from the forties through the sixties, is widely acknowledged for having championed the emerging playwright Tennessee Williams and his "Glass Menagerie," which had its world premiere in Chicago. Without her, would we even know about "A Streetcar Named Desire" or "Cat on a Hot Tin Roof"? Would they even have been written by a more discouraged playwright? No one knows, but perhaps, we're on the verge of an experiment to find out with the Williams of tomorrow, who might not have his champion.

But it's not just the artists who hold their critics in disdain. So too, many members of the public who believe (not incorrectly) that anyone can and does have an opinion. And now, thanks to the internet, everyone truly is a critic. And if everyone's a critic, is anyone?

Yelp, founded in 2004, now covers thirty cities, was visited by twenty-six million people in December 2009 and features nine million local user-generated reviews. Not the first city guide online to aggregate user-generated reviews—Citysearch, Metromix and just about anyone in the game had done so previously. But Yelp took out the editorial filter: users did not augment the critical voice, they were the critical voice, in aggregate. And Yelpers could review just about anything in a community—the people were in charge, not the editors. Add in a healthy mix of social-networking enhancements and a well-constructed user interface and simple but memorable name, and before long, they were a force to be reckoned with across the nation. Hundreds of amateur critics, everyday people, were rating and reviewing in a crowd-sourced manifestation of critical democracy. The infinite monkey theorem was being proven.

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Or was it? Before long, reports broke out across the country of Yelp's ad sales reps strong-arming local restaurants and retailers to advertise, offering to manipulate the establishment's polling results to eliminate or reduce the influence of negative reviews and, nefariously, to plant more negative reviews if they refused. While Yelp continues to officially deny this, a class-action lawsuit was recently filed against the company in U.S. District Court in California accusing Yelp of extortion. Since it was filed, nine small businesses have joined the suit, moms-and-pops from far-flung cities like Washington D.C., Los Angeles and, here in Chicago, Bleeding Heart Bakery. Though it's possible that a few renegade sales reps were telling tall tales on their own, and anyone who's ever managed ad salespeople know a few capable of such, the breadth and pervasiveness of the "smoke" points to something a bit more systemic, whether officially sanctioned or not. American journalism has a long-established wall between the church and state of editorial and advertising, but Yelp wasn't started by journalists and likely doesn't see itself that way. In the absence of the long-articulated ethical standards by which the media self-polices (often to a fault), the actions of which Yelp is accused might even seem downright reasonable. Every city has at least one print publication of dubious editorial quality that makes it a practice to package "stories" with ad buys, after all.

But there are greater concerns with Yelpism than ethics, or the platform granted for truly obnoxious loudmouths. The premise of Yelp is a statistical one; that a crowd is going to be right in its collective wisdom. The problem with this is that in most cases, the sample of contributors is far from statistically significant and thus prone to potential bias. Save the chronic contributors, called "Elites," who fancy themselves arbiters of opinion but who have not found a traditional media outlet for their output, either due to skill or choice, most of us are only inclined to go to the effort to put forth our views when our experience is far outside the mean. That is, when we have an

extraordinarily great or, more likely, especially bad experience. The silent majority who've found the establishment good, adequate or slightly below average stay silent, turning the platform over to the outliers. The result is that the thousands of “polls” that make up Yelp's database are far from statistically significant and prone to potential manipulation, either by an establishment convincing friends and family to weigh in with positive reviews, or by an unhappy customer doing the same. The problem is that users may not consider this, and a negative review might have a disproportionate negative impact on a business's ability to attract customers.

That a sample size of one is even less significant is inarguable, but it's a different conversation. The professional critic earns his or her authority by virtue of their cognitive skills, life experience, writing ability and the reputation of their outlet. Their audience recognizes the singularity of their voice and opinion and modulates its response accordingly. We find the critics we relate to and discard those who do not.

Long before Yelp staked out its digital turf, Nina and Tim Zagat had established their surveys of restaurants as an important voice in the form. But voting for the Zagat guide had a more filtered, seemingly scientific methodology to it and was initially limited to those invited to vote based on being especially knowledgeable consumers. Though Zagat surveys had plenty of faults of their own, including accusations of being too much of a closed circle of contributors, they offered a reasonably credible way for the people to pierce the exclusivity of the critic's club, in a way that augmented, not replaced the critic's role. It was a workable balance, if far from perfect. The challenges in vetting participants that any survey like Zagat, including our own Best of Chicago audience poll, faces in order to enforce ethical credibility increases exponentially for the likes of Yelp as its contributor base and markets covered grows.

If working critics despise what Yelp is doing to their domain, then they love Twitter. Twitter and, in a similar way, the Facebook status update, allows a real-time continuous brain-dump/upload from a self-curated group of followers and followed. And it accentuates the race to opine: last year a debate raged among local restaurant critics (including our own Michael Nagrant), chefs and related food folks about whether a Twitter take issued by Steve Dolinsky after a visit to Big Star on its opening night constituted a “review” and if so, was he playing by the “rules.” Before too long, the debate moved itself to the less-confining and more “established” venue of Facebook. These debates, really a digital version of taming the Wild West, are more engaging than nefarious. But only a miniscule fraction of the millions of Twitter users are professional critics, though skeptics might suggest the latter bloviate far beyond their numbers. The “masses” are spreading their “reviews” freely and without any contemplation of ethics or consequence. And services are springing up to aggregate these reviews, like a Frankenstein Yelp, to create critical consensus, to wrangle word-of-mouth. Here's a Reuters headline from last fall: “Hollywood is increasingly relying on Twitter and Facebook to gauge popular buzz on movies even before they come out, in a move reflecting the power of average filmgoers over once-mighty film critics and detailed surveys.” More power to the people. What hope then for the poor little critics?

The latest debate is over the growing use of proximity-tracking capabilities, epitomized by the iPhone's GPS, with various ways of interacting with venues. Think of one application as the personally crowd-sourced proximity-dependent critic-on-demand. “Hey, I'm in Bridgeport tonight. Anyone know where I can get a decent cocktail?” While privacy concerns are real, the appeal of this is significant. My friends network is now my meta-critic.

The meta-critic is not new on the internet. Why follow a particular critic you like, or have access to via the local paper, when you can get a quick fix on the aggregate opinion of hundreds of critics via sites like Rotten Tomatoes? Of course, with established film critics losing jobs by the dozens, what does this portend about the data in Rotten Tomatoes? Will the sample size shrink down and down and down, or will they substitute the Manohla Dargises and Michael Phillippses of the world for a larger serving of the Harry Knowleses? Can that be a better thing?

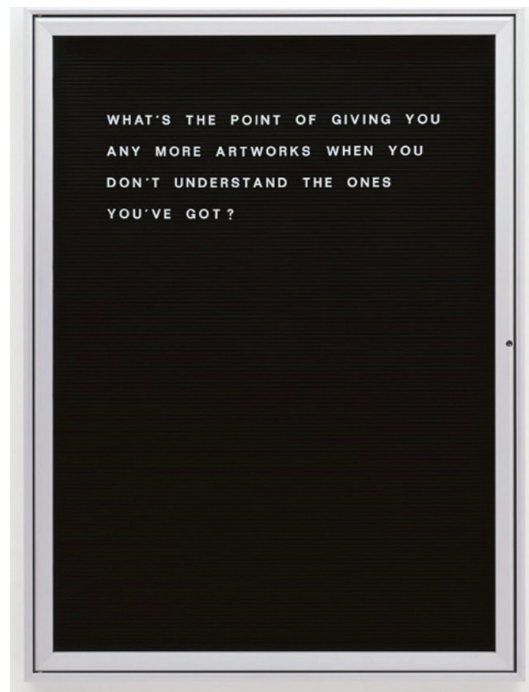
Those of us who rely on critics in an old-fashioned way are just as inclined to read their review after we've seen a movie or eaten at a restaurant as before. We seek understanding, deeper insights into our experiences. Sometimes even more. But conventional media hastened its own fate long ago when it started adding reductive, scannable data to its reviews with star systems and points. This information was the data that would add to its decline, since it was easily reduced to aggregate consumerism, a simple thumb, up or down, without a voice attached.

It's hard to imagine our culture will ever create another Gene Siskel or Roger Ebert; bona fide celebrities by virtue of their roles as critics, serious critics writing about movies for major metropolitan newspapers. With Siskel stricken down more than a decade ago by a cancerous brain tumor and Ebert, diagnosed with thyroid cancer in 2002 and now, as Esquire characterized, “dying in increments,” those times are now past us. It's tempting to read Ebert's condition, his inability to speak, as metaphor for our cultural cancer: America's last famous critic is literally silenced.

However, Ebert's vocal chords may be defunct, but he is far from silent. He's fought back with a body of written work more prolific, more meaningful than any he's done before. He writes books, reviews for the newspaper, he blogs and he tweets to a nation of followers, some 113,234 and growing. He Will Not Be Silenced. In his willpower, perhaps we can find hope for his form.

The State of the (Visual) Art

By Jason Foumberg



LAST YEAR, THE POPULAR ART podcast Bad at Sports shut off the comments section to its weekly website component. Responders got out of hand with insults, and it seemed the negativity far outweighed useful commentary. In those four years of unmoderated feedback, some discussions ran on for more than 200 comments, which in the realm of web 2.0 equals a successful dialogue. And isn't the art world always begging for more “dialogue”?

Withstanding the attacks of a belligerent audience is just one challenge of living on the web. The other challenge is content, or how to craft responsible, poetic and meaningful criticism when there's no overhead, little foresight and no time. Worrying about editorial is “like organizing the kitchen cupboards while some dude bleeds to death in the living room,” writes Kathryn Born, publisher of a new art criticism website, Chicago Art Magazine. “We publish two unedited articles each day. It would be nice to have someone look them over, but we just don't have the money.”

It may not matter whether or not art criticism is vetted, edited and consciously published. Published criticism means exposure, and exposure means free publicity, or just another line on the resume, as several artists confessed to me.

“Public acknowledgment is primary, critical assessment is valued to a much lesser degree,” says critic and artist Michelle Grabner. She continues, “The fact that recognition takes the form of criticism doesn't matter to artists. Poetic reflection or a mention in the society pages is just as touted by artists and their dealers.” Is this true? Gallery owner, and former art blogger, Scott Speh tells me that he's disallowed several local critics—both web and print-based—from interviewing the artists

he represents at Western Exhibitions, and if they review a show, he won't list it on their resumes. Reviews do pad an artist's resume, but a strong resume leads to more opportunities to make more and better art. Granting institutions, residencies, curators and dealers often consult resumes. It's an attempt at professionalism in a highly unregulated art world.

Whether ignored or acknowledged, clipped for PR or thoughtfully considered, reviews help spin the art world on an axis of its own making. Anyway, making money from an art career shouldn't be so stigmatized. It feeds the monster. It perpetuates the machine.

But sometimes the machine is a website called The Instant Art Critique Phrase Generator, which randomly pieces jargon into strings of art speak. This website reveals how easy it is to praise mediocrity. It could pass for published art reviews.

Artist and critic Elijah Burgher draws out an interesting conflict. As an educator, he believes that “knowledge is common property,” to which we all contribute. He co-published a short-lived art journal called Blunt Art Text, in print and digitally, and believes that “criticism makes for healthy discourse, which makes for better art.” However, he says, “If I want to know something, I'm not going to read Jerry Saltz's Facebook posts. I'm going to hit the library.”

We meet in public, shake hands in public, exhibit art there, publish reviews there. With web 2.0, the public field has been torn open, perhaps inelegantly. But that's how revolutions go. As things settle, taste levels thin out or flatten. “Group thinking tends to create the average,” says Elijah.

With the entire public sitting online, we

need something to occupy our time, and there is enough content on the Internet to fill it. Pile on the monthly art magazines and there's almost too much to digest. But there are tools to better organize all this information, new and old (as old print becomes archived online). "There is a reason for newspapers to exist, but magazines and newspapers have to adapt to digital audiences," says Alicia Eler, who worked for Chicago Now, the Chicago Tribune's new blogging enterprise, and is now a freelance social media consultant and art critic. Digital audiences like to be able to search information easily, talk to themselves, and be heard.

There aren't more artists in the world since the dawn of the Internet; it just seems that way because they all have personal websites. As a tool for artists, web 2.0 is hugely successful. "The art community is more active on Facebook than Twitter," says Alicia. It's a good place to organize, build fan bases and post new art for instant response.

Positively, online social media increases the size of one's network, which increases the possibilities for collaboration and the exchanging of ideas. Negatively, information tailored to a digital audience promotes emotionally reactive and flippant responses, and somehow seems unserious. This is not, traditionally, how critics like to proceed.

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As the Internet is all about audience, and its influence expands, the voice of the critic fades. For some types of art, like community-based or social practices, this is ideal. For others, it's an unwelcome flood of amateurs, hobbyists and Sunday critics. Today, anyone who posts anything on the web is heard and receives attention. But the need for expertise, and good writing, will resurface. The public should demand it.

By Michael Nagrant

A MAN WITHOUT A COUNTRY may die wistful, pining for a homeland. But he might also rejoice that he's boundless, tethered to no cheap allegiances, and thus able to operate freer than most. Having come up as a journalist in the last four years, launching a career via the internet and now finding myself working often for the print establishment, I very much see myself as such a man. I do not revile Yelp, but I also do not have any nostalgia for the old-time newsroom.

So much of the establishment's criticism of Yelp and its ilk has been one long apologist rant. Newspaper columnists and editorial pages deriding the rise of citizen or social media-based criticism sounded like a grandfather telling his grandson he walked uphill both ways to and from school every day ducking gunfire and a blinding rainstorm. And gosh darn it, he liked it.

Grandpa hated the old way, he got a bad case of arthritis because of it, and his life expectancy is much shorter. If he'd really been smart, he would have packed an AK-47, an umbrella and found a shortcut home.

Old media does not take enough credit for its own failure. Instead of investing in content and valuing those who really created it (reporters, writers and low-level editors), they created top-heavy editorial hierarchies. Two years ago, if I wrote a freelance piece for a big paper or magazine, that piece would have gone through a sub-editor, an editor, an executive editor, a fact checker and a copy editor. Having gone through the sub-editor or editor, and fact checker, I was usually happy with the piece, felt it retained my intent and still had an original voice. By the time it went through the rest of the process, anyone could have written and reported it, and it was so boring, I'd wished print journalism, like the film industry, had an Alan Smithee clause.

And that was on a good day. Because an editorial gig was more lucrative than writing, many writers, though they wanted to stay writers, ended up taking the promotion anyway. They never lost the desire to write, and often did so through their editing, and thus as with too many cooks spoiling the broth, your editor became one more writer mucking up the piece. Even if they didn't harbor a secret ambition to continue writing, so concerned with preserving their high-paying jobs or forced by a corporate management structure to hew to a sense of some standard readership, which despite focus-group and scientific studies did not likely exist, editors muzzled voices and wrangled journalists through line-editing, cost-cutting etc. into an unnatural collective voice.

Then again, the failure of the establishment to captivate readers might reside with the writers themselves. Maybe there are only a few Roger Eberts, Christopher Hitchens or Ruth Reichls in the world and everyone else is filler. However, I've seen a lot of talented writers get bogged down in the micro-management of big media organizations and eventually stop fighting for their right to be original and engaging.

In some cases, good writers just got lazy. A longtime food writer like Pat Bruno of the Sun-Times once an intrepid dude ferreting out emerging regional Mexican and Thai spots on the edge of town, now only engages in cheap adjectives and blow-by-blow plate-by-plate breakdowns of his restaurant visits. He spends much of his time, as many establishment critics do, browbeating the reader intellectually (talking of his trips to Europe and how domestic foods could never compare to those he'd had abroad, for example) and reminding them of his power and expense account and position.

I hesitate to bring up the example of Raymond Sokolov, the Wall Street Journal critic who recently left the paper because they eliminated his position, as his talent and his hard work make Bruno look like the very worst Yelper. However, as good as he was, in the last few years even he'd used his prominence and budget to take on sweetheart topics like, say, looking for America's best hotdog or hamburger, pieces that have been written a thousand times and thus fail to capture the collective imagination. If such a piece captivates, it's in the argument that a reporter trying to find such a thing often overlooks some real contenders. In Sokolov's case, his investigation of Chicago's dog offerings basically consisted of calling Charlie Trotter and asking him his favorite hotdog stands in Chicago. Trotter had some good suggestions, but the move was sloppy and deferential.

One thing Sokolov didn't forget was to tell a good story, and by that virtue alone, he will be missed. Maybe more than anything, many establish-

What (Editorial) Obesity Hath Wrought

ment critics somehow seemed like they thought they'd been absolved of the responsibility to captivate. When establishment writers stopped telling stories as a professional class, they offered very little competitive value, and consumers lost interest or didn't differentiate between the establishment and a citizen journalism instrument. "This American Life" has proven that if you tell a good story you can talk about health-care politics, credit-default swaps or belly lint and people will listen. Heck, because Yelp is generally an unfettered Wild West, though its critical reviews may be questionable for their fairness or ethical righteousness, they often were entertaining.

That's not to say Yelp's rise doesn't have negative ramifications for our culture. I generally agree with what my editor has written here. But I came up through the internet as a participant on lthforum.com and also by creating hungry-mag.com, rather than trying to earn my way through the establishment, because I saw it didn't work very well anymore. As such I probably have a lot more faith in the marketplace for internet criticism than other establishment print journalists. But, I also believe in the market in general. If Yelp is truly dealing in unfair practices, the lawsuits filed against it will bring it down. A person who drops two-hundred bucks on a meal because Yelp said it was four stars, and finds it's not even two-stars will eventually stop reading.

I also believe the establishment will identify where real opportunity lies: identifying those smart interesting folks that came up through the new internet-based short-form venues and rewarding those people with the opportunity to shout their voices in a more greatly nuanced, ethically measured long form.

I think that readers will make more distinctions between bad and good sources. There is truly a blinding rain storm of content out there, and so it's tougher for an unknown to break through or for a consumer to know where to turn. However, I think Ebert's success on Twitter and his website is as much about his prior capital as a smart successful talent, as it is also about people getting tired of the garbage out there and turning to quality once again.

I say this as a writer who straddles both internet and print and struggles to make a living solely as a journalist. I genuinely believe I've worked as hard as anyone (averaging twenty-five articles a month, whereas a very active staff journo might write twelve pieces in the same period) and I also believe I have a fair bit of talent. I'm not measuring my talent so much by my own estimation ('cause we're all great in our own minds), but in that I've written for almost everyone in Chicago and continue to do so regularly. It's possible I just suck or I haven't done enough to market myself. But, I really believe a large part of my struggle is a function of the tension between new and old models, the loss of lucrative advertising in the establishment and the reluctance of such advertisers to spend the same money on internet-related advertising. Though I want nothing more than to do this full time, I've recently taken on a non-journalistic consulting side gig to pay the bills.

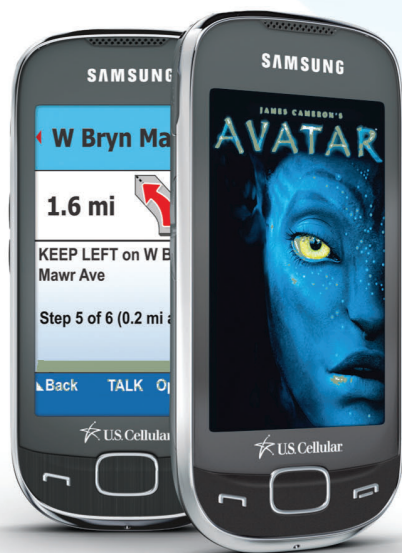
The way it was never will be again. And the way it is won't be that way for long. I wish it was four years from now and we'd figured things out and I was making a living solely through writing. Maybe it'll take a decade, but I do believe things will shake out for the better. I've started to see little signs in the last few months I hadn't seen before. Sure, lots of blogs are starting up, but so many are shutting down after months when their writers realize that passion for a hobby isn't enough to sustain the creation of original content for the long term. I've seen jobs, once coveted, go unfilled because media organizations decided to cut the pay for them. Ultimately, what will sort out Yelp and the establishment more than anything is that you can't value content as king, but always pay a pauper's sum for it.



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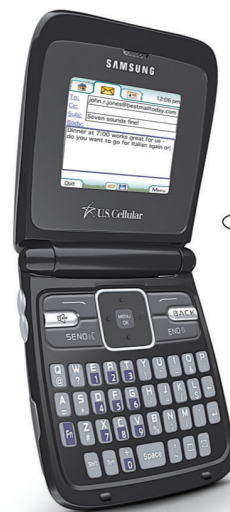
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While doing research for this issue on the growth of citizen reviewing, I came across the newest user-generated review website. Unable to ignore the astonishing depth and breadth, I wanted to share it with our loyal Newcity readers. (Michael Nagrant)



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Sunda

★★★★★

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[www.sundachicago.com](#)

1 Review for Sunda:



Mike S.
Seaside Heights, NJ

Elite Situation '10
9,979 friends
1 review
★★

First off, you know I like to serve my hater juice cold, and I wanted to give this place one star, but you know my boy Billy Dec runs this spot, and that dude definitely knows how to GTL, well, gym and tan anyway. I think he pays someone else to do his laundry. Second off, it's supposed to be Asian Fusion. Yo, I ain't no John Mayer. My junk and my heart is totally Benetton and I like me some fusion with Asians, know what I'm sayin? But ain't none wanted to fuse with me. I mean this restaurant is sexual napalm – in a bad way. That being said, I still heard this was the hottest joint up on the Lake Michigan shore, but, let's just say it was a totally robbery. I'm not talking about that chick I stole from that DraftFCB d-bag either – hey, bro maybe if you paid more attention to your lady than the Taco Bell shrimp taco commercial, youda kept her. The nickel and diming is killer. The ladies next to us said they wanted a six pack, but forgot to bring it. Being the gentleman that I am, I jumped over to their table quick and lifted up my Ed Hardy tee and showed them my killer abs. I mean I heard this place was BYO, and they charged them ladies a corkage fee, WTF. Still, the food was awesome here, except the sushi. They make it square with steak. It's supposed to be round with fish, duh. The chef, whoever he is, yo, I will never cook for you. You're excluded from the surf n' turf night. You're excluded from ravioli night, and you're excluded from chicken cutlet night. Also, listen, whoever runs this website, like this is the third time I've written this. For sum reason my review keeps disappearin and The Situation don't play that. I think you know how I like beatin up them beats. Imagine that's your head!!!!!! Also, it says I have 9,979 followers, and I know it's supposed to say 9,993 because there's no way I could have less followers than Pauly D. I just called all my peeps to confirm, so you better fix that.

Alinea

★★★★★

Category: [American \(New\)](#)
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(312) 867-0110
[www.alinearestaurant.com](#)

1 Review for Alinea:



Snooki P.
Seaside Heights, NJ

9,979 friends
1 review
★★★★★★★

After a long night of doing cartwheels in my thong at Underground...hee hee...! I woke up at around 3 p.m. and spent a long day with the girls getting our nails did. I was famished. A high-class guidette like this don't go for no taco shack (but I do like grocery store deli ham when I get supah-wasted), so we hit up this Lincoln Park joint which was supposed to be the best evah. At first I was a little angry, I mean we walked in and we couldn't find no door. I mean what kind of juicehead designs a restaurant with a hidden door. I walked to the end of the hall and they have this like crazy purple thing with all these antennas or whatever hanging off it. I thought it was like those bamboo curtain doors, so I walked in to it, and my Bump-it got caught in it and ripped it off. But some skinny hipster dude with a big afro who said he was a smellier came out and saved me. Before they sat us, he hooked me up with a spare Bump-it and everything was cool (he said this happens all the time and they keep spares on hand). I haven't had service like this since they hooked me up with a free shot of Stoli raspberry with my beer order at Karma nightclub. We didn't even have to order, which is good, because I have a hard time reading since that teacher dude clocked me in the face in Jersey. They knew how much I liked pickles from watching my show, so the chef (OMG. HE'S SO CUTE. Though he's a little skinny. You know how I like gorilla-sized guidos) did a 22 course pickle-focused menu. Some wine dude named Joe hooked us up with a Kamikaze shot pairing with course seven which was dehydrated peanut butter snow covered braised gherkins with flaming dill leaves that was TO DIE FOR.... I mean there are no words to describe it so I'll just say, F__ K Y _ S because I love hangman. They only have five stars on this thing, but I asked them if they could bump-it (no pun intended) up to ten for me 'cause I ain't never had a pickle swinging on a bow before.

Mado

★★★★★

Category: [American](#)
Neighborhoods: Wicker Park
1647 N Milwaukee Ave
(between Caton St & Concord Pl)
Chicago, IL 60647
(773) 342-2340
[www.madorerestaurantchicago.com](#)

1 Review for Mado:



Mike S.
Seaside Heights, NJ

9,992 friends
300 reviews
★★★

Was heatin up the wheels of steel over at Sonotheque a few years back, and I asked my boys what the fresh-to-death Italian joint was. My bros told me about this spot that just opened that supposedly cooked like some Italian grammas (that's Nonna to you bitches). I didn't want to go at first because they'd only been opened for like a day and you know that if a joint ain't been coordinatin' a feast for at least a month, they prob don't have it together. But, I ain't no journalist, just a hungry dude. First off this ain't Italian. They don't even have sausage and peppers. Well, they have sausage, but it's made from pig's brains or something. Good thing I brought my boys Vinny and Ronnie, 'cause sometimes when you eat out, there's a grenade, you know, and you need one of your boys to fall on that bad shit, so you can eat the good stuff. Vinny will eat anything. Kids a sucka, so he just licked up the brains and the pigs head – he says it tasted like cinnamon. Besides there wasn't enough for all of us, them portions here are tighter than Snooker's fist on a glass of pickles. I was checkin out some awesome shortbread (think it's called that 'cause Smurfs eat it) and some Migas Bark (at first I was like I ain't eatin nothing that came from a tree- but it was chocolate), but, damn Vinnie sucked that up too. I was pissed, like “Yo dude! Bros before ho hos!” But whatever. What was cool is this place is BYO, and Ronnie brought a batch of the Ron Ron juice and they poured a round for the whole dining room. I did like the roasted chicken, so I asked to see the chef. He ain't no chef. He didn't even have one of those white Chef Boyardee hats ... was sportin' a Yankees cap. Dude, go back to Rockaway. METS REPRESENT! But, he can straight up cook, and since it was there first night open I still gave him mad props. In fact, I like him so much, I might be stalkin his whole life everytime I'm in town.

style

Select fashion shows, trunk shows, sales and events. See [boutiqueville.com](#) for more listings.

FRI/26

Anna Hovet Fall 2010 Fashion Show
Womenswear apparel designer and Chicago Fashion Incubator 2009 Designer in Residence, Anna Hovet, presents her Fall/Winter 2010 collection. Inspired by European streetwear fashion and 1910s womenswear, the Fall/Winter 2010 line includes multi-functional outerwear and Hovet's signature color-blocking. \$10 Tickets available at [annahovet.com](#). Chicago Fashion Incubator Pop-Up Shop, The 900 Shops, 5th Level, 900 N. Michigan, 8pm.

Marc Le Bihan/Jean Francois Mimilla Trunk Show
A cocktail reception and in-store appearance accompanies this trunk show with featured Parisian designers Marc Le Bihan and Jean Francois Mimilla. They will be showing their Fall/ Winter 2010 collections for pre-order. (773)278-6150; [robinrichman.com](#). Robin Richman, 2108 N. Damen, 4-8pm.

SAT/27

Dollparts: A Fabric and Vintage Sale
Some of the city's vintage vendors are joining forces for a sale with over 1,200 units of vintage clothing, accessories, and supplies and over 4,000 yards of deeply discounted remaindered fabric. Check the website: [theheliopsis.com](#) or contact Michelle and Daniel for more information, [theheliopsis@gmail.com](#). 2016 W. Concord Place, 11-7pm.

Shoe To Do
Chicago stylist George Fuller emcees a spring fashion show featuring spring's trends in designer shoes. Enjoy refreshments and get the lowdown from a fashion expert. For more information or to make a reservation, call (312)642-5900 ext. 4030. Neiman Marcus Michigan Avenue, 737 N. Michigan, Shoe Salon, Second Floor, 2pm.

ONGOING

Fix's Wheel of Fortune
Fix Boutique is giving customers a chance to prove their luck with their Wheel of Fashion. Anyone who comes in the store has the opportunity to spin the wheel for a chance at a variety of discounts. [shopfix-chicago.com](#). Fix Boutique, 1101 W. Fulton Market. Through WED/31.

Jayson Home & Garden Spring Upholstery Sale
Take 20 percent off their entire collection of upholstered furniture, both in stock pieces and custom orders. All new spring sofas, chairs, ottomans and beds are included. In stock pieces are available for immediate delivery. The sale is in store and online. [jaysonhomeandgarden.com](#). Jayson Home & Garden, 1885 N. Clybourn. Through SUN/28.

SAIC Fashion 2010
Tickets on sale now for this May 7 event. For the first time in its 76-year history, SAIC's annual fashion show takes place in the Griffin Court of the Art Institute's Modern Wing. Fashion and art lovers will have the opportunity to see a multimedia runway show featuring cutting-edge garments by the next generation of SAIC designers. Presented against the backdrop of Renzo Piano's stunning architecture, the 2pm presentation is general admission seating, while the 10pm "best of" presentation is part of NightWalk, a new late-night fashion party that kicks off at 9pm. \$75/\$125—for more information, (312)629-6710. The Art Institute of Chicago—Modern Wing, Griffin Court, 159 E. Monroe, 2pm and 10pm.

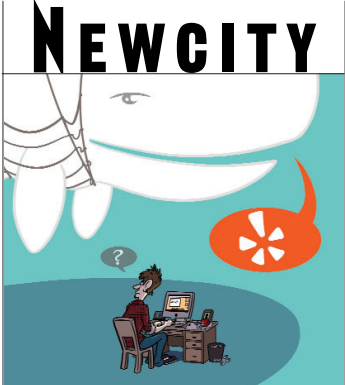


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