Peer Review: Claudio Sodi interviews Sarah Lewis

Producer Claudio Sodi interviews writer Sarah Lewis about collaboration, expectation, and the importance of always being open to new ideas and experiences.

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As told to Claudio Sodi, 1575 words.

Tags: Art, Writing, Process, Collaboration, Multi-tasking, Independence, Inspiration.

Read:  Sarah Lewis interviews  Claudio Sodi

First of all, let's talk about Index. Where did it start, and how has it evolved since it became public over a year ago?

It started as a spreadsheet—just a simple Excel spreadsheet of photographers and filmmakers that Sara [Leimbach] respected. A private collection. As the list grew, she saw an opportunity to create a tool that would bridge the gap between industry creatives and the community. So, a little over a year ago, she released this gift into the world.

It was last July that Sara and I decided to expand Index from a digital platform and move it into physical spaces. We had been in Mexico City together in February, and had started to notice how people were continuously coming and falling in love with the city, with the country, and with the community. But then, when people would come back, they would bring their own work, their own crew, and their own ideas. As such, they weren't actually utilizing or elevating the Mexico City community that inspired them in the first place.

That was when our series, *On the Table*, formed. We wanted to create another platform that would elevate the voices and the visions of Mexico City's talents—some of which are more known, and some of which are not. First and foremost, we wanted to start discussions. However, being from the U.S. and observing what we had of outsiders coming in, we knew we had to be respectful and intentional. So we listened. We asked questions. That led us to you (Claudio), and Squash. So much of our work has been a practice in learning to say yes, without knowing the outcome. Just trusting in our instincts.



photo by Camila Rodriguez

Do you think there's a responsibility that you should have towards audiences?

There is absolutely a responsibility, which is why it's so important for us to keep our eyes open and to listen to what's happening around us in the community (and even outside of it). It's not just about *our* opinions—it's about the opinions of others, and about creating a space for for us all to exist together. It's about forming a deeper understanding and sense of connectivity.

How difficult is it having a partnership with Sara, when you two are often living in different cities? How do you make it work?

There's no question that it can be difficult, but what I've learned from our time working and growing together is that it's important to really listen—to each other as well as to our own voices—and to communicate. It seems simple, but it isn't always, and our ability to do so with each other has been instrumental.

We don't always agree with each other, but we respect each other's perspectives and instincts and stay open to the other's opinions. A partnership can't grow if you're not building each other up. Since we're often working at a distance—which often means taking meetings or making quick decisions without the other person present—to have a strong sense of established trust is necessary. Index wouldn't work if we didn't have that.

When we discuss ideas or projects, neither of us feels limited in any way. Small, large, ridiculous, whatever—we continuously encourage and fuel each other to entertain our curiosities, and there are a lot of them. Trust and communication, man. They're the foundation of all relationships, and what makes ours works so well.



photo by Camila Rodriguez

With any team, large or small, you're going to have different personalities, and different working habits.

Right. It's about being able to adapt, and being able to remember that you can't control everything. And honestly, this has been a hard lesson for me. I find it helpful to remind myself that while I can't control everything around me, the one thing I truly can control is myself, and my own reactions to a situation. It's empowering, that reminder. It brings back control, in a different way than planned for, to a situation that felt out of my hands. That's been something that's really helpful to me—being able to let go, and to look at a situation and be like, "This is happening. That happened. Can't do anything about it. What's my next move?"



photo by Camila Rodriguez

But of course I say that, and then you'll find me at our next opening hiding upstairs in the dark with a beer. It's a process. Like we were talking about earlier, you just have to throw your hands up and say, "I'm on this rollercoaster ride, and there are twists and turns and drops, and laughs, and fear, and excitement." Then you get off, you're a little dizzy, and you're just like, "All right, let's do it again."

There's Index, but your main career is as a writer. How do you manage to work in both ways without getting overwhelmed?

I don't know if you've heard of this fun, new concept called "self-care," but I'm really trying to learn about it. Balance is something that I'm constantly working on figuring out, and something that is constantly shifting and making me lose my footing.

Sara and I were recently sitting on the balcony talking about this idea of not doing enough. We've all felt that, right? It's a common thread, and a constant thought among a lot of us. I stopped her, I stopped *us* really, and was like, "Wait, no, we have to change that way of thinking. It's so negative! It's so hard on ourselves, and we *are* doing a lot. It's just that we want to do *more*!" Repositioning that internal dialogue and narrative was transformative in my approach, and in being kind to myself.

Do you think that we want to do more things just because we love what we do? If so, when do we stop?

I hope that we're doing this because we love it. I know *I'm* doing it because I love it. That's what makes this all worth it, no? It's the work, it's the people we work with, and it's the community that experiences the work.

If I don't use that momentum, what happens to it? It just becomes this ball of energy that's building inside of

me that needs to be released. I can't imagine not putting that energy somewhere, not putting it out into the world. Energy is so contagious—we build off of each other. Why would I want to be in a place where I'm not surrounding myself with people that are inspiring me, filling me up, and then doing the same for them in return? Why would I want to stop feeling that? We've found ourselves in this beautiful collaborative community of people, and I really hope I never walk away from that, because I fucking love it.



photo by Camila Rodriguez

Where do you find the time when there seems to be so little of it?

I think if you want to do something, you find the time. You become flexible—not just with your time, but with your expectations. It's not always going to look exactly how you thought it would. Planning your life is impossible, because you have no idea what's going to happen along the way and along that path that will inform it. For all you know, tomorrow you'll come across an obstacle in your path, and you'll turn around and go in an unexpected direction. Ultimately, you'll end up somewhere. Maybe it was your original destination, or maybe it'll be a completely different place that you didn't even know existed.

I think it's really important to just stay open to what's happening and to go along with it. Not being caught up in the details of what will happen—not trying to completely control it—for me, saves a lot of time and energy.

Index is self-funded, at the moment. At what point do you say, "we need to be making money off of this?" Because, as you know, we do live in a capitalist society.

With the *On The Table* series, it's become really evident of what you can do and how creative you can be without a lot of money. Which is not to say that more funding wouldn't be welcomed or helpful (it absolutely would be), but

it’s been incredible to watch the community come together and put in their own time and their own money, out of this shared passion. It’s special, and unique. There are a lot of things that we could do if we had outside funding, but there are so many things that we have done with so little, that it’s been a beautiful reminder of the power of community.





photo by Camila Rodriguez



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Sarah Lewis recommends:

Playing Nadia Sirota's "Tooth and Nail" on a long, late night drive.
Walking with no destination.
Reading James Baldwin's *Another Country*.
Watching THIS for some dance move inspiration.
Stepping out of your comfort zone.

Name
Sarah Lewis

Vocation

Writer

