

the literary magazine of the University of Pittsburgh graduate english dept

# Interviewing Daphne

([edit page](#))

Interview by [Adri Ramirez \(/?page\\_id=2\)](#)

San Francisco-based performance poet and writer Daphne Gottlieb discusses the creation of *Fucking Daphne*, a collection of essays about, well, fucking Daphne Gottlieb. The author also considers how the collection complicates notions of identity and persona, and drops some great head advice. *Fucking Daphne* will be out in March 2008 and includes “mostly true” encounters between Gottlieb and Ariel Gore, Bett Williams, Bucky Sinister, Hanne Blank, Marty McConnell, Richard Melo, Stephen Elliott and more.

Hot Metal Bridge: In [Sleeping with a Writer](#)

(<http://www.goodvibes.com/Content--Good-Vibrations-Online-Magazine--id-2132>), you write:

But just because I’m the kind of writer who protects the innocent (and the not-so-innocent, and the downright depraved), doesn’t mean that other people don’t — or that they shouldn’t. As long as the person who is being written about is down with it and we’re all consenting adults, well, why not?

In the world of nonfiction, particularly in memoir and profiles, “protecting the innocent” can backfire. Augusten Burroughs recently came under attack after the family he barely disguises in *Running With Scissors* publicly announced that Burroughs fabricated the memoir. So, to borrow your phrasing, Burroughs failed to protect his not-so-innocents, as they did not consent to the writing and didn’t seem to be “down with it.”

Daphne Gottlieb: Which is why I’m usually a fictionary!

HMB: In the case of *Fucking Daphne*, the forthcoming anthology you’ve edited, you reverse the formula: you asked folks to write about you, retaining control and relinquishing any claims to innocence.

DG: Yes, it’s kind of a faux-memoir. While I technically retained control, in that I edited the stories and selected the writers, I actually didn’t edit for content, and there are a lot of stories that I can’t call particularly flattering in there. So I think it’s probably fairer to say that I relinquished control and retained my claim to innocence.

HMB: Are there any innocents in this book?

DG: Just me. More seriously, there are at least four writers in the book whose pieces pre-existed the idea of the anthology, so given that they were making their own art, I think it reflects if not an innocence, a certain authenticity and integrity.

HMB: Any moments where you found yourself vulnerable?

DG: Of course. I’d be lying if I said I never felt vulnerable working on this. And as the book goes to market in March 2008, I expect many, many more vulnerable moments. The process was a little like reading those “slam books” from junior high, where everyone writes about you, and what’s good and what’s bad, but it’s even more distorted than that, because you’re dealing with writers who have created a character. Most of the time it was fine — I was working on a book about a Daphne Character, but once in a while, there was that uh-oh feeling, “Is this really what that writer thinks about me, or is this just about the character?” It’s impossible to be bulletproof.

HMB: As an editor, did you shape your portrait?

DG: Only to the extent that I gave my website URL and occasional tattoo description to the writers.

HMB: How aware were you of the reader identifying you as Daphne the persona, the idea?

DG: Well, that's the whole point of the book — the difference between the person and the entombment by language. How we live our lives versus how we are created by other people's perception.

HMB: How important is the difference between Daphne Gottlieb the human being and Daphne the metaphor?

DG: It's essential. The metaphor doesn't bleed, but the metaphor is why the book is interesting, not me. The book could have been about anyone. Actually, I think everyone should have their own pillow book like this!

HMB: How did the compiling of this book affect your relationships with the writers?

DG: I love them more than ever, from the ones I know to the ones I only know through e-mail. It's a hard project to take on, and it was a long process. So I am incredibly, incredibly grateful to them, for getting the book, for writing their incredible pieces. I think they still like me, too.

HMB: You mention that some writers turned you down, how did you handle that rejection?

DG: You know, I have to say "no" to opportunities all the time, and I imagine it's the same for everyone. Sometimes you're too busy, sometimes you're not interested — it really didn't feel personal to me. And compared to the people who said "yes," the "no" writers were a drop in the bucket.

HMB: David Sedaris' family complains about being under his eye; they never know when they'll end up in an essay or on the shelves at a local bookstore. You mention that as you put the book together, your then-girlfriend said it was an "interesting time to be your girlfriend." How did putting together this volume affect your relationship (I notice that she's a "then-girlfriend")?

DG: It's really never been an issue as far as jealousy or the like; but I can imagine that it could be unsettling to watch your lover get stories from people you don't know about sex with them. I'm ridiculously lucky to have been with such supportive people during the course of the book's germinating. I can't imagine that it'll be any kind of issue in the future, really, though I have a limited imagination.

HMB: How does a project like this affect future potential relationships?

DG: I am more concerned, honestly, about potential future employers! They might not take the time to figure out that this is a Smart book, not just a smutty one (even as smut is worthy in and of itself).

HMB: Would you give them a copy of the book to use as a primer?

DG: Oh god, no!

HMB: You state that the book is about how we craft identity. The double portraits are about you, but are mostly about the writers themselves. As you edited and put the volume together, how did this theme affect order and structure?

DG: There were all sorts of thematic and imagistic connections that arose as the stories began to compile, and so that was where the order sort of started from — stories about tattoos, stories

about words, stories that were more experimental, stories about sex and drugs and rock 'n' roll, BDSM stories and the like.

HMB: Where did you begin? How did you know where to end?

DG: It begins with a foreword, and ends with an afterword. How else could you do it? More seriously, I knew there had to be a certain number of stories, so that's the number I commissioned.

HMB: How hot is this book?

DG: Read it and see for yourself.

HMB: Should I read it in the privacy of my own home?

DG: You should read it anywhere you want.

HMB: Any good head?

DG: I don't kiss and tell.

HMB: As this is the Headless issue, got any advice on how not lose one's head, or on how to give good head?

DG: You'll be happy to know there are naked bodies without heads on the cover of the book! [as for giving head] Take out your chewing gum first.

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