Nina Arsenault is a transgendered Canadian artist who has documented her experiences of psychic and physical transformations through her work in stage plays, photography, video art, website, blog, print media writing and popular national media as well as performance of the body in public life and in celebrity appearances.

On Friday 5 May, 2012, Buddies in Bad Times Theatre in Toronto, Canada launched Trans(per)forming Nina Arsenault: an Unreasonable Body of Work published by Intellect Books. In Trans(per)forming Nina Arsenault, editor Judith Rudakoff brings together a diverse group of contributors from artists to scholars and includes Arsenault’s personal contributions in the form of interviews, poetry, photographs as well as the script for her one-woman play The Silicone Diaries. This collection reflects Arsenault as a transdisciplinary artist as well as her very personal and powerful brand of storytelling and performance art. This book would be of interest to theatre practitioners who are interested in this style of testimonial/documentary storytelling as performance as well as anyone who is interested in theatre as cultural critique.

Trans(per)forming Nina Arsenault explores Arsenault’s practice of both representing and interrogating the relationship between the female self and the constructed feminine body. Arsenault is herself a contradiction; her body exceeds heteronormative expectation while also emulating aspects of white, western culture’s most popular beauty models. Arsenault’s work explores ideas of maleness and femaleness, real and fake. For her, the body can be inhabited and performed and explored as an art object. Arsenault’s decision to retain her penis represents the subversive aesthetic she adopts as part of her daily performance of an unconventional, individualised concept of the feminine.
This subversive aesthetic comes through in all the pieces in the book. In a series of Arsenault’s creative responses to the experience of traveling to the Yukon Territory in Canada’s far north, to perform her autobiographical stage plays there, she examines the way in which her understanding of femininity does not match the expectations of more conventional understandings of femininity. In ‘I am the Event III’ which takes the form of a Talk Back session after a performance of *The Silicone Diaries* Arsenault responds to a question about the type of images she is sending women. She responds ‘Mixed messages. Paradox is empowering.’ I think this can help guide the reader through this book and indeed anyone who engages with Arsenault on any level. I think this is the greatest value of Arsenault’s work and indeed this book as a whole. Concepts are not neatly packaged for the reader and they do not follow a single theoretical trajectory.

As Editor, Rudakoff includes a wide variety of articles in the book, appealing to as many readers as possible. The anthology includes different types of texts, photographs, theoretical perspectives and performances. What I noticed was the lack of an organising theoretical principal in this publication. For example, the photographs are not collected in chronological order. Rudakoff in consultation with Arsenault has carefully placed chapters and images in order ‘to offer contrast as well as complementarity’ (7). Rudakoff uses a framework of ‘exceptionalism’ to organise the work in this book. This tactic allows each reader to approach Arsenault’s body of work without preconception and in their own highly individual way.