

The achievement of this book is the way in which it manages to interweave two distinct projects, offering a feminist reconception of nation-as-performance and a history of *québécois* in performance. In this second project I find that I have unanswered questions that derive from Hurley's very assured, polished, and sometimes arch writing. It is expressive of intellectual rigour and works through its arguments with dazzling skill. At times, though, it strikes me as distanced and perhaps reluctant to address its own positionality. This may be a consequence of what I see as the one striking absence in her discussion, and that is the recurrent question of anglophone presence in *québécois*. I would be fascinated to see how she reads David Fennario, whose self-position as a minoritised Anglo-Québécois is resolute but unwelcome in *québécois*. Or what she does with Arcade Fire sharing a stage with Céline Dion.

JUDITH RUDAKOFF, ed.

TRANS(per)FORMING Nina Arsenault: An Unreasonable Body of Work

Chicago: Intellect Ltd.-The University of Chicago P, 2012. 264 pp.

ZAREN HEALEY WHITE

TRANS(per)FORMING Nina Arsenault undertakes the ambitious task of presenting and examining the many forms of this transgendered Canadian aesthete's multifaceted "body of work." As an anthology with a range of essays responding to the diverse avenues of inquiry provoked by this complex woman, the book succeeds in capturing the theatrical, creative, performative, and spiritual conundrums *embodied* by Nina Arsenault.

Through one-woman stage performance, self-portraiture, and the daily enactment of her hyper-femininity, Arsenault's "body of work" is her evolving physical and spiritual self. In her transition from man to woman and from woman to goddess, Nina Arsenault has undergone over sixty cosmetic surgeries and procedures costing approximately \$200,000. Funded primarily through sex trade work, Arsenault's transition is a story of literal self-fashioning through a process of surgical alterations over eight years. As an artist, Arsenault uses the aestheticization of the female form as fodder for her highly personal, carnal, and challenging art practice; that is, she engages with the female form as material object and ideological construct, with transgender

issues, and with the nature of stage versus real-life performance (in her embodiment of concepts and characters such as mannequins, faeries, and Barbie). These ideas in turn constitute some of the critical ways into Arsenault's writings, self-portraiture, and performances collected in the volume.

Edited by Judith Rudakoff, dramaturg for Arsenault's one-woman autobiographical play *The Silicone Diaries*, with the assistance of Associate Editor J. Paul Halferty, *TRANS(per)FORMING* explores Arsenault's "unreasonabl[e]" embodiment of "extreme and even unreal representations of Western beauty" (3). A mix of writers, professors, playwrights, directors, and artists provide the essays that range from meditations on cyborgian identity politics, to searching for authenticity in vocal training for a transsexual performer, to analyses of her evolution as a commodified sexual being. The texts follow no apparent order, but rather are arranged in such a way as to highlight their variety and diversity and to separate similar topics. In so doing, this anthology engages both in formal and theatrical as well as ideological principles that Arsenault confronts, confuses, and subverts.

The editors guide the reader through this book and its goals with Rudakoff's introduction, an essay that broadly introduces Arsenault as an artist, providing both biographical background as well as an insightful and contextualizing overview of the cross-disciplinary critical approaches to follow. The form and structure of *TRANS(per)FORMING* is ideal, as it is through many diverse voices focusing on different facets of Arsenault's life and art that her life-art can be best understood. Likewise necessary to this volume is the inclusion of a section of full-page colour photos of Arsenault, comprised of images before her plastic surgery, during her transition, and artistic self-portraits of her current body. To talk about Nina Arsenault is to engage with her artistic canvas—her body—and thus her physical form as object and image. The inclusion of the text of *The Silicone Diaries* play is also important, as most of the essays engage directly or tangentially with this work—or the autobiographical details that the play draws upon.

Associate Editor J. Paul Halferty's essay on identification and embodiment lands on Arsenault's self-portraits, arguing that, "her identification with and personification of what are commonly considered imaginary figures are, like her gender transition, externalizations of her internal identifications and understandings of self" (29). Using Donna Haraway's "A Cyborg Manifesto" as a framework for "an unorthodox form of identification and embodiment" (29), Halferty analyzes Arsenault's *The*

Silicone Diaries and various photographic collections and astutely describes Arsenault as “the apotheosis” of Haraway’s cyborg (30).

While Halferty tackles Arsenault’s externalizations of inner mythologies, Shannon Bell focuses on how these externalizations correspond with icons and images of female beauty. Bell employs Lacan and her own coinage “fast feminism”—“[f]ast because philosophy, pornography, and politics mesh in action, feminist because action is grounded in female power” (95)—to analyze Arsenault as revealing “the process and suffering involved in manifesting the perfect female given-to-be-seen” (95). Throughout Arsenault’s transformation and resulting art practice, she has identified with many mythic and spiritual figures from goddesses to monks. Finding joy in the suffering, Nina says, “I live for beauty. I have suffered for it; the suffering is sadomasochistic. [...] I speak the forbidden, I speak the blasphemous” (102). Sublime joy and ecstasy mingled with suffering—as exemplified through the bodily pain of surgery and rigorous body modification—is a key element of Arsenault’s quest of transformation.

The anthology also provides essays that, unlike so much of the photographic and written attention on Arsenault’s person and art, are disinterested in her hyperfeminine, sexualized body and focus on other facets of her performance of interest to theatre scholars; for instance, Cynthia Ashperger’s essay details three acting sessions with Arsenault through which Ashperger explores, “What does it then mean ‘to act’ once a performer has physically transformed into a role permanently?” and “When she acts does she still play a part, or is the part playing her?” (45). Similarly, Eric Armstrong’s essay is an analysis of Arsenault’s search for authenticity in her voice, and how, according to Armstrong, she must place her voice “within the challenges of voicing her new feminine role” (151).

Despite the fact that each essay approaches Arsenault and her art in a way that is positive and appreciative, the anthology succeeds in crystallizing the controversial or troubling elements of Arsenault’s art practice; rather, contributors explore the intellectually provocative ideas and images she proffers. As Sky Gilbert comments in his essay on identity, “I certainly understand what might offend feminists about Nina. She has chosen the cosmetic sexist trappings that so many women have rejected as confining. Nina is the most fascist of body fascists” (21). He goes on to say, “Her now famously modified body is both real and it is not; it is her own sexual fantasies made flesh” (23). Observations such as this, that recognize the inevitable inwardness and self-

centeredness of art arising from one's own body, allow the text as a whole to respond positively to Arsenault's work while still stimulating provocative debate and discussion.

Arsenault is extremely open and forthcoming about her journey, making photos throughout her transition, including swollen and bruised post-surgery images, readily accessible and incorporating such images into her play *The Silicone Diaries*. With her past experiences as a sex worker—ranging from cyber-sex chat-rooms, to stripping, to prostitution—providing the material of certain “diaries” in the play, it would appear that there wouldn't be much more to learn about Arsenault's personal, sexual life and its impact on her evolving art and femininity. *TRANS(per)FORMING*'s inclusion of a variety of writers, including several who know or have known her personally, before, during, and after her transition, nonetheless opens up a new avenue of insight into the life and art of this woman. Todd Klinck's “Nina, Amber, and the Evolution of a Commodified Sexual Being,” an especially insightful essay, was the most interesting to me, having already read extensively on Arsenault. While the essay relies heavily on Arsenault's own words in a candid interview, Klinck applies knowledge and insights gleaned from his personal relationship with Arsenault, in particular from a time in which, as he explains, “as Nina's DJ, waiter, and manager at The Lounge [...] technically I was also her pimp” (60). Charting the chronology of Arsenault's sexual evolution in eras, including the Shemale Stripper Period and the Militaristic Hooker Period, Klinck gives access to a fundamental aspect of Arsenault's history and ongoing identity that, while known, is not examined extensively in articles about Arsenault and reviews of her plays.

The content of the volume's collected essays sometimes unnecessarily overlap. Each essay works as a stand-alone piece; none presupposes that the reader is informed by the other essays in the collection. As an anthology, however, certain key ideas, theories, and aspects of Arsenault's performance and work surface repetitiously. For instance, Haraway's “A Cyborg Manifesto” (a fitting and necessary theoretical framework to be applied to Arsenault) is introduced in Halferty's essay and reappears later in Alistair Newton's essay. While each essay usefully employs Haraway, it reads as redundant to introduce and explain the utility of the cyborg's destabilization of identity and social norms twice in one anthology.

Overall, *TRANS(per)FORMING Nina Arsenault* is a well-executed book that does justice to Arsenault's unreal reality as a

woman, performer, and shameless worshipper of beauty. Completely abandoning any desire to pass as a biological woman, Arsenault has instead embraced the extraordinary and unnatural; for example, she complicated the aestheticization of the female form by deciding to surgically remove her testicles while retaining her fully functional penis. Arsenault is a captivating artist whose work and ideas can appeal to students and scholars of many interests.

One need not be invested in physical/ sexual corporeality and transformation to appreciate the theatrical and performance aspects of Arsenault's work. Similarly, a reader interested in religious iconography and mythic symbolism will benefit from the essay on Arsenault's goddess affinities and embodiment of a death and resurrection narrative, even if they are not interested in theatre and performance, more broadly. *TRANS(per)FORMING* is the first book-length scholarly publication about Nina Arsenault, and the diversity of critical responses to her life and art testifies to the need for this book and the range of interests to which it appeals.

NORMAND CHAURETTE

Comment tuer Shakespeare

Montréal: Les Presses de l'Université de Montréal, 2011. 224pp.

LEANORE LIEBLEIN

Normand Charette's remarkable *Comment tuer Shakespeare* is an elusive and provocative book. It contains fiction, history, theory, translation, literary analysis, memoir, confession, and more, and it is this multiplicity that constitutes its richness. Taken together the chapters are a representation of the playwright/translator's love affair with an inexhaustible Shakespeare and the adventure of translating his work. Like all love affairs, it is passionate, volatile, and not untroubled. In Charette's account, the painful and exhilarating experience of translating Shakespeare is a journey of self-discovery and a paradoxical process of killing and creating.

The book is a masterpiece of indirection. Each chapter is titled "A Translation of [a work by Shakespeare]." But only some chapters are actually about Charette's experience of translating (or not) the work in question. "A Translation of *Macbeth*" is a work of fiction in which professional translator Bantcho Bantchevsky, assailed by the hordes of his fevered depression and