

## Adeena Karasick's Book, *Massaging the Medium: Seven Pechakuchas*

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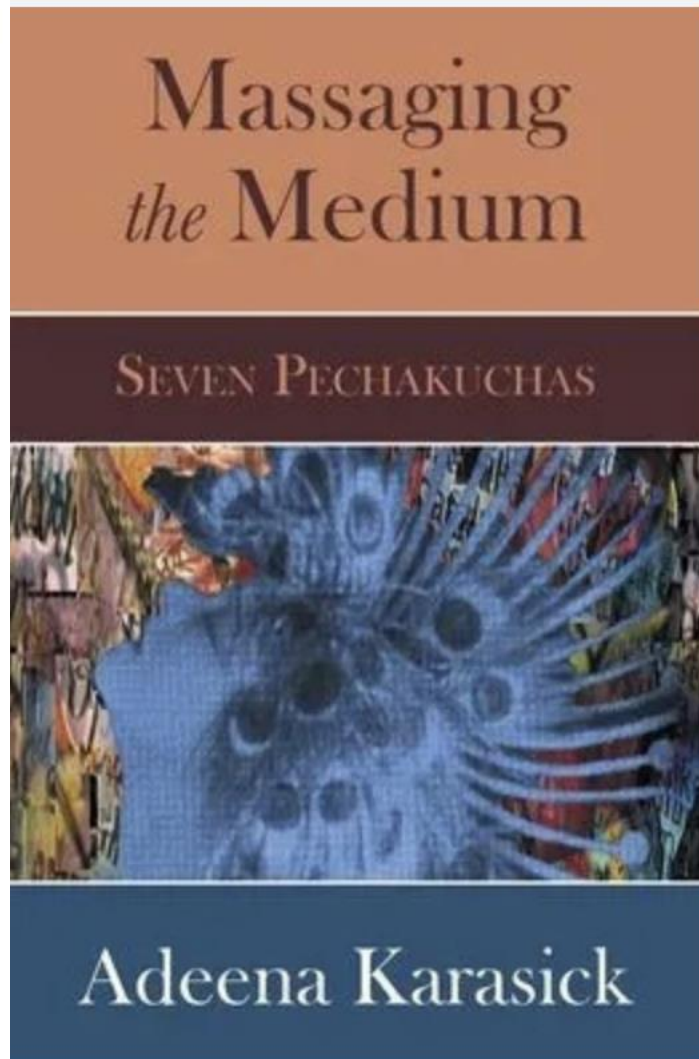


**A Review of Adeena Karasick's Book, *Massaging the Medium: Seven Pechakuchas***

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I took advantage of being the Editor to assign the review of Adeena Karasick's book *Massaging the Medium: Seven Pechakuchas* to myself, because I so enjoyed reading it. Karasick's poetry is so delightful and contagious that one wants to imitate it, so at times you will find my attempts at using

Adeena-like verse. I cannot match the creativity of her use of, play with, and insights into words, nor provide the resonances both verbally and ideationally she creates. But that is what one wants to do after reading her text. But there is more to her poetry than just the tonal resonances that she provides. There are also the images that accompany her poetic text, so that each of her Pechakuchas consists of a series of poetic texts, each of which is paired with a set of multiple images. These delight as do the insights of her ideas and the humor that lurks about her words and the images that resonate and resound her poetic words. She has prepared for us a minestrone of words, sounds, images, humor, and ideas that nourishes the mind, the heart and the soul. Although Adeena's text is pure poetry, it is at the same time a scholarly analysis of the impacts of the medium or the technology of language, and as such it is an important contribution to the canon of media ecology.

Here is an example of how Karasick combines her poetic text with images she has collected. This one is from section 5 of "Ceci N'est Pas Une Telephone or Hooked on Telephonics - A Pata-philophonemic Investigation of the Telephone":



And as we are re-mediated through now wireless technologies

the present is always re-presented in a messy prescient,

a pressing sense that the future of the future  
is the present which we walk backwards into; a present  
(which is also a gift) a gift given with no giver, re-gifted  
in a re-mediated immediacy

As the purpose of a review is to introduce the reader to the work being reviewed (i.e. viewed again), let me quote from the opening paragraphs of Karasick's own introduction to her book of seven Pechakuchas.

### Introduction

"I HAVE ALWAYS been obsessed with language, language as technology; a prime mover in the re-distribution of aesthetic values. Whether on the page, the stage, the mis-en-scène, the screen, over my 35 years of publication and performance, the work draws upon a range of neo-Fluxus post L=A=N-G-U-A-G-E, Sound Poetry, Concrete poetry and Vispo modes. And through an aesthetics of jouiss-ey transgression, invasion, contradiction, ambiguity, ornament, excess, heterogeneity, paradox, hybridity and desire, I have always been rapt with the physicality, materiality of language, how it sounds, look, feels, and tastes and the various ways meaning can be constructed from non-traditional modes of language construction -- and how that fundamentally affects the way we see, breathe, feel, and act. How it propels us to see the world in new ways -- of parsed plays laced socio-political-lingual cultural shards, pulsing with palimpsested resonance, instruments of change with time-binding capacities.

As such, all the work is marked by a kind of intertextatic syntacticism ; or in Korzybskian terms, "semantic disturbances," weaving meaning through questions and celebrations, reverberation, elation, navigating ways this engagement with language invites us to embrace the impossibility of the possible, the contingency of our finitude, our brokenness, excess and exuberance, within the fissures of being."

Adeena Karasick, the scholar and the poet, in *Massaging the Medium* "explore(s) the relational contingencies of visual and acoustic space," providing us with a corpus callosum of the left and right brain sensibilities that both informs and delights. She is in fact our very own corpus callosum of media ecology and as such we are blessed. In reviewing her book, I have taken the liberty of quoting liberally from her text because paraphrasing Karasick cannot do justice to her delicious text with all its overtones, undertones, associations, nuances, and resonances."

Karasick throughout the Seven Pechakuchas juxtaposes high and low culture, creating a fascinating mix of two types of genres in which the poetry of her words is combined with the images that accompany her poetic text. But at the same time, the text and images of her Pechakuchas also form rigorously researched multimediatic border-blurring essays.

All is fair game when Karasick plays with language. In fact, one of the markers of her writing is the way she poetically strings together adjectives that are closely related, enriching the noun she is describing and showing us the relationship of the adjectives that she has strung together. Here, as an example, is her two sentence-one paragraph description of her Pechakuchas:

And as you can't take the jew out of the jouissance, each PechaKucha erupts as an analytic meditation on the relationship between language, culture, technology, and communication, bound by a firm commitment to play and plaisir. Incorporating a hyper-generative aesthetics highlighting recycled language, sampling, borrowing, cutting, pasting, mash-up; engaged in an 'inter-inventive' poetics marked by neo-formalized post-consumerist media-infused transgressive linguistic practices - underscoring how whether on or off the screen, each luxuriant reference, phrase, meme is saturated with ideological codes, intertextually drenched palimpsested systems, an ever-shifting political, social gendered logospace of 'ambition-valence'.

This is just one example of the way she slings together adjectives. There are many more in the seven Pechakuchas that make up the content of her book with each Pechakucha consisting of anywhere from 12 to 22 pairings of text with and image. A short description of each one of these now follows.

### **1. Ceci N'est Pas Une Telephone or Hooked on Telephonics A Pata-philophonemic Investigation of the Telephone**

This Pechakucha extends McLuhan's analysis of the telephone as found in Chapter 27 of *Understanding Media*. She describes the many uses, features and functions that today's phones possess. She describes the way the phone engages our senses with not just the dimension of sound like the original telephone, but also the visual with text, images, and video, and the tactile with the touch screen. She "explores ways the telephone has shifted our sense and understanding of time and space" in light of the emergence of the smartphone and the Internet.

### **2. Where is Fancy Bred Rethinking Imagination Through the "Unthought" and How that Affects Communication**

In this Pechakucha Karasick deals with imagination drawing on a variety of sources, thinkers, artists, and religious practices, ranging from Heidegger, Jabes, Derrida, Lacan, Zizek, Coleridge, Baudrillard, Blake, Deleuze, Barthes, Freud, to quantum physics, Jazz, and the Torah. She examines and describes the many dimensions and nature of imagination, including ways to make the fanciful and the desired real, our conscious and the unconscious reality, the realization of the very existence of the world, of ourselves, of our knowledge, of our diversions, of our interconnections, of our meanings.

### **3. The Ghost in the Machine Medium, Messages, and Mysticism**

In this Pechakucha, Karasick explores the relationship between the magical, mystical, or spiritual, and the machine, or our technology, especially given the use of computing, AI, and robotics, to imitate or replace the human. She traces this back to the arrival of the telegraph, the telephone, radio, and television. She examines the impact of computers and cars that talk to us, services like Siri that help us locate information we seek or use to solve problems, associated with the use of our computers, as well as sex robots, and likens all of these to the “ancient Kabbalistic practice of creating a Golem,” that operates as a private servant.

### **4. Medium in a Messy Age Communication in the Era of Technology**

In this Pechakucha, Karasick provides us with “a playful media ecological investigation of Conceptual Poetry and its impact on communication.” Using the insights of McLuhan, Pound, and Kittler, she shines a light on this poetry movement, providing examples of some of its prominent practitioners.

### **5. Refracted Facts The Crazy Talk of Checking In A Postmanic ‘Pata Semantics**

In this Pechakucha Karasick reflects on what is true and how poetry can disentangle the deception of Crazy Talk, Stupid Talk, as originally defined by Neil Postman. She then provides us with the poem “CHECKING IN,” which deals with the deception of language, a recurring theme of her seven Pechakuchas.

### **6. Maps and Terrortories, PreScience and In-Sanity bill bissett and the Non-Allnes of Abstraction**

In this Pechakucha Karasick creates a poetic homage to bill bisset and his use of language in which she once again wrestles with the meaning of language and its power to create, and yet its “inherent uncontainability.”

### **7. Scenes, Screams, Screens and Semes The Salomaic Elasticity of the Page and the Stage**

In this Pechakucha Karasick dances her dance of seven veils as she again and again suggests that words don’t stand still, but whirl around from one context to another, both revealing and obscuring. But



in this her seventh dance of words and poetry, she reveals why she chose seven Pechakuchas for her book.

When I first began reading this book, I was struck by the choice of seven chapters and knew of the sacredness of seven from my Jewish education. But in this her seventh dance, she confirmed my suspicion and revealed for me even more reasons for the choice of seven. In the opening of Chapter 11 of this Pechakucha, she wrote, "where for example, 7 unveils," and then proceeds to list the many times that the number seven appears in the Bible and in Jewish practices.

But I say her work is not done, because there is also the sacred number 40 in Jewish lore. After the number 7, the number 40 appears the most often in the Bible. It rained 40 days and 40 nights when Noah was on his Ark. Moses spent 40 days on Mount Sinai before coming down from the mountain with the law written with the finger of G-d. The Jews spent 40 years in the desert after escaping Egypt, before they could enter the promised land. And there are many more. Even in the New Testament the number 40 appears, as Jesus fasted 40 days and 40 nights in the desert, where he was tempted by the devil. So, Adeena Karasick, you have your work cut out for you with 33 more Pechakuchas to go.

### Summing Up: A Confession

I must confess that perhaps I went beyond the bounds of a straightforward academic review of Karasick's book, *Massaging the Medium*, but that is one of the marvelous things about her writing; her ideas and her thoughts stimulate and inspire. So readers, take my advice and read her book. It can be ordered at: <https://shop.generalsemantics.org/products/massaging-the-medium-seven-pechakuchas> or from [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com) in the USA or [Amazon.ca](https://www.amazon.ca) in Canada and be inspired and enchanted and never again think of language the same way ever again. Amen!

**Adeena Karasick** is a poet, cultural theorist and the critically acclaimed author of seven books of poetry and poetic theory. She is currently Professor of Communication and Media Theory at Fordham University. Her writing has been described as "electricity in language" and noted for its "cross-fertilization of punning and knowing, theatre and theory"; it is marked with an urban, Jewish and feminist aesthetic that continually challenges normative modes of meaning production and blurs the lines between popular culture and scholarly discourse. Karasick has lectured and performed worldwide, participating on an international scale at conferences, telepoetic colloquia and literary festivals. She regularly publishes articles, reviews and dialogues on contemporary poetry, poetics and cultural / semiotic theory. She also produces videopoems and sound recordings of her work, which highlight its radical performativity [text by Alex Kuskis that appeared in his McLuhan Galaxy blog that reproduced this review. (<https://mcluhangalaxy.wordpress.com/2022/08/22/robert-logans-review-of-a-new-book-by-adeena-karasick-titled-massaging-the-medium-seven-pechakuchas/>)].