

Ania Malinowska

Author of *Cutting Up Books: A Writing Method in Critical Thinking*

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Ania Malinowska is a culture theorist, author and professor in media and cultural studies at the University of Silesia in Poland. She has published widely on media semiotics and technologically constructed relationship.

*What first inspired you to develop the ideas that became *Cutting Up Books: A Writing Method in Critical Thinking*?*

Dissatisfaction with linear narrative and the formula of an enclosed volume, whose content, once fixed, cannot escape. I first imagined a mash-up novel built from lines lifted out of various other books. But that felt too vast, and raised concerns about consistency: I still wanted the plot or story to be logical and coherent. Thinking toward a shorter form, I arrived at textrapolations: poem-like epigrams through which I think academically and which help me break through traditional approaches to academic writing.

How would you describe the book to someone who has not read it?

A guided method for thinking with fragments. And with scissors. *Cutting Up Books* shows how dismantling other people's sentences can teach you to build your own arguments.

What is the 'cut-up' method and what drew you to it?

An alternative to handwriting: another way of making meaning more multidimensional. It grew out of a childhood proclivity to redesign objects and give them new form and content. I loved scissors as a kid, what they could do to textiles, to paper.

How did researching and writing this book change the way you think about writing?

It changed my understanding of fluency, method and engagement with existing texts. Writing, in its conventional forms, tends to reproduce what you already think. The cut-up slows everything down and forces an almost visceral encounter with someone else's language, which is where the unexpected thought tends to appear.

What challenges did you face when writing the book?

Occasional criticism from colleagues who saw the integration of destruction into book form or, put more straightforwardly, the physical dismantling of books as something close to blasphemy.

How does the cut-up method encourage people to think differently about texts and ideas?

By treating a text as material rather than authority. Once you cut into a book, you stop being a passive receiver of someone else's argument and become an active maker of meaning. The fragment detached from its original context loses its certainty: it has to earn its place in a new configuration. That is where critical thinking actually happens, not in the consumption of ideas but in the friction between them.

Do you have a favourite example or exercise from the book?

The book contains a single exercise: a cut-up exercise described in chapter 6. It is my favourite part of the book. It walks through the entire process step by step but also transmits the delight of the activity, which I hope the reader can discover for themselves. As for examples, textrapolation no. 111 is one I keep returning to: it shows how this form of writing can be personal, how academic text can carry lived experience and how it closes the entire cycle that all those epigrams together represent.

What role does creativity play in critical thinking and academic writing?

A central one. Critical thinking is not a purely logical operation; it depends on the ability to make unexpected connections, to see what doesn't yet exist, to tolerate not knowing. Creativity is precisely that capacity. The cut-up method makes it visible and teachable by turning it into a physical act.

What do you hope readers take away from the book?

A space for rediscovering writing, if they need it. And if they don't, fun.

What projects are you working on next?

A book on love tester machines and an experimental project on imagined geographies. Part of the latter will incorporate cut-up as a writing method.