Dr Roxani Krystalli prepared this keynote with oral, live delivery in mind, not written publication. The transcript below is provided for ease and has been lightly edited for clarity.

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Krystalli, Roxani. “Feminist Pedagogy and Reflexive Assessment.” Invited keynote at Alternative Assessment Workshop. School of Modern Languages, University of St Andrews, June 2021.

[title slide]

Good morning everyone and what a treat to be here with you! I'd like to thank Dr Sarah Arens for pulling this together and Sarah King for supporting with today and the follow up. And I'd like to thank all of you for joining us live after what has admittedly been a very long year for teachers, and I think it's worth starting there. For your comfort, if it would be easier to keep your camera off during this portion, you're absolutely welcome to do that and then turn it back on during the Q&A.

What I'm going to speak about today is the relationship between feminist pedagogy and reflexive assessment. And as the title of this talk suggests, I see that as being a relationship

of both fears and freedoms, and I will talk a little bit about how teachers can address both components of that relationship.

[slide 1]

To do that, I'd like to begin by telling you first what (feminist) pedagogy means to me. You will note on this slide I have put feminist in parenthesis because I think this question of "what does pedagogy mean to you" is a good question for us to independently contemplate during this workshop.

I also will point out that feminist pedagogy to me is not just a question of subject matter. I do teach *about* feminism and other issues of gendered power, but it's also about a *way* of teaching. So I'm not only interested in teaching *about* feminism as a subject, but I'm

interested in teaching *in a feminist way*, including when I teach, for example, about the politics of nature and place, or critical approaches to peacebuilding, or research methods, or poems and international relations.

And to me, feminist pedagogy means four things. First, I have a commitment to encouraging curiosity about power. And I start with gendered power as a feminist. But you notice here [on the slide] that I didn't put an adjective because to me a feminist curiosity about power is one that encompasses all forms, manifestations, and effects of power. So colonial power, racial power, and so on and so forth.

Second, feminist pedagogy to me means practicing reflexivity in the creation of knowledge— and I don't just mean inviting my students to question who's considered an authority or what sources and materials of knowledge are we reading, but also to see themselves and me as creators and disruptors of knowledge, not just seeing the student as someone receiving knowledge from the teacher.

Third, feminist pedagogy to me means both critiquing *and* re-imagining worlds. You'll notice I put “and” in italics on this slide because it's actually one of the hardest parts of my job. I am a critical scholar and a critical theorist, a feminist scholar and a feminist theorist, and sometimes that means focusing on the critique part of the job a little too enthusiastically. But to me, living a feminist life, in the words of Sara Ahmed, also means imagining new worlds into being and helping students imagine what would a more equitable, a more

just, a less violent world look like. So I'm trying to hold both of these parts of the job in one complicated embrace.

And finally, a feminist pedagogy to me means shedding light on practices of joy and care,

not just on violence. This is, to some extent, specific to my subject matter, because I teach a lot about violence. But it's also pedagogical commitment to teach *with* joy; to bring joy and care into the classroom; to encourage my students to practice care towards one another, towards me, towards their subject matter.

And so these four commitments very much shape the rest of the talk and the Q and A, and I encourage you to think about what your own pedagogical commitments are.

I should also say, like all pedagogical commitments, these are aspirational. I fall short of my own commitments all the time and I'm very happy to speak about that in the Q&A.

[Slide two]

In terms of pedagogical inspirations that have shaped the practices of assessment I will speak about today I have learned a tremendous amount from bell hooks's book *Teaching to Transgress*, which you see pictured on this slide. Specifically, three principles that she talks about in that book have shaped my approach to feminist assessment.

The first is she talks about education as the practice of freedom, and some of us might think assessment is the opposite of freedom. It's where we measure, where we discipline, where we expect students to demonstrate certain things in certain ways. And so I'm really interested in bell hooks’ provocation of what does it mean to think about assessment as the practice of freedom? How can assessment be freeing for the teacher and the learner alike?

Second, in the book she talks about how she uses weekly student journals as part of her commitment to reflexive learning. Some of why she does that is because she sees the classroom as a site of mutual responsibility. So the teacher is responsible for some forms of learning, but so are the students. And that mutuality in that relationship of accountability is really important to how she sees the classroom as a site of politics and power. So she uses these journals as a way to welcome and invite the students inputs directly into that learning process.

And third, she asks and really questions critically where knowledge and theory come from, and she really sees everyday life, emotions, and experience as the stuff of theory. A really subtle but important distinction here is that she's not just talking about, “we need to look at theory *and* practice, or the applications of theory;” she's talking about everyday life as being the *materials* of theory, and that's a big part of my pedagogical commitment to assessment as well.

[slide 3]

In practice, what this means is that I use a form of assessment called reflexive responses. So my students write 500 words each week for each of the 10 weeks of the semester that we have at St Andrews. So they do one each week of the semester. And the task is, on its surface quite simple, wherein I expect them to connect one insight from one reading each week to a manifestation, or experience, or application in their own life. They're welcome to draw from more than one reading, but I actually set the bar quite low because I don't want the ‘kitchen sink’ approach of “show me everything you've read.” I'm much more interested in their richness and depth of narration and storytelling, particularly given that 500 words are not a lot of words.

So what could that application be? It could be that they take one insight from the readings of the theory and connected to something going on in current events or in the media. It could be that they write about their St Andrews experience through the lens of the theorists. It could be that they take one of their other modules, that is not explicitly about feminist theories and global politics, and they apply the insight from the theory [we read] to that module. So it could be that they write about art, popular culture, and much, much more.

[slide 4]

The aims of this form of assessment are threefold. First, I teach Feminist Theories in Global Politics, and that module would not work if the students didn't closely read theory. This form of assessment ensures that every single student has closely read at least one text each week. I'm happy with that. Ideally, they would read everything, and I should say with delight that most of them do read almost everything, as our rich discussions suggest. But I'm much happier knowing that they read closely one text than that they skim read several others.

Second, I'm interested in helping students make theory their own and make texts their own, and in so doing I want to help them reimagine the uses of theory. So how do we think differently about the reading or the theory if we apply it to popular culture, or to the news, or to something going on Twitter, or Tiktok?

And third, and practically, I'm interested in helping them develop a reflexive, critical, and generous writing voice. And if you think the adjectives here are at tension with each other, you might be correct. These three adjectives are sometimes at tension with each other and we’ll speak about how we navigate those tensions. I also am compelled to point out that I'm critically thinking about the icons that PowerPoint selected here. For example, theory is some sort of cogs in the brain, and the reading is a stack of books, and a reflexive, critical, generous writing voices is quotations. And so I think this slide is also open to critical visual analysis as well.

[slide 5]

I'm going to pause here for a second and contemplate the title of the workshop: Alternative Assessment Practices. And you might be thinking well, what's new, or creative, or alternative about reflexive responses as a form of assessment, and I'm going to quite honestly say: potentially nothing--because I'm not interested in fetishizing innovation here. So when I speak about reflexive responses as an alternative form of assessment I'm going to focus on what it is that my students experience as different from their other experiences with assessment or learning. What does that difference tell us about how we imagine mainstream or standard or traditional pedagogy and assessment, and indeed, what are the fears and possibilities of freedom that crop up along the way? I'm going to answer those questions by focusing on three challenges and opportunities.

[slide 6]

First, I’ll start with my students’ anxieties about whether creative assessment, reflexive assessment, or alternative assessment is “academic enough”. Second, and relatedly, their anxieties about whether this is situated enough within the canon of international relations, and I would say this applies in any discipline. So really ,the anxiety of students about their sense of disciplinary belonging. And third: the possibilities and challenges of assessing creative and reflexive work.

[slide 7]

So the first anxiety: “is this academic enough?” You'll notice the subtitle for this slide is *freedom (in education, in assessment) can be really scary*. So when I first introduce this form of assessment, students usually say to me in week one: Can’t you just give us a topic? Do we have to come up with it ourselves? Where’s the list of “Here's what to write your reflexive responses about”? Because it *is* really scary to come up with what you care about on your own. The ways this anxiety manifests or unfolds over the course of the semester is things like: “can I write in the first person when I have been told throughout my whole

Education, even before university, that the first person is not academic?” It also manifests in: “Can I really write about the patriarchal comment my dad made?” or: “Can I really write about Britney Spears's performance of femininity?” “Can I use Twitter or YouTube as a

source?” What these anxieties have in common is that this form of assessment encourages students to challenge some of the conventions that we, their teachers, have taught them in the past (and sometimes concurrently) about what academic work sounds like.

[slide 8]

So, what are some potential responses to that anxiety? First, I tell my students one of the very best skills we can learn in university is learn to spell out the mainstream. Don't just say “mainstream academia,” or “traditional academia,” or “mainstream international relations.” Tell me what the characteristics of it *sound* like. So when you're worried that something is not academic enough, what does academic writing sound like? According to whom? What characteristics does it value? Do you agree with that assessment? What are the expectations you are afraid you are not meeting, and who set them? And, indeed, there is a quiet question nested within that which is: How do the theorists and practitioners and activists we read in my module disrupt those expectations?

So really, learning to spell out what is traditional or mainstream is actually a key learning objective of alternative, or critical, or feminist, or reflexive assessment. Second, I encourage my students to consider who or what is threatened if we expand the vision of what academics care and theorize about.

And third, because I don't want us to only think in terms of threat––remember, that's one of my key pedagogical commitments­­–– how does expanding our notion of the sources, materials, creators, and defects of theory shift what we choose to care about and how we write?

[slide 9]

In practice, there are several manifestations of this form of anxiety and assessment, and I also want to give us some practical tools for thinking about them. So when students are afraid that what they're doing is not academic enough they sometimes just summarize the reading. They don't actually draw a connection to life outside the text, or they don't tell me what they think about it, and that is partly because this is a form of assessment many colleagues use, right? “Show me that you've read”. And “show me what you've read” is part of what I'm expecting students to do, but it's only half the job. Show me what you've read *and* make it yours.

So what do I do when a student summarizes the reading without drawing a connection to life outside the text? First of all, I help them think of what some of those potential connections are. Reflexive responses are necessarily personal, so you have to choose what your application or connection would be, but they don't have to be intimate. You don't have to write about the sexist comment an uncle made. And so I take what the student has written and I say “where is this observable?” What is one manifestation of this phenomenon? If I were to see what you're talking about at work, where would I go? What would it look like? And that helps them imagine an application.

A second and related issue is sometimes the student will summarize the reading without critiquing it. And this is one issue as well with decolonial pedagogy that Sarah mentioned at the introduction, the students will put the theorists, and especially the critical theorists they read, on a pedestal, and they're afraid to critique the text, so they just take the text wholesale and apply it somewhere we found without critically engaging with it.

And the response there is that I have to make room for a variety of engagements in the teaching. I will often pull a quote out of bell hooks, or Cynthia Enloe, or Sara Ahmed, or another feminist theorist I greatly admire and say, “I'm not sure I agree with this. I'm curious to hear whether you agree with it.” By making room for disagreement in my own assessment, I'm also making room for their [the students’] disagreement. And indeed, the third challenge is related to that, which is the student is afraid to disagree with the theorist, and I just gave you an example of that.

[slide 9]

Anxiety #2 : is this IR enough? Is this international relations enough? Or, is this political enough? Depending on the disciplines in which you're situated I'm sure there is a corresponding standard in your own field, where somewhere students learned, sometimes from us our colleagues, their past experiences with texts and teaching what the discipline ought to sound like. And in getting them to think about reflexive assessment, and alternative or creative assessment, we're shaking the foundations of what the discipline can be and what belonging can sound like.

[slide 10]

So how does this manifest, and what can we do about it? First, one of my favorite pedagogical practices is to turn the question around, and I say to them, and partly this comes from my own interdisciplinary positioning, “This isn't my anxiety. I'm not interested in whether this is IR enough. I'm not worried about whether this is IR enough. So tell me: political for whom? Political by what standard? Why is Britney Spears potentially not political? What do *you* think about that? Why is your home or relationship with your father potentially not political? What do you think about that?” And by turning it around, again, we're getting them to spell out mainstream dynamics, but we're also widening the door of what the discipline can be.

And secondly, (and again, there are a lot of commonalities here between decolonial pedagogies and feminist pedagogies): specificity and critique is important and really hard to learn or practice. So even if my students aren't convinced that what they're doing is political, they sometimes cannot spell out what notion of the political they're working with, what it means to do political work within the academy, and with what effect.

[slide 11]

So what do we do about that? The first is I have a list of key terms that I always encourage my students to spell out, because that is part of the practice of reflexivity. And you see some of them here [on this slide], and we go through them as a matter of teaching over the course of the semester. So they often say, “this text made me feel empowered”. And I push them to say: empowered to do what? What notion of power? Why did it make you feel empowered? Or they use the word privilege, but without spelling out the vectors of privilege, and the effects of privilege. Another word on this slide: inclusive. Inclusive of whom? Who did the including? In what? By what mechanism? With what effects? So really pushing them through critical pedagogy and critical assessment to go beyond the buzzwords to look at the content and what makes these terms meaningful. Accessible is another one like inclusive, right? Accessible to whom and with what affect.

Other terms Ι encourage them to spell out: traditional, or mainstream. By what tradition? What are the characteristics that make something mainstream? One of my personal favourites and pet peeves: when students characterize something as problematic. What is the problem? What is problematic about it? And, relatedly: critical. We need to be more critical. What kind of critique are we advancing? Who is critiquing, what, why, and with what effect?

[slide 12]

The third anxiety: assessing reflexivity. When I encourage students to write about things that they really care about, that initial fear of *is this academic enough* or i*s this political enough* is something they often overcome by weeks three, four, and five of the semester. But then they worry about assessment, because this is a practice of assessment that requires them, or at least invites them, to make themselves vulnerable. And it is hard when you place your vulnerability on the page to be assessed for it.

So the first question is really who or what is and is not being assessed, when assessment also draws from personal experience. And I make it very clear to students that feminist pedagogy takes personal experience seriously, but what is being assessed is not the nature of the experience, but how the student told the story about it. That's a tough balance these days. It's tough to teach that there are ways to narrate personal experience, political beliefs, and so on and so forth that are more effective than others.

[slide 13]

One thing that helps dispel that anxiety is having a really clear marking rubric. This part of the talk will get very practical and very technical in ways that I hope are helpful for our discussion, moving forward. So the marking rubric [seen on this slide] is in my module booklet––or if you're watching this afterwards in the US, a module booklet is a syllabus–– and the assessment criteria make it very clear what is and is not being assessed. So here I want to look very closely at a few principles that shaped this marking rubric and also how they linked to pedagogy.

The first is I wanted to make it very easy for student to pass. A passing grade at the School of IR is above 7, and you'll notice in the distribution of points on this rubric that there are several ways to get 7 points, and that's really important to me. So you'll see the first criterion “Demonstration of the Understanding of the Key Points of the Reading” that is 3 points. So if you've summarized the reading and you've shown me that you've read, those are really easy to get. Critical response to the concepts of the selected reading is different from reflexive discussion of how the reading ties to broader themes and feminism and politics, or how it informs the student’s studies and actions in feminist practice, and I'm expecting students to do both. To both critique the text generously, *and* draw those connections. If you've done one, again, it's easy to get to that minimum of seven points, but it's also easy to see where there's room to grow.

[More criteria]: Intersectional analysis and critique of the key concepts discussed, quality of writing. Appropriate citation, and I should note here, appropriate citation refers not only to citation practice, but also citational politics. Whom did you cite and why? Who did you invite into the room, if we were to think of your writing as a room in a conversation? And finally, creativity and originality in the students’ insights or in the format in which they are presented. And you'll notice I’ve given that two points, in part because it's important in feminist pedagogy to also differentiate the upper end of the scale. So, how do you reward students who may have that excellent first-class piece of work but want to go the extra mile? Creativity can feel like a lot of pressure, so you'll notice it is perfectly possible to do well in this form of assessment without getting those points, but I also wanted to create an opportunity for students who wanted to challenge themselves in these ways to do that.

[slide 14]

I'm going to close by talking about some practical commitments, or as I called it here, a gardening theory of feminist critical, joyful pedagogy. What does it mean to implement these forms of assessment for the teacher, for the students, and how do we deal with the hiccups that crop up along the way?

[slide 15]

First of all, if we expect creative outputs from students, we need to facilitate creative inputs as teachers. It's very much this idea of tending to the soil; that if we expect beautiful plants to flower, the soil needs to be really good. So in practice what this means is that the reading list and the teaching style need to mirror reflexivity. I cannot expect or encourage my students to write compellingly in the first person if I don't assign texts that model that, and if I don't sit with them and say OK, what works about this form of first-person storytelling? What makes it good? That's fundamentally different than teaching the content of a text. It's about looking at a text *as* a text and saying “what is it about this that is compelling?”

Secondly, asking students to practice this kind of creativity week in and week out with midterms, finals, a pandemic, all the heartaches and being a young person in the world is a lot. And I recognize I do not have 10 good ideas 10 weeks in a row in my own life. So I always give some ideas when I'm lecturing about what students could write their reflexive response on in connection with what we're talking about.

As I said, I don't have a set list, it's up to the student to come up with what they will write about. But it's important to me to create some entry ramps, such that if they can't think of anything that week, they are more than welcome to write on one of the prompts I gave them with no penalty whatsoever.

And then finally, if I expect creativity from students when it comes to where they direct their curiosity, I also need to model that; so I bring a lot of poems into the classroom , podcasts, memes, TikTok videos, tweets, and I've put here on the slide *What else?* because I'm curious to hear what are the “non-scholarly” or “non-academic”–––and I'm putting quotes around it because we should question those terms–––what are the “non-scholarly” inputs that help you also invite more creative outputs?

[slide 16]

Practical commitment number two: reflexivity is iterative. Meaning that it takes practice, on the part of the students, and on the part of us as teachers. And you’ll notice the asterisk on workload implications. This is a ton of work. I do not say this as a complaint, because teaching brings me a lot of joy, because the practice of feminism in the classroom brings me a lot of joy, but I say it is an important acknowledgement that teaching in feminist ways and

 teaching well takes a lot of time.

So, in practice what I do is I have an unmarked, but required, reflexive response due on week two in response to the week one reading. And that's partly to get students thinking about this really early on in the semester. And I give extensive written feedback on that reflexive respons. I have a collective feedback video as well, saying “across the board here are the patterns that we saw and here's how to work with them.”. And the reason I do both of these things is because I want students to receive tailored support and I want them to feel like these challenges of reflexivity and creativity are not their individual flaws. They're systemically produced through how we, their teachers, have taught them to think and write in the past and the present, and therefore they need to be systemically and structurally and collectively unlearned. I also have some video guidance in the pandemic on how to do a reflexive response and written guidance in my module booklet, and I'm very happy to share those with you. For those of you attending live, or if you're watching this later at home, feel free to email me, and I'm very happy to share all of that if you want to work with this form of assessment. As I said, this is a lot of work and I think it's an important part of the conversation about alternative assessment.

[slide 17]

Third: sometimes creative learning requires unlearning. So, for students to embrace this form of assessment, they actually need to unseat or challenge things they have been taught to value in their education to date. So you'll see the first box on the top right says my high school teacher, or my other IR tutor said… “you should never write in the first person” or “the passive voice is fine”, or whatever it is I'm telling them is not fine. And so thinking with students about how to unlearn what they have learned to date, but also how to manage those potential conflicts with other forces of influence and pedagogy and knowledge in their lives is an important part of this assessment.

Some of what needs to be unlearned when embracing creative assessment is student anxiety around performance. Very often students who are used to doing really well on essays or exams don't do as well as they’re used to in their first reflexive responses. So what do we do about them? First of all, the unmarked response really, really helps, because it's a way to calibrate their expectations of how to do this and also give them a low stakes example that they can then build on the rest of the semester. Secondly, the percentages I have allocated [to each individual response] help make the stakes of each individual response really low. So I have the reflexive responses due in sets, even though I encourage the students to do them every week (and I'm sort of shocked to say they actually *do* do them every week for the most part). So set 1 corresponding to weeks two, three, four, and five of the semester is due in week six and is worth 20% of their total mark. So when students panic I say to them, “Look each one of these is 5 percent of your total mark. You can take a risk, you can live with it. Five percent is very, very low”.

Then set two (weeks six, seven, eight, nine, and ten), due in week eleven, is 30% of their total mark. Not only because there are more responses in that set, but also to show that as they're learning and building their skills that it is weighted more. And the other 50% is an essay that they also come up with that I encourage them to practice reflexivity in, and I'm happy to speak about in the Q&A. So when they get really anxious around performance, reminding them that each one of these is a very small part of your mark tends to help.

And finally, part of my teaching philosophy is that assessment is not antagonistic. I'm not looking to catch them out. And in practice, what this means is that I think with my students about the challenges they’re having. My office hours are always chock full. And that brings me great joy. And they're usually full because students come and say “I want to write about this text, but I actually can't think of a good application” and we talk about it. And I don't do the assessment for them, but if I'm expecting this kind of creative learning, I also need to give them the tools and the questions with which to succeed.

[slide 18]

Commitment number four: the Institutional dimensions of creative or alternative assessment. I was born and raised in Greece and educated in Greece. Then I got my PhD in the United States, and this is my first time teaching in the UK. One of the big differences for me is how much more regulated teaching is in the UK: how many more actors are part of the ecosystem of what you teach and how. And one of the reasons we hear for why assessment is often not creative is “well, there's no way the board that's in charge of approving courses will approve this form of assessment,” so I want to talk a little bit about that.

Very often, when having to implement creative or alternative assessment, we have to provide justifications that mainstream or traditional assessment practices don't have to provide. So it's rare that you have to justify at length why you're giving an essay or an exam but suddenly, if you're doing something like this you have to demonstrate why it's appropriate. And I'm going to start with one of my failures here, which is that initially I approached this out of fear. I approached this by trying to demonstrate that this is a rigorous standard of assessment and learning. Then I realized, actually, this is at odds with how I think about this assessment. The reason I use this assessment is because it's in line with my pedagogical commitments, with what I understand feminist teaching to be, and so I rewrote the justification and said here are the module objectives. Here's my pedagogy. Here's how the assessment is in line with those. As opposed to “I promise they will write as many words as they write in an essay for my other colleagues”.

Second anxiety of institutional dimensions: What about the second marker / moderation? The external examiner? The other person who will read our work? I have feelings about the idea that marking is objective, and that people can arrive at the exact same mark when they come from different traditions and pedagogies. Feel free to ask me about those feelings in the Q&A. But for the purposes of this, I will say I've been pleasantly surprised by how receptive my colleagues, both in the School of IR and more broadly, have been to moderating or examining forms of assessment they don't use. They need a bit more information, so I send them the module booklet or give them access to the videos. I explain what I'm assessing to them in the same way I do to the students. So people can actually be quite receptive.

And the last point here is that we're rarely ever the first people to think, practice, or teach in this way. There's always someone in your department, in your university who has tried something unusual, who has tried something that differs from whatever the mainstream is. So find them and ask them: how did they navigate these institutional dimensions, and then we all build on each other strategies.

[slide 19]

Last point before the Q&A, my last gardening metaphor is: sow the seeds and unexpected things flourish. A lot of students do just write 500 words, but I've also had really creative responses to the creative form of assessment. I've had students write me poems, draw paintings, create podcasts, and I've loved seeing that be brought into the classroom. So if you're curious about how do you assess that, how do you help the student write a poem? What if you’re not a poet––which I’m not––what are you assessing in that case? Is it the literary value? Is it something else? Please do ask me about it in the Q&A.

[slide 20]

I'm going to send us off into the discussion with a provocation, which is that my students experience one final form of anxiety towards the end of the semester, which is that over their journey of reflexivity have learned to love thinking and writing and creating in this way. And then they worry a lot about going into their other modules, into the rest of their learning, and being sent off into a patriarchal and not always reflexive world of learning. They worry *Will I be allowed to write in the first person again? Will I be allowed to cite Twitter or TikTok?*

So I also would love for us to think in the Q&A about what are our duties of orientation reorientation, disorientation, vis-a-vis our students. When we put in practices that disrupt the politics of knowledge creation, what are our responsibilities towards caring for students in a system that doesn't always reward that disruption on their part and ours? With that, my contact details are here if you'd like to get in touch and chat more, and I'm really looking forward to the discussion. Thank you very much.