The Importance of Liveness within the **Online Education** During the Time of COVID-19

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic impacted the whole world, turned our lives upside down and had an impact on most of our daily activities, duties and interactions. As a result of required self-isolation from others, most of the educational buildings needed to adapt to online education. Consequently, technological devices are placed in between the teacher and students. This research focuses specifically on the online education conducted by Utrecht University which prefers to use the communication platform Microsoft Teams. Here, most of the educators are advised to and/or prefer to use the asynchronous education, which is based on pre-recording the study material and sending it to the students who then watch it individually. However, this research argues that they should also take into consideration the synchronous education, meaning meeting with the students live online in a shared virtual reality, as an important strategical tool.

This thesis investigates the online live and pre-recorded lectures in depth. Consequently, other forms of classes such as seminars are excluded. Both of these types of lectures are analysed through the dispositif analysis (an in-depth analysis of the technology, users and text) and through various supporting concepts such as liveness, connectivity and participation. Subsequently, this thesis provides a comparison between the two, highlighting the different benefits and possibilities offered by each of them. The main findings argue that the asynchronous education offers stable technological performance and flexibility for the students. However, the synchronous education allows the users to connect, engage and participate with one another in a shared time and virtual space. These features offer a familiar way of education as we were used to before the pandemic started. Therefore, instead of highlighting the ubiquitous individuality we live in, the synchronous education offers connection and social interaction through technological device from the safety of one's home.

Key Words: COVID-19 pandemic, Online Education, Liveness, Microsoft Teams, Dispositif Analysis, Participation, Connectivity.

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1. Introduction

The home environment was always perceived as the space where one can relax and spend some time with the family. However, in the end of the year 2019, a new virus started to spread around the world, resulting in a global pandemic and consequently, closing of various institutional buildings, one of which being schools. People were advised to stay at home and to self-distance from others. Everyone needed to adapt to the new normal as all of the daily duties and activities were suddenly placed in the home environment. In these strange times, new technological developments and media gained incredible importance since they offered a way for people to connect together while keeping a safe distance.

This thesis will focus on the area of online education in the context of the coronavirus pandemic. Specifically, online lectures at Utrecht University will be analysed through the components of users, texts and technological affordances. Since a variety of definitions and applications of the concept affordances exist, in this research, I use the conception made by Matt Bower, Australian learning technology researcher. In his definition, affordances refer to the functionality and utility of a particular object which is offered to the user. [1] In other words, when mentioning affordances, I refer to the possibilities offered to the user by the technology.

The question this research aims to answer is: What is the role of liveness, as explained by Van Es, in the dispositif of a Microsoft Teams live lecture compared to that of a pre-recorded lecture accessible on the platform in the times of COVID-19 when, as a result of self-isolation, education in person is not possible? To answer this question, I will explore the following sub-questions in depth: What are the affordances of Microsoft Teams that allow students and teachers to connect and participate with one another? How does the agency that the students have within the live lecture vary from the one they have in the pre-recorded lecture? And how does the text of live and pre-recorded lecture differ?

Since it was not possible to go to school physically, the educational system had to develop new ways of educating their students by using technologies. Teachers, becoming producers of their digital lectures, had to think about different strategies to keep the students

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[1] Matt Bower, "Affordance Analysis–Matching Learning Tasks with Learning Technologies," *Educational Media International 45*, no. 1 (2008): 5-6.

motivated and focused. The university provided a list of guidelines for the teachers which they can embrace when preparing their materials. Between those, the difference between synchronous and asynchronous education is pointed out. While the former provides the lecture live, the latter allows the student to learn at different times. According to Utrecht University, the asynchronous education is preferred since it prevents the class from undesirable technical interruptions.[2] On the contrary, I will argue that liveness is an important tactic offered by technologies that teachers can use for distance teaching.

This leads me to the relevance of investigating liveness with regards to online education. Societally, I provide a piece of evidence for the teachers that liveness should be perceived as a strategic tool as it provides a way to connect to and participate with one another in a shared reality. It may be argued that this shared reality is even intensified through sharing certain activities and tasks with a virtual group. Academically, analysing this case study adds a new viewpoint to the debate concerning liveness. Liveness is a popular feature within media and there have been many scholars focusing on it from various angles. However, they mostly focus on the area of leisure and entertainment, such as TV shows or social media, while other areas remain rather unexplored. The explanation for this gap is simple. Very recently, due to the need of (corona) self-isolation and subsequent transformation of everyday duties to the home environment, the concept of liveness started to become of remarkable significance for certain areas, like education. [Screenshot 1]

In this thesis, I will first explore the theory regarding liveness and the concepts of participation and connectivity, as a feature of internet. Within this section, the dispositif analysis will be introduced as well, following the theory of Nanna Verhoeff, Dutch professor of Screen Cultures & Society. Second, I will analyse the case study in four important steps; the areas of technology, users and text within the live lecture will be investigated in depth. Subsequently, I will compare these findings to the pre-recorded lecture and highlight the significant features and benefits of each of these types. Last, I will conclude, summarizing the main points of this thesis, reflecting on it but also suggesting future research.

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[2] "Tips & Tricks," Educate-it-Strengthen your education, Utrecht University, accessed September 30, 2020, https://educate-it.uu.nl/en/tips-tricks/.
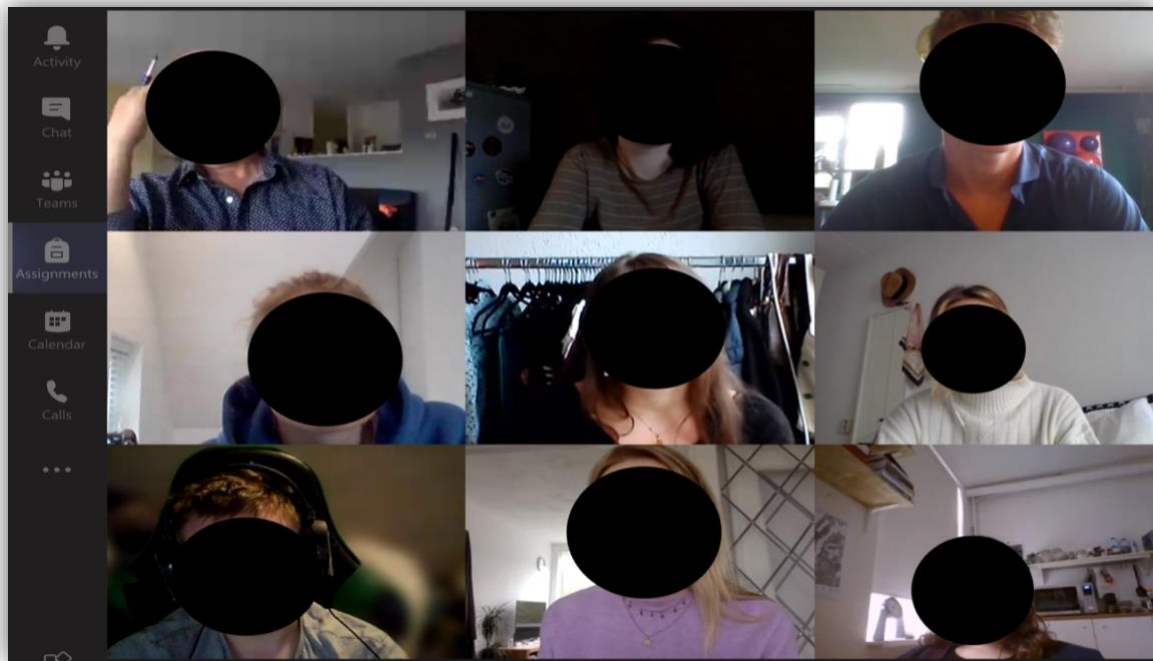
Screenshot 1: An online live lecture on Microsoft Teams. In order to ensure the anonymity of the participants portrayed, the black circles have been applied.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Selection of the Material

This research explores the differences between synchronous and asynchronous education in order to highlight the role and uniqueness of liveness which may be embraced by teachers as a strategic tool. As online education is a very broad area, certain selection had to be made. First, since different schools employ diverse ways of education, I specifically focused on the strategies of Utrecht University. Moreover, I only investigated the faculty of humanities as other faculties may have different systems. Second, to make the centre of attention even more narrow, I explored the case of online lectures which allowed me to exclude areas such as seminars or individual meetings. Thus, this research focuses on classes where teachers need to cooperate with rather large group of students. The reason behind this selection regards the extent of this thesis. Third, humanities on the Utrecht University employ the communication platform Microsoft Teams explicitly. Therefore, other platforms, such as Zoom, could be eliminated.

Last, while I could select a concrete subject as a specific case study, I decided to analyse online lectures of Utrecht University in general. Meaning, when reading this thesis,

one should keep in mind that when I refer to a case study and or/screening situation, I point towards live or pre-recorded lectures without further specification of the class. To explain, while each class employs only certain affordances and schedules specific moments when students have agency, I present in this research all the possibilities offered by synchronous and asynchronous lectures. In other words, I explore all the unique characteristics of online lectures, while the teachers may only employ a few of them within a specific subject. The selected material is explored through the dispositif analysis which allows me to answer the three sub-questions listed above. Furthermore, this methodology combined with the concepts of liveness, participation and connectivity enables me to answer the principal research question.

2.2. The Concept of Liveness

There is a long and fruitful academic debate concerning liveness. While in the past the concept was only analysed with regards to television, for instance by French researcher and professor Jérôme Bourdon, today there is a general consensus that with the new technological development, liveness connects to a variety of media.[3] This was argued for example by Norwegian professor and author Espen Ytreberg who focuses on liveness in multi-platform reality formats or by British professor of media and communication Nick Couldry.[4] Similarly, this thesis provides an addition to this argument since liveness is evidently present on a communication platform.

Scholars such as Bourdon and Couldry argue that liveness should be studied from three important angles, which are the connection of people, technological performance and the industry which shapes the live transmission.[5] In this thesis, I follow the conception of Karin van Es, Dutch professor of Media and Culture, whose approach to liveness is comparable to the one of Bourdon and Couldry. This approach provides me with a useful tool for analysing the live lecture dispositif as I explore the screening situation through the three aforementioned angles. Moreover, it also fits the definition of dispositif analysis presented

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[3] Jérôme Bourdon, "Live Television is Still Alive: On Television as an Unfulfilled Promise," *Media, Culture & Society 22*, no. 5 (2000): 531.

[4] Espen Ytreberg, "Extended Liveness and Eventfulness in Multi-platform Reality Rormats," *New Media & Society 11*, no. 4 (2009): 478.; Nick Couldry, "Liveness,"Reality," and the Mediated Habitus from Television to the Mobile Phone," *The Communication Review 7*, no. 4 (2004): 357.

[5] Bourdon, "Live," 534.; Couldry, "Liveness," 356.

by Nanna Verhoeff, which is the methodology used in this paper. Frank Kessler, Dutch professor of Media History, points out the diversity of the conception of dispositif, by summarizing various important thinkers and their approach towards to concept.[6] In short, Kessler highlights that when using the concept of dispositif, one should make clear what does he or she mean by it.

In this thesis, I follow the conception theorized by Verhoeff who explains it as an analysis of a specific screening situation through three components which mutually influence one another. Those are the technological affordances for the users, the content of the produced texts and the experience of the users.[7] By analysing how these components impact each other, the experience created through the screening situation can be explained. What's more, she highlights that each screening situation is embedded within institutional framing.[8] That means that each situation is shaped by history, culture and/or tradition. Furthermore, it is very often connected to a certain institution. Similarly, Kessler concludes his text by pointing out his conception based on the triangular relationship between the text, technology and users.[9] In short, the concept of dispositif may be approached through various angles. When analysing the live lecture dispositif, I will explore it through the abovementioned components. Thus, my conception of dispositif links with the one of Verhoeff and Kessler.

Similarly, Van Es argues that the definition of liveness is explained by various scholars from three perspectives: ontological, phenomenological and rhetorical. Nevertheless, she claims that each of these perspectives are in some way problematic and one should rather analyse how the categories of technology, institutions and users influence one another in order to understand the complexity of liveness.[10] To put it another way, the three categories should not be perceived as separate units but rather as a mutually influencing construction. Therefore, it is evident that the dispositif analysis of Verhoeff and the conception of liveness by Van Es resemble and add to one another. This combination allows me to investigate the agency of the users, affordances of the technology and the agency and power of the institution shaping the text in depth. Subsequently, these findings can be compared to the

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[6] Frank Kessler, "Notes on Dispositif. Work in Progress," in *Utrecht Media Research Seminar*–http://www. frankkessler. nl/wp-content/uploads/2010/05/Dispositif-Notes. 2007.

[7] Nanna Verhoeff and Karin van Es, "Dispositif Analysis: How to Do a Concept-Drien Dispositif Analysis," *Third Edition* (Utrecht: Utrecht University, 2020), 1.

[8] Verhoeff and Van Es, "Dispositif," 5.

[9] Kessler, "Notes," 2007.

[10] Karin Van Es, *The Future of Live* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2016), 12-15.

pre-recorded lecture in order to highlight the unique possibilities offered by liveness. In other words, I investigate the texts of the lectures which are shaped by the educational industry, their technological performance and affordances through Microsoft Teams, and the agency and the experiences of the users with regards to the texts and technology.

In the era of new media when liveness is not considered to be solely a feature of television, certain scholars embrace various categorizations of the concept. Van Es points out how most of them rather simplify the concept instead of justifying its complexity. For instance, Couldry or Philip Auslander, an American professor of performance studies, highlight the internet liveness type in their personal categorization.[11] However, Van Es stresses that multiple constellations of live can occur depending on the specificity of the three aforementioned components. To put it another way, these categories are rather generalizing the concept and do not portray its complexity, since there is not one internet liveness, but rather multiple types of internet liveness with different specificities.[12] Likewise, my case study shows that live lecture cannot be simply categorized as internet liveness due to the diverse affordances of Microsoft Teams and various teaching strategies that shape (different types of) lectures.

2.3. Feeling of Connection through Liveness

According to Van Es, every live occasion is characterized by a certain technological performance, the real time, and by the sociality which may offer the feeling of connection between the users. In other words, she claims that liveness may create a connection between the users through the technological affordances which breaks down the spatial barriers.[13] To give an example, Michele White, American Professor of Communication, focuses on webcams which she describes as technical windows, offering the participants to share a space in the real time while keeping safe distance.[14] Likewise, Primus Tazanu, African professor of diversity studies, highlights that through new media, liveness offers people to stay socially connected

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[11] Philip Auslander, "The Liveness of Watching Online: Performance Room," in *Perform, Experience, Re-Live*, ed. by Cecilia Wee (London: Tate Public Programs, 2016), 113-119.
[12] Van Es, *The Future of Live*, 23.
[13] Van Es, *The Future of Live*, 23.
[14] White, "Television," 348-349.

even if they are far from one another.[15] Moreover, Xi Cui et al. argue that liveness creates a sort of shared identity through the instant social connection of the users.[16] Similarly, Couldry, Bourdon and Ytreberg argue that liveness creates connection and sense of co-presence. Provided that, there is a general agreement between the scholars that connectivity is an important feature of liveness. My case study allows me to position myself within this argument since I assert that a possible connection, provided by the technological affordances, between students and teachers serves as a strategic tool. The students and teachers are invited to step into a shared reality and participate with one another, as will be explained below, from the comfort of their home, hence keeping a safe distance.

2.4. Participation through Liveness

As stated by Van Es, the specific constellation between the technological performance and sociality can offer different values of liveness, one of which being participation.[17] She defines it as the relationships between users of the media content and the institution that provides it and between users among themselves.[18] To apply this to the case study of this thesis, participation can be understood as the relationship between the students with one another, but also with the teachers that lead the class. Van Es goes more in depth and identifies three important concepts which portray how technologies, users and institutions influence one another when analysing liveness.[19]

First, Van Es introduces the concept of metatext which explores the essence of the text of the screening situation. To explain, first the concept of paratext needs to be introduced. Bourdon, among others, points out that fully live television is described by its paratext, the way in which the public is being prepared that a certain live event is going to happen which everybody is going to watch.[20] In her book, Van Es states that she also uses this term in order to explore "the understanding of the text, or rather in her case, the media platform."[21] She explains that once there is a certain repetition of themes, topics and ideas

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[15] Primus Mbeanwoah Tazanu, "Theoretical and Conceptual Framework," in *Being Available and Reachable: New Media and Cameroonian Transnational Sociality*, (Mankon, Bamenda,Cameroon: Langaa Research & Publishing, 2012), 28.

[16] Xi Cui, Jian Rui, and Fanbo Su, "From Immediate Community to Imagined Community: Social Identity and the Co-Viewing of Media Event," *Global Media and China 1*, no. 4 (2016): 482.

[17] Van Es, *The Future of Live*, 66.

[18] Van Es, *The Future of Live*, 25.

[19] Van Es, *The Future of Live*, 26.

[20] Bourdon, "Live," 539.

[21] Van Es, *The Future of Live*, 36-37.

within the paratexts, one can acknowledge the platform as metatext. Thus, according to Van Es, metatext suggests what the value of the specific live medium is. Second, user responses describe the agency of the users within the live medium. Lastly, the space of participation is offered by the platform where the users can participate together.[22] Altogether, these three components are helpful for my case study as they uncover the value, affordances and agencies offered by the live lecture dispositif.

There is a general agreement that certain live occasions can offer their viewers a possibility to participate together. Nevertheless, some scholars see the concept of participation as a static part of liveness, for instance Ytreberg. Others think of it as a possible feature of liveness, for instance Van Es or Bourdon. Provided these two opinions, my research argues that participation is an important feature of liveness, but it is not a static part of it. While students may become participants through the online lecture, they can also choose to only listen while still being connected to others. Similarly, the teachers can decide if they will provide the space for participation or not. To put it another way, online live lecture can happen without any of the users actively participating with one another. However, they have the possibility to do so.

Therefore, through the features of participation and feeling of connection, I will highlight how, in contrast to a pre-recorded lecture, live lectures create a shared reality where students and teachers can connect and participate with one another. In other words, these concepts grant me to explore the agency and experiences of the users in the virtual space. Briefly, the combination of the dispositif analysis and the highlighted concepts allows me to investigate how technology, users and text within live lectures influence one another and thus, create a specific and complex screening situation. Subsequently, this situation will be compared to the pre-recorded one, highlighting the differences between the two.

3. Analysis

3.1. Online Live Lecture Dispositif

Before the live lecture dispositif is explored in depth, it is necessary to outline the main features of this screening situation. As stated before, the analysed lectures take place on the

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[22] Van Es, *The Future of Live*, 27-42.

communication platform Microsoft Teams, at a specific time and on a particular channel of the class. While the exact duration can differ depending on the subject, it is common that the lecture takes around an hour and a half, hence resembling the time that students were used to before the pandemic. During the class, the teachers and students may see and hear one another through webcams and the microphone. However, it is mostly up to the teacher to decide when students can speak and when they should be quiet, for the sake of the smooth continuation of the class. Various affordances are offered by Microsoft Teams which allow the students to ask questions and raise discussion without disrupting the flow of the class. In short, the online live lecture happens at a specific time on a specific channel and affords its users to connect and communicate with one another, sharing a digital reality of here and now.

3.2. Technological Performance of Microsoft Teams

During the time of isolation, technology plays an important part with regards to communication between individuals, groups and the whole society. Meaning, if people want to connect with one another while keeping a safe distance, certain technological device is needed. Within the analysed situation, the students and teachers need not only a technological device with a connection to internet, but also the communication platform Microsoft Teams. This platform offers the participants to hear each other through the microphone and to see one another through the webcam. Both of these affordances are optional; the users may decide if they will be turned on or off. Michele White puts forward how webcams offer delivery of live images and that screens should be seen as windows which enable the viewers to enter realities which are otherwise not reachable.[23] Although White writes her article in 2006, her explanation of screens is very fitting nowadays as one may not go to school physically and connection with others is only possible through the digital environment. When talking about the digital environment and/or realities, I refer to the here and now we share with the other students and teachers. While it is not possible to share a physical space together, the technology offers to the participants to connect and participate in a shared time, peeking into each other's environments through the windows with a fixed frame, offered by webcams. In other words, I point out the way Microsoft Teams positions its

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[23] White, "Television," 350.

users, offering the possibility of connecting individuals within a specific timeframe, which is physically not possible in time of COVID-19. As we live today in a one and a half meter society, the possibility to meet online and be part of a group in a virtual shared reality, is of a great importance for the social interaction and sometimes even mental health.
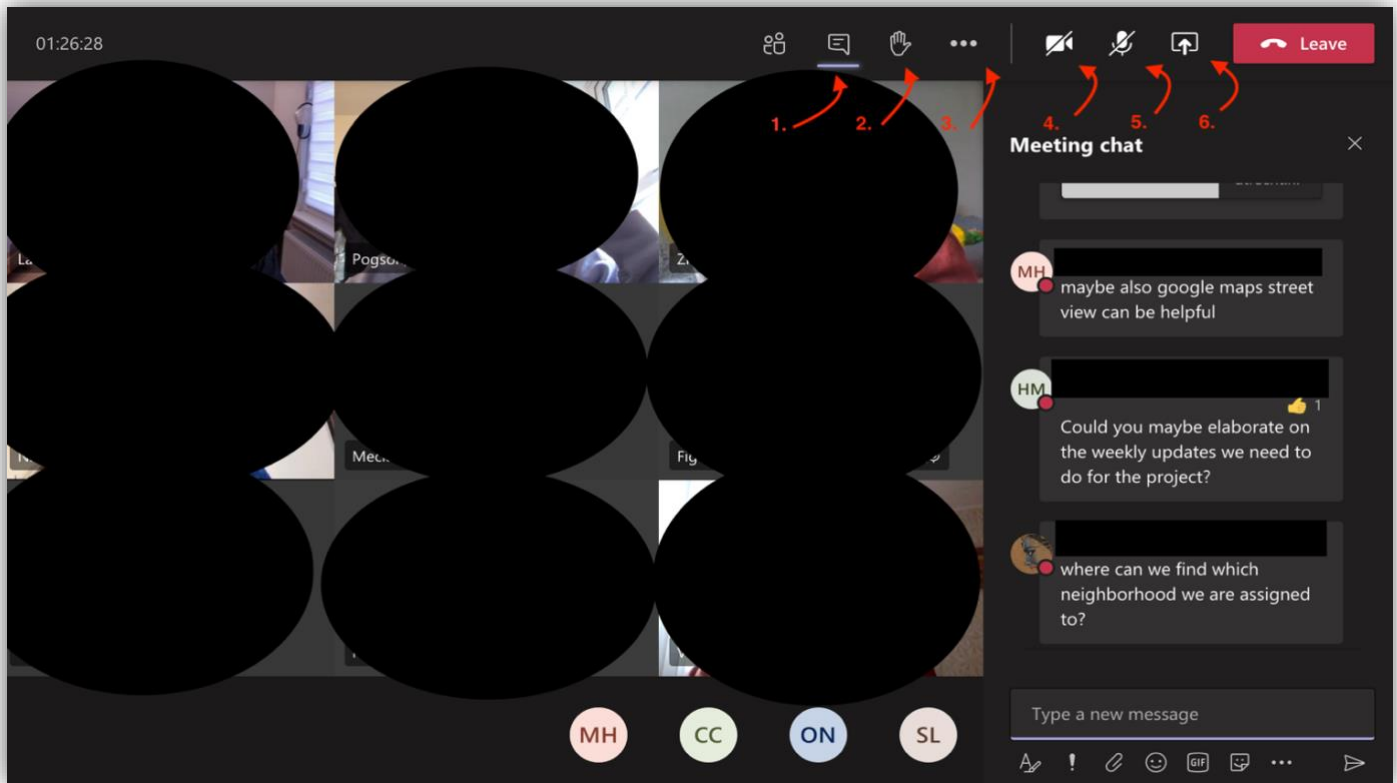

Screenshot 2: Affordances offered by the communication platform Microsoft Teams during an online live lecture. The faces of the participants are hidden in order to keep their anonymity.

1. General Chat (may be seen on the right)
2. Raising hand option
3. 'Others' (Screenshot 3)
4. Webcam
5. Microphone
6. Screen sharing

Besides the opportunity of seeing and hearing each other, Microsoft Teams provides many other affordances to its participants. First, the users may write to a group chat alongside the videocall which provides the opportunity for the teachers to keep track of the questions and discussion points from the side of the students. Often, two teachers are present during one lecture. While one of them presents the study materials, the other one controls the chat

and answers questions. If needed, he or she may also stop the presenting lecturer for further clarification or discussion. Second, the users may also virtually raise a hand. This function was added in the spring of 2020 as a result of most of the education transforming into the digital environment and serves as a tool which makes the discussion between the group of students and teachers run more smoothly. To explain, instead of multiple students asking questions and discussing at the same time, they may simply click on the hand icon and wait to be invited by the teacher to speak up. [Screenshot 2] Not to mention, this function highly resembles the way physical lectures were framed. Third, on behalf of privacy, the platform allows the users to change their background, one of the options being a school classroom. [Screenshot 3] Lastly, the users are offered to share their screen, a file or for instance a PowerPoint presentation which could substantiate the lecture. [Screenshot 4]
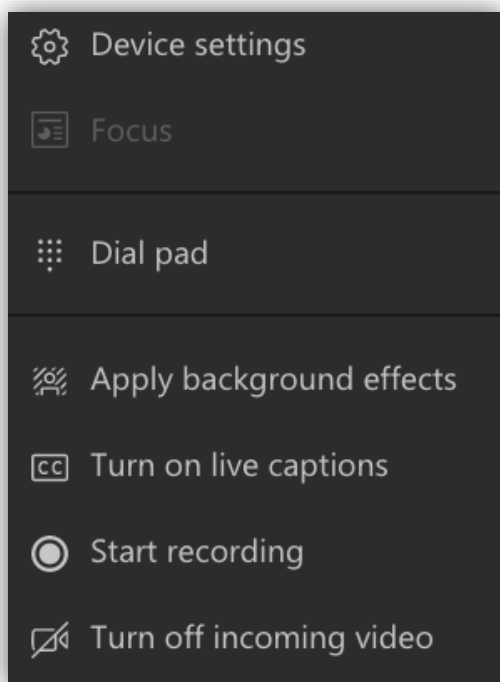
Screenshot 3: Other options, for instance applying a background effect of the user's choice or recording of the content of the class.
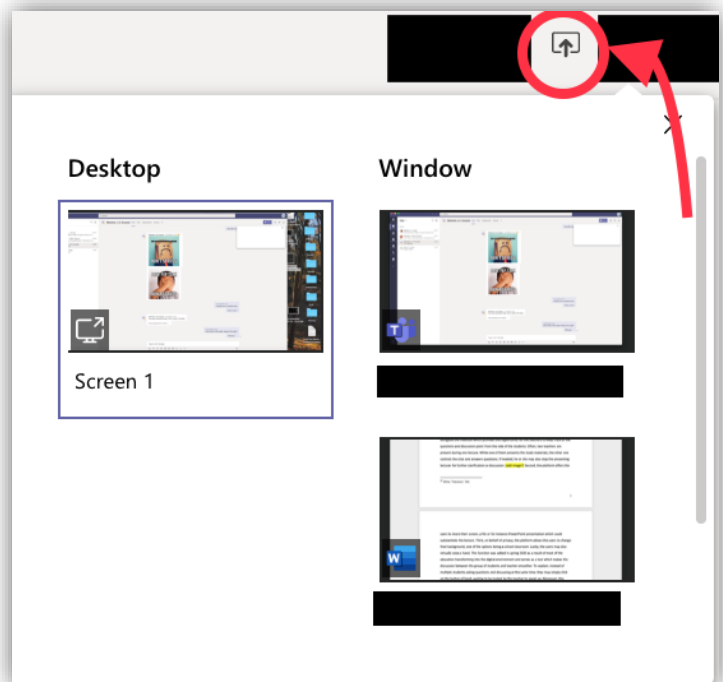
Figure 4: The affordance to share a screen, presentation or text document.

As mentioned above, Van Es perceives the concept of real time as an important, technical part of liveness which describes the simultaneity of the live screening. This connects to the possible distractions that can occur within the technological performance, for instance

delay or freeze of the picture. In the analysed case study, certain disruptions may occur due to the bad internet connection of one of the participants or for instance particular fizz due to a problem with the microphone. This suggests that the event is live. Due to these possible distractions, most of the teachers select the asynchronous variation of online education. By pre-recording the lecture for their students, they make sure there will be no disrupting elements. However, one should also acknowledge that, as argued by Van Es, the constellation between the real time and sociality, the connection between the users, offers particular value of liveness. In this instance, the value is connectivity and participation. The students and teachers may participate and interact with one another in ways such as asking questions, raising discussions, watching shared contents and others. This connection between the users happens at a specific time. Briefly, in the terminology of Van Es, the space of participation is offered by the technology, where users may connect and share an experience together. I argue that this experience is not an individual one, as the participants share a common goal. Jonathan Bishop, a British scholar, focuses on participation in online communities and explains that online groups are based on sharing similar goals, values and beliefs.[24] Likewise, Andy Lavender points out the concept of nowness, to which he refers by the experience of participants joining a specific activity at a specific time. Similarly as I do in this thesis, he makes a distinction between something live and pre-recorded, concluding that live events provide a shared experience of here and now for all the people present.[25] Therefore, the online group within the analysed screening situation emerges through the shared interest in the specific subject, shared goal of gaining knowledge and passing an exam but also the value of connection with other classmates and participation towards their goal. Furthermore, a shared experience between them is created as the lecture happens at a specific time.

3.3. Agency of Users within the Online Live Lecture

Another important component introduced by Van Es are the user responses: the agency of the users within the screening situation. As already listed above, Microsoft Teams provides various affordances which may be utilized by the users. Throughout the lessons, the students

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[24] Jonathan Bishop, "Increasing Participation in Online Communities: A Framework for Human–Computer Interaction," *Computers in Human Behavior 23*, no. 4 (2007): 1882.

[25] Andy Lavender, *Performance in the twenty-first century: Theatres of engagement* (London and New York: Routledge, 2016), 175.

are able to follow the study material, ask questions and request further explanation if needed. For this, they may use the chat or raise a virtual hand. Similarly, the teacher may ask the students questions and explain what is needed. In other words, the users may communicate together through the shared reality while using the tools offered by Microsoft Teams. There is not any specific command regarding the place from which students may connect and how far away they need to be from their device. Nevertheless, they need to be in a quiet space and close to the microphone in order to be heard when asked to turn it on and speak up. What's more, they should make sure that while having their webcam turned on, their background is not distracting to other students. Besides that, the participants have a dominant agency over the affordances of microphone and webcam. To specify, the teacher has the power to operate the microphone and webcams of students if necessary. However, this conduct is not common within the university environment as the students mostly adapt to the requirements of the teacher. Moreover, since they may ask questions regarding the study material, they have certain influence over the content of the class. Yet, they need to follow and respect the guidance of the teacher as misuse of the abovementioned affordances may lead to certain visual and auditory disruptions. This may suggest the concept of real time since it concerns the simultaneity of live screening through the technological part of liveness.

Nevertheless, the feature highlighted the most within this section is the one of sociality. Since the lecture is live, both the students and the teachers may connect, discuss and engage with one another. This interaction might only be based on the teacher sharing a presentation or videoclip, and the students watching. Still, they acknowledge that all the others are watching the exact same thing at the same time. Likewise Lavender, Van Es explains in her text that by experiencing something at the same time as others, the group gains a shared, even if individual, experience.[26] I argue that, in the times of isolation, the shared activity through virtual reality may be perceived as intensifying the feeling of a connection to and sharing an experience with others as physical activities are forbidden. As pointed out above, the users not only share a certain reality, the nowness of the lecture, but also a specific goal and aim. Therefore, it is clear that the connection emerges due to the technological performance and the users who form a group with a shared belief. However,

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[26] Karin van Es, "Liveness Redux: On Media and Their Claim to Be Live," *Media, Culture & Society 39*, no. 8 (November 2017): 1247.

one should also acknowledge the influence of the texts and the industry, as explained in the following section.

3.4. The Industry Shaping the Text of the Live Lecture Dispositif

It is important to say that, while students have certain power over the class, it is the teacher, the educational institution, who shapes the content and text of the lecture. Similarly, the teacher may decide at what time the lesson will start and end. Students simply need to adapt to it which creates, in the terminology of Van es, "the pressure of passing time."[27] Some teachers may choose to record the meeting which gives an opportunity to the latecomers to gather the study material. [Screenshot 3] However, the pressure is still present as this is the only moment where students may ask questions, collaborate and help one another. Moreover, the teacher decides how to present the study material to the class. To give an illustration, some employ educational videoclips while others make use of self-created PowerPoint presentations. The students have the agency to ask questions about the study material. This can be answered by the teacher but also by one of the students, hence participating together and working towards the shared goal. However, it is the teacher who frames the lecture and who decides when, what and how the study material will be discussed. In addition, the teacher also decides when the students can turn their microphone on and off.

To the component of text and industry, Van Es applies the concept of metatext: the value of the specific screening situation. Each screening situation has different enticement with a different focus and value. By that, the situation establishes that something should be attended at the moment and not later as it is important to the particular group of people.[28] With regards to the online live lecture, the most important selling point is the one of connectivity. Following that, as the students and teachers are offered to connect in a shared virtual reality, they are allowed to participate and help each other with regards to the study material; to ask questions and to clear certain incomprehensibilities. The live lecture allows the participants to create a group of people with shared interests regarding education in a specific subject. This establishes that the lecture should be attended at the communicated time as the abovementioned values would otherwise not be possible.

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[27] Van Es, "Liveness," 1253.

[28] Van Es, "Liveness," 1249.

Thus, the exploration of the components of technology, users and texts makes clear that they highly influence one another, and the screening situation only emerges as their combination. To put it another way, the live lecture dispositif needs to be investigated through the combination of students, teachers and their study materials and the communication platform Microsoft Teams. Once one of these components is missing, the dispositif cannot emerge. Moreover, this analysis also uncovered the way online live lectures resemble the educational institutional framing in many ways, specifically the physical lectures. As previously mentioned, the students and the teacher share a certain space at the communicated time in which they may debate and participate. Importantly, the teacher is the one who decides about the time and the content of the class. Nevertheless, students also have a certain agency since they can ask questions, through the chat or by raising the virtual hand, and hence influencing certain parts of the content. What's more, they have a dominant agency over their webcam and partly also their microphone. This research aims to highlight the aforementioned features of the live lecture dispositif, regarding the argument that liveness should be seen as an important strategy within online education due to the possibility to connect, share and communicate together. Below, I highlight these same elements by conducting a comparison between the live and pre-recorded lecture dispositifs.

3.5. Asynchronous Education and its Comparison to the Synchronous One

The guidelines provided by Utrecht University specifically encourage teachers to use the asynchronous educational type. This strategy is based on teachers pre-recording the study material and subsequently uploading it for the students online on the communicated platform, most commonly Microsoft Teams or Blackboard. [Screenshot 5] Some teachers provide their students with the so called 'knowledge clips'; a package of rather short videos focusing on a specific topic. Others record for their student a longer video (around one to two hours), in which they mainly show their presentation of the study material. The students can only see the teacher in the corner of the video. [Screenshot 6] They are mostly given a deadline to watch the weekly video(s) separately. Subsequently, they may ask questions during the seminar session. Similarly as in the case of live lecture, the users need a certain technological device with an internet connection. Moreover, they need to have access to the platform, Microsoft Teams or Blackboard, to be able to watch the study material.

📁	wk1-lecture	November 9, 2020
📁	wk2-lecture	November 16, 2020
○ 📁	wk3-lecture ⋯	November 23, 2020
📁	wk4-lecture	November 30, 2020
📁	wk5-lecture	December 7, 2020
📁	wk6-lecture	December 14, 2020
📄	201101_Course_Manual_Creative_Urban_Te...	November 4, 2020
🖼	669b24e1-936f-4eee-b6d4-d664c51f72d4.j...	December 10, 2020
🖼	dogwalkers interface final.jpg	December 10, 2020
📄	Presentation assignment.pdf	November 12, 2020
🖼	rules_of_engagement.png	November 12, 2020

Screenshot 5: The list of submitted lectures throughout the specific course on Microsoft Teams.
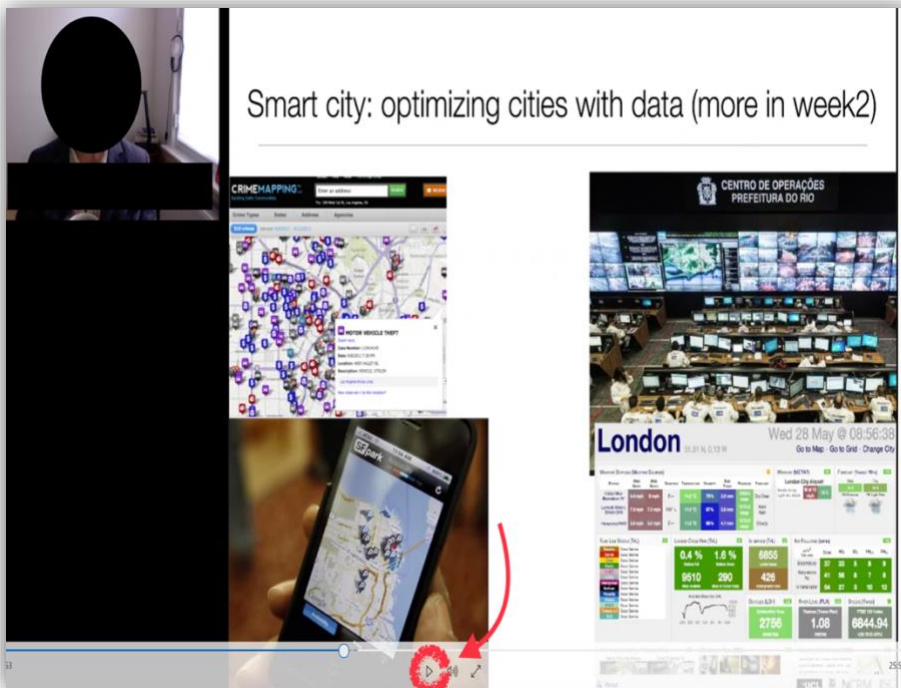
Screenshot 6: A screenshot of pre-recorded lecture. This screenshot highlights the position of the teacher in the corner of the screen and the agency of the students to pause, rewind and/or switch the video off. The face was hidden behind a black circle in order to keep the anonymity of the teacher.

As explained above, the reason why Utrecht University prefers the asynchronous strategy lays within the technological performance of the lectures. When conducting a live lecture, many distractions may occur. For instance, from the side of the participants or from bad internet connection which may result into a freeze of the picture or sound. When this happens, it is possible that the students will not understand the teacher properly or that they will be distracted. This is not the case with the pre-recorded lecture as the teacher can prepare the video in advance. The disturbances listed above cannot emerge since there is no virtual group which may be interrupted. However, this also highlights that the technology of the asynchronous lecture does not offer its users the notion of connectivity and subsequent

space of participation. Instead of meeting together as a group, the teacher prepares material in advance which the students are asked to watch individually. Altogether, the pre-recorded lecture lacks the constellation of the real time and sociality which is the reason why the space of participation and connectivity cannot occur.

In contrast with the live lectures, the pre-recorded ones do not request from the students to sit in a quiet environment considering there is nobody who could be distracted. Likewise, their background does not matter. While during the live lecture the students need to adapt to a specific time and come to a specific channel, the pre-recorded lecture offers them to decide about the time and space of their online learning. Therefore, no pressure of passing time emerges. Nevertheless, they still need to stick to the deadline given by the teacher, regarding the day by which everyone should see it. What's more, on the contrary from the live lecture, the students gain the agency to stop, rewind or simply switch the pre-recorded lecture off. [Screenshot 6] As there is no virtual group created, the students are not able to know if anyone watches the study material at the same time. Similarly, the teacher records the video alone, talking to a group of 'imaginary' students who will watch it in the future. It is important to point out that Microsoft Teams, but also other platforms to which teachers may upload the lectures, provides the information to the teachers regarding which content is visited by the students in order to make sure that everyone eventually access it. However, the students do not have the same agency. Thus, the asynchronous strategy lacks the notion of shared experience. Rather, this experience is very individual as each student watches the material in time of their preference.

With regards to the text and industry, the teacher has complete control over the content of the class since no additional questions and discussions from the side of the students are possible. In other words, students cannot intervene in any way and thus, have no agency over the content. Similarly as within the live lecture, the teacher has again the agency to decide the way in which the study material is presented to the class (i.e. PowerPoint presentation, videoclip and/or others). Instead of connection and space for participation, the value offered by the pre-recorded lecture is based on flexibility and minimum of possible distractions form the side of the participants or technological performance.

This leads me to the institutional framing resemblance. As argued above, the live lecture dispositif resembles the physical lectures, as we know them before the pandemic, in various ways. To repeat, the participants of the lecture share a certain space at specific time,

in which they may connect with one another and ask questions. The teacher has the dominant control over the content. However, by asking questions and raising discussions, students can also influence it. This is not the case during the pre-recorded lectures as this is much more of an individual experience. The students and teachers do not share any virtual space and there is no communicated time given to watch the lecture. The teacher may select the content while the students have the agency to decide when, where and how to watch the study material. Some may even watch it in multiple fragments throughout the week as they can stop, rewind and/or switch the lecture off.

Therefore, in opposition to the live lecture, the pre-recorded one does not resemble the institutional framing of education, specifically the lectures in person, in any way. Before the pandemic, when it was possible to go to the university, the students and the teacher had class at a specific time on a specific location. Thus, they shared certain space together. The teacher was leading the class while the students could ask additional questions and raise discussion points. While the teacher was speaking, it was not possible to pause or rewind the lecture back to the beginning. It is clear then that the pre-recorded lecture is not in accordance with the institutional framing of 'pre-pandemic' education. Meaning, this screening situation is very different from what people were used to when physically going to school. On the other hand, the live lecture offers very similar features. The main difference is that instead of physically going to school, the students and the teacher only open their technological device and connect with one another virtually while keeping a safe distance. Therefore, while pre-recorded lectures offer flexibility and unique agency to the users, it lacks the elements of connection and the possibility to participate and engage with others since no virtual group is being created. Clearly, it lacks the features which are offered by the live lecture, features which are very important during the time of self-distancing and isolation.

4. Reflection

In reflection, this research explores different possibilities which may be embraced by the teachers within online education, comparing the differences and similarities between synchronous and asynchronous pedagogy. However, one should acknowledge when reading this paper that the analysed dispositifs are only very specific configurations between many other possibilities. In other words, online/pre-recorded lectures on Microsoft Teams,

conducted by the Utrecht University, are a small and very specific part of the overall online education. The findings may differ greatly when investigating different platforms, institutions or distinct types of classes. Moreover, this paper also discusses only two extremes of the online lectures: the live and the pre-recorded one. While many teachers may decide to combine the two together, this option is left out from this research due to the extent of the paper. In short, this analysis provides insights about a selected part of an online education, rather than laying out general information.

Furthermore, this analysis provides a theoretical grounding with regards to the two opposing strategies of online lectures. With the use of abovementioned concepts, it explores the similarities and differences between live and pre-recorded lectures, pointing out the technological performance as the main advantage of the pre-recorded lectures and connection as the main benefit of live lectures. Nevertheless, this theory was not tested on any actual subjects. In other words, no survey or questionnaire was conducted among the students and/or teachers who participate in the analysed dispositifs. Thus, this research grants theoretical information to the reader, but it lacks the practical results.

5. Conclusion

This thesis investigates the comparison between synchronous and asynchronous education during the time of COVID-19 pandemic. This time requires people to self-isolate from others and transform all their daily duties to the home environment. Due to the extent of this paper, the area of education had to be narrowed. Therefore, this research only focused on online lectures conducted by Utrecht University through the platform Microsoft Teams. The main aim of this research was to highlight the importance and benefits of the synchronous education, since most of the educators prefer to use the pre-recorded lectures option. To do this, I investigated the role of liveness, its specific and unique features, within the online live lecture in depth. Subsequently, these characteristics were compared to those of the pre-recorded lecture. This was conducted through the dispositif analysis, exploring the technology, users and text of the two types of lectures, and with the use of various concepts. Mainly through liveness, connectivity and participation. However, other concepts such as affordances, shared experience, nowness and institutional framing supported this analysis greatly.

The two dispositifs were explored and compared by focusing on the three sub-questions regarding the affordances offered by the Microsoft Teams, the distinction between the agency of the users within the two dispositifs and the difference with regards to the text and industry. The analysis made clear that the main benefit and the possibility offered by the live lecture dispositif is the one of connection and participation together. This is possible through the affordances offered by the platform such as the raising hand feature, the ability to chat or the possibility to hear and see one another. By sharing a similar belief, value and aim, the connected online group emerges at a specific time which may result in a shared experience. This is not possible within the pre-recorded lecture as it lacks the feature of simultaneity and it offers very different affordances, such as the button to pause, rewind or switch the video off. Since no group of people emerges, the experience is rather individual. This leads me to the agency of the users within the two dispositifs.

In the live lecture, the students may operate with the affordances listed above and they have the possibility to influence the content of the class by asking questions and raising discussions. Due to the lack of connection and distinct affordances, they lose this agency within the pre-recorded lecture. Nevertheless, they gain the flexibility to decide when, where and how are they going to watch it. Within the live lecture, the students have the agency to intervene and hence shape the text of the class. This is not possible during the pre-recorded one which allows the teacher to operate the content alone. Moreover, the text of the live lecture resembles the physical education in many ways as they share a specific virtual environment in which they may connect. This is not the case within the pre-recorded lecture as it is, as said before, an individual experience and thus, the opposite of the education we knew before the pandemic. Therefore, the question is if the teacher will decide to pre-record the study material and consequently, have an un-complicated assurance of strong technological performance. Or rather, if the teacher will choose the quality of the liveness, taking into consideration the possibility of poor internet connection or other technological errors. Perhaps, the decision is also based on the aim of the lecture. To explain, there is a difference between lectures which primarily want to inform the students, and lectures based on discussions.

As mentioned above, this thesis provides a strong theoretical analysis with regards to the specific part of online education, exploring the different benefits and possibilities provided by synchronous and asynchronous lectures. The research brings forward a new

viewpoint regarding liveness since it highlights the concept within the area of education. Most of the scholars dealing with the concept focus on the area of leisure. The reason is simple: the concept of liveness was not very useful for other areas than entertainment before the pandemic. This changed last year when all the daily activities had to transform to the home environment. However, one should acknowledge that the selected material is only a fraction of the overall online education in general. Thus, future research may investigate to what extent may this analysis be applied to other dispositifs comprising of different components such as the used platform, the institution but also the type of classes. Furthermore, one may explore the affordances and agency over the dispositif in which the teacher combines the synchronous and asynchronous education. Moreover, further research through a survey or questionnaire, asking the participants about their actual experiences, may provide more information and additional knowledge about the online education in general.

This research pointed out that while pre-recorded lectures are convenient due to their technological performance, they lack the possibilities to connect, participate and engage with one another, creating a shared experience. This is only possible through the online live lecture. These features are currently more important than ever, since during the time of COVID-19, everyone needs to self-isolate from others. The possibility to connect at least digitally and thus, to have certain social interaction, may have a great influence on the personal mental health. Due to the pandemic, the public needed to get used to the 'new normal' as things that were taken-for-granted, suddenly changed. Institutions such as bars, shops or cinemas closed. Between those are also educational institutions. Life became very individual in its essence since one may not meet with friends or visit family members as they can be considered to be in risk. While the asynchronous education highlights this omnipresent individuality, the synchronous one offers to its users a familiar way of connection and communication, due to its resemblance of the institutional framing of real-life classes. Simply put, the teachers and students have a comparable experience considering they share a certain space together in which they meet at a specific time, similarly as in the time before the pandemic. The teachers may present the study material while the students make notes and ask questions. The live lecture dispositif allows its users to connect, participate and engage in a similar manner as before the pandemic. However, instead of going to the university, one has to simply switch their technological device on in their home.

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PLAGIARISM RULES AWARENESS STATEMENT

Fraud and Plagiarism
Scientific integrity is the foundation of academic life. Utrecht University considers any form of scientific deception to be an extremely serious infraction. Utrecht University therefore expects every student to be aware of, and to abide by, the norms and values regarding scientific integrity.

The most important forms of deception that affect this integrity are fraud and plagiarism. Plagiarism is the copying of another person's work without proper acknowledgement, and it is a form of fraud. The following is a detailed explanation of what is considered to be fraud and plagiarism, with a few concrete examples. Please note that this is not a comprehensive list!

If fraud or plagiarism is detected, the study programme's Examination Committee may decide to impose sanctions. The most serious sanction that the committee can impose is to submit a request to the Executive Board of the University to expel the student from the study programme.

Plagiarism
Plagiarism is the copying of another person's documents, ideas or lines of thought and presenting it as one's own work. You must always accurately indicate from whom you obtained ideas and insights, and you must constantly be aware of the difference between citing, paraphrasing and plagiarising. Students and staff must be very careful in citing sources; this concerns not only printed sources, but also information obtained from the Internet.

The following issues will always be considered to be plagiarism:
- x cutting and pasting text from digital sources, such as an encyclopaedia or digital periodicals, without quotation marks and footnotes;
- x cutting and pasting text from the Internet without quotation marks and footnotes; x copying printed materials, such as books, magazines or encyclopaedias, without quotation marks or footnotes;
- x including a translation of one of the sources named above without quotation marks or footnotes;
- x paraphrasing (parts of) the texts listed above without proper references: paraphrasing must be marked as such, by expressly mentioning the original author in the text or in a footnote, so that you do not give the impression that it is your own idea;
- x copying sound, video or test materials from others without references, and presenting it as one's own work;
- x submitting work done previously by the student without reference to the original paper, and presenting it as original work done in the context of the course, without the express permission of the course lecturer;
- x copying the work of another student and presenting it as one's own work. If this is done with the consent of the other student, then he or she is also complicit in the plagiarism;
- x when one of the authors of a group paper commits plagiarism, then the other co-authors are also complicit in plagiarism if they could or should have known that the person was committing plagiarism;
- x submitting papers acquired from a commercial institution, such as an Internet site with summaries or papers, that were written by another person, whether or not that other person received payment for the work.

The rules for plagiarism also apply to rough drafts of papers or (parts of) theses sent to a lecturer for feedback, to the extent that submitting rough drafts for feedback is mentioned in the course handbook or the thesis regulations.

The Education and Examination Regulations (Article 5.15) describe the formal procedure in case of suspicion of fraud and/or plagiarism, and the sanctions that can be imposed.

Ignorance of these rules is not an excuse. Each individual is responsible for their own behaviour. Utrecht University assumes that each student or staff member knows what fraud and plagiarism
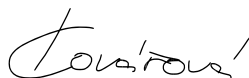
entail. For its part, Utrecht University works to ensure that students are informed of the principles of scientific practice, which are taught as early as possible in the curriculum, and that students are informed of the institution's criteria for fraud and plagiarism, so that every student knows which norms they must abide by.

I hereby declare that I have read and understood the above.
Name: Klaudie Kovarova Student number: 6393330
Date and signature: 25/01/2021

Submit this form to your supervisor when you begin writing your Bachelor's final paper or your Master's thesis.

Failure to submit or sign this form does not mean that no sanctions can be imposed if it appears that plagiarism has been committed in the paper.