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MA Photography

Confirmative Praxis

Is a self-portrait for the artist or for the audience?

Disclaimer:

To sit here and explain to you how I have developed my practice and grown as an artist and maker would be made up of large, overcomplicated words that I do not have any idea of the meaning of. I am Faith, and I love to take photographs. I don't hold value to subjective meanings and dead philosophers. This report will be in the first-person format, drawn from my experience growing and developing not as an artist or maker but as a person, an imposter and a photographer with ADHD and Dyslexia.

Introduction:

The Photo in the Road. Photography started for me as a way to save my memories of events. ADHD takes away your ability to focus and retain practical information. Most of my knowledge would only be valid in a pub quiz. My head is like a sieve. Photography has allowed me to capture and regain my memory.

When I see beauty, I have the ability to capture it. For me and me alone—a self-portrait of my practice.

I will walk you through my personal growth from the beginning of my MA course in September 2021. During that time, I began taking medication for my ADHD. Symptoms of ADHD

”The symptoms of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) can be categorised into 2 types of behavioural problems:

- inattentiveness (difficulty concentrating and focusing)
- hyperactivity and impulsiveness

Many people with ADHD have problems that fall into both these categories, but this is not always the case.”

consist of being unable to sit still, especially in calm or quiet surroundings, constantly fidgeting with my body or small objects, and being unable to concentrate on mundane tasks. I began taking my medication to help me focus and bring my mind some peace and quiet while allowing me to focus on my studies with clarity and understanding. I have a clearer view of life now. Regrettably, this has also led me to lose my creativity and drive for this MA.

I started this course as a simple photographer that took photos for fun. Interested in the quality of images and the detail I could capture in a single frame. I have always loved showing others the most exciting and intricate moments. But in university, I was expected to be more than just a photographer. It became compulsory for me to be an artist. Photographs without specific meanings or intentions were suddenly not good enough.

I take photos because it gives me a chance to capture a moment in time that will never be experienced again. It allows memories to be shared and remembered. When you take a picture, you capture the moment's emotions and are given the opportunity to either enhance or manipulate that further.

Starting photography as a hobby had the excitement to it; everything was for the taking.

There was no pressure to achieve and produce to a standard. This is something that I struggle with due to my ADHD. Small and simple tasks often become overwhelming especially when they have layers of expectations. Starting this MA, photography transitioned. It was no longer a hobby. Requiring explanations and contextualization, this snowballing small task quickly gained difficulties. My approach to taking photos without specific meanings or intentions, photos that were spontaneous reactions, was no longer enough.

Reading about American philosopher John Dewey, his description of experiencing feelings through art is more of a 'spilling over' or spewing fourth' instead of an expression of emotion. He describes poetry, and art itself as a literal 'spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings.'

"Spilling over" is an action deemed to be an accident and a mess, but in this context, an accident resulting in an idea or outburst of creating art. This is an accurate metaphor for Making art with ADHD. This practice results in spilling out messy ideas. Attempting to articulate these in a controlled and academic environment results in an overthought and overcomplicated outcome. Because this is so far from the initial, messy and natural beginning, it results in something that no longer makes sense.

The importance of the self-portrait

There is a language barrier between myself and other artists. I am dyslexic. I cannot appreciate what these other artists are saying because I do not know what they are saying.

This has created a barrier between the academic side of contemporary work and myself. It is still just a photograph, and I am still just an imposter.

“There is an essential element of “control” in the art of self-portraiture.” Holly Maire

Armishaw explains details found in artists’ final works as seizing ‘control of time and space.’

This is relevant in my discussion of whether a self-portrait is for the artist or their audience?

My practice has always been me doing my work in my image and preference, but recently I have been altering it to fit my audience. This change has been influenced by imposter syndrome, feeling out of control of my own work and striving to be seen as acceptable within the context of this degree.

As an imposter, I found a connection with another imposter in whom I have seen myself. He has inspired me to continue finding my practice and has become my most significant influence on both academic and personal levels. Vincent Van Gogh is one of the most famous painters in history, and he painted things he loved no matter what others said about them.

(Figure 1)

I have seen myself in Vincent, reading about him in books, in his artwork in museums and in dramatic TV reproductions. He is me, and throughout my journey toward my bachelor’s and master’s, he has supported me. I see him as more than just an influence but as a friend. This is why I will be referring to him on a first-name basis. As Vincent and not as Van Gogh.

His letters to his brother Theo reveal how Vincent did not meet the requirements of his time. He wrote about the ups and downs of a man that was kept fed and socialised by his brother. Vincent's experience has helped me to stick to the belief that my time will come if I continue with what I am doing. There is room for people like me in society, and my work is important regardless of any social boundaries I may experience.

“ it seems tenable to conclude that creation is a necessity (compulsion) for an artist because it provides effective protection against mental disorders. Artistic creation may thus be seen as a primary need, almost on a par with e.g. physiological needs, which serve the purpose of preserving the vital functions” (Vincent, 1997)

Compulsion has been widely discussed among artists and scholars throughout history. This drive serves as an essential ingredient in the creative process as it allows artists to infuse their work with their own emotional experiences, perspectives, and insights.

Many prominent figures in the art world also agree that passion and compulsion drive artists. Moreover, scholars like Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi have researched the psychology of creativity, suggesting that the creative flow-state, a ‘trance-like altered state of total absorption and effortless concentration’ is a profound engagement in the work itself. This is often fueled by artists' passions and compulsions. Robb, A. (2019).

I first became introduced to Vincent by seeing his work in advertisements out in public. I have always found his work beautiful. The vibrancy of the colours looks like they are screaming out of the canvas and creating ripples which you can almost feel in the layered oil paint.

Then later on, I became engaged with the popular tv series Doctor Who, which made a special episode where they travelled to Musée d'Orsay in Paris. The Doctor and his assistant admired Vincent's post-impressionist paintings. (Figure 2)

After seeing Vincent's suffering as a penniless artist, they take him into the future to an art museum. Here Vincent hears the art curator Dr Black say that he, Vincent, was "the greatest painter of them all" and "one of the greatest men who ever lived". They return an emotionally changed Vincent to the past and say their goodbyes. They believed that maybe that change would have helped him to create new work and live a longer life, but this is not the case, as his death was always an inevitable outcome. This always fills me with great emotion because this moment of recognition as a real artist was never made in real life. Furthermore, the potential that this recognition and respect could have helped Vincent's mental state will never be realised.

I believe Vincent's story and later success after his death have caused people to monopolise Vincent's life, art and suffering. It feels like there is false sympathy and a lack of respect for his disability and mental health conditions.

Van Gogh himself suffered from protanopia, the most common type of colour blindness. Protanopia is a red/green form of colour blindness where the red cones are anomalous. You can see here that, using a protanopia filter, Van Gogh might have viewed his work in a completely different colour palette than we do. There may only be a few others that would have been able to share the same view as him. So the beloved art we see today doesn't translate Vincent's true vision. This connects to Barthes's theory of post-structuralism and

how, realistically, our interpretations are meaningless in the context of true creation. But what we can see is his expression of attempting to let us see what he saw.

Although Vincent's vision disorder undoubtedly played a significant role in the development of his art, it is important to note that he was also deeply passionate about painting and drawing. His artistic pursuits were a way for him to channel his energy and emotions, and he dedicated himself to his art with great intensity.

Vincent's work continues to inspire and fascinate people around the world, reminding us of the power of artistic expression and the importance of seeing the world through our unique perspective.

Vincent was discredited by the viewer of his time. His struggles with mental illness classed him as the town crazy man who tried to pay his way by flogging his paintings for money in the street. Because of this stigma, no one wanted to be associated with him or buy his work.

I am fortunate enough that in this current time, we are much more aware of mental health. Help and support is much more accessible, which has allowed us also to become more open about having these issues. During Vincent's time, mental health would rarely be discussed in fear of ending up in an asylum.(Figure 3)

I too have had my work overlooked and pulled apart to find deeper and more structured meanings. This has often felt like I am being overlooked as a person and judged as an artist. Trying to find art within an ADHD mess is often impossible, as the art and the mess is so intrinsically linked.

My face scrambles with words and colours, unable to find where they are meant to settle, to understand this becomes too much effort for others and creates a barrier between the people looking at my work and myself trying to justify it. My work is simply just my own self, a scramble.

Visually a scramble reminds me of the swirls that are so prominent in Vincent's paintings showing a physical representation of what Vincent would see through his eyes and made into such interesting and intricate works.

Due to my lack of intellect in academic writing from my late diagnosis of Dyslexia, I have always had to adapt my ways of thinking in order to understand what is expected of me. Institutionalised making has made my work feel like less of my own. As an escape from this, I have been creating and experimenting with poetry. I have taken a liking to this as poetry gives me a platform to express myself without necessarily needing my words to be understood. It feels like cheating. It makes my work feel like something I can take pride in and call my own, especially when it is autobiographical. Poetry has become my outlet.

After writing my poem titled "me",

me,

My mind is wired
energy drained as quickly as the bathroom sink
my mind spinning with ideas,
task coming and going in orders of chaos
hours go by like seconds; days drag into weeks

my mind is stuck but changes so easily
conversations bore, Faces inspire me
talking to release the backlog
interrupting to be involved

I don't understand
never have
My humour is misunderstood
my ideas are ignored

why do I push them away
plans are made, I don't attend
messages ignored

Memories are few
I can't keep things stored
there's not enough space

I've learned many skills
to entertained myself
improve myself

the pills make it stop
time slows down
ideas are taken in
plans are made
conversations are had

I'm happy
I'm in control
I have ADHD

I had an overwhelming feeling of understanding. I was able to write down how I felt without overcomplicating it; It did not have to make sense. I wanted to push this further. I was able to create this poem, and in my head, the image forming was a self-portrait.

Photo in the road (Figure 4)

I had been feeling down and needed to find something to help me, so I drove up our beautiful valley to the Bwlch, with long bends in the road and large pine trees reaching over the top of our heads. Coming down, I was overloaded with the view and had that passion for capturing that moment, so I took a picture at my own risk.

My leading inspiration has been this image I took while driving. For the first time in a long time, I was compelled to take a picture for my own enjoyment. An image was taken in a single moment that will never happen again.

To allow the camera to be able to reproduce all of the content that I was seeing at that moment, the landscape was the only way I was able to capture it in one shot. The human eye has a 180 ° view making it a landscape, this allows us to see so much in a few seconds of viewing.

Like the traditional camera, you have a short timeframe to capture an image. I took this photo because I wanted to capture what my eyes could see, the colours and textures that stood out to me. This attempt at a self-portrait went unfulfilled. The camera failed to translate my vision. The image became a subject of reflection.

“The early portraitists were intent on emphasising their subject’s outward appearance, their position in society; direct, sharp images that profess to be statements of fact but by the 1860s this approach began to evolve.’ Julia Margaret Cameron wrote in her journal that she wanted to capture ” the greatness of the inner, not outer man”

Looking into a camera lens is like looking at yourself in the mirror as a reflection of how people see you. By covering things and changing the colour of your clothes you can change what others see. You can also do this in photo editing, lighting and props.

By literally looking into a mirror the subject is seeing a reflection of how the photographer is seeing them. The camera is the photographer’s eye, and the photo is what they see through that eye. The best way to experience seeing through the camera's eye is with a camera obscura.

Richard Learoyd is a British contemporary artist and photographer who has created many works using this method, "photographic paper is exposed in his room-sized camera, as a subject sits in the room next door, with a lens dividing the rooms. Then the light that falls on the subject gets focused on to the paper, without using a negative". the Guardian. (2015) With these long exposures, his models have to sit or stand in the same position over times up to over 30 minutes to allow the picture to be as clear as possible. This also is a beautiful finish to his photos; it creates these paintbrush effects of movement during the long exposures.

(Figure 5)

“Richard Learoyd’s portraiture has a lot to do with its refusal to fall in line with the breakneck pace of the Internet age. These are not the sort of pictures anyone could take with

an iPhone or create via a software program. Instead of rapidly shooting images for instant consumption, he wants to take his time and he asks everyone involved to do the same. A typical exposure inside his studio, where his trained subjects pose under hot lights in one room and his camera stands in an adjacent one, might take 8 hours. Even though it has taken him years of experimentation to achieve effects he had only imagined were possible, the camera obscura is about as basic as photography can be.' Collector Daily. (2016).

The camera obscura is a unique Projection of what the camera is seeing, the camera's eye. I have a connection with this process because this was the first time I experienced photography from this perspective. Making a camera obscura was a collaboration between my vision and the cameras. And being inside this camera, we both saw the same result. I continued with photography because of this. The camera allows me to share my vision and perspective on what I deem worth keeping in my thoughts.

The method of working requires time and dedication, and to be in the mindset of walking into your own camera and being part of the making of your images, whether the actual photo, as with Learoyd's work or by using another camera, as I did, to show the process and beautiful workings of the idea. (Figure 6) Learoyd has been able to physically capture a moment in one shot but you are able to physically see the small movements made even breathing. This creates this beautiful ghost silhouette.

'The magic lantern' is a further development of the camera obscura and shares characteristics, the lantern was invented in the 1600s, probably by Christiaan Huygens, The earliest known written account of a camera obscura was provided by a Chinese philosopher 'Our Camera Obscura isn't the only one in existence. In fact, camera obscuras date back to as far as 400 BC, possibly even before records existed.

The earliest known written account of a camera obscura was provided by a Chinese philosopher called Mo-tzu (or Mozi) in 400 BC. He noted that light from an illuminated object that passed through a pinhole into a dark room created an inverted image of the original object. ‘

I have now created two DIY camera obscures (Figure 7) and both have been a success. I took two different approaches by using a sheet of film to catch the image, the other I used my Digital camera so I was able to get colour. These experiments have been invaluable to my photography journey.

Photographers often consider their photographs to be an extension of themselves, primarily because they use their creativity and unique perspectives to capture a moment in time. Through their compositions, photographers can express their emotions, thoughts, and ideas, and they can convey their own personal style.

For many photographers, photography is more than just pressing a button or capturing an image. It's an art form and a medium for self-expression.

Photography is an extension of the photographer because it allows us to capture not only the subject but also their emotions, thoughts, and ideas. It can be approached as a means of self-expression, allowing the photographer's unique vision to be showcased to the world.

My image of the road became my muse for my final exhibition. Alone the image is beautiful, but I felt that it did not live up to what I saw through my eyes, the saturated colours and sharpness, so I took it into Photoshop and edited it to be able to physically show others what I was trying to show and describe. This feeling of necessity to show what I saw, has been my final inspiration for this work. (Figure 8)

Visually many types of work created by painters and artists are a delight to anyone who is neurodivergent; bright, bold colours that are peeling off the page are even more appealing, and they involve us and bring us into the work.

I took the Raw image into Photoshop, editing it to be able to physically show others what I was trying to show and describe. This feeling drove me to my final inspiration for our end-of-year exhibition.

On its own my image on the road was going to become my final showing in my exhibition. I did not think a single photograph seemed complex enough for a final show. In turn, the final exhibit became too complicated. This relates back to John Dewey and my thoughts behind overthinking artworks. I have taken this simple image, the initial ‘spill’ of expression, and condensed it into something that is potentially overcomplex.

This photograph of the road evolved. A box with the image inside is the ultimate self-portrait of my work. It represents my work and how I have only been seeing my work through a lens, adapting and fitting it into criteria instead of looking at it through my own eyes and appreciating it for what it was in the moment.

It became a physical model; giving me the focus I needed to express myself. I thought would be a peaceful experience, but unfortunately, throughout creating my model it did not feel this way. I have often thought about throwing it across the room and destroying it, not for the sake of art and expression, but because all the time and effort did not seem worth it. I also understand the urge to do that, finally having some control over the state of something that you made, no matter what state it is in. That struggle with control, I realised, came from my struggles with dyslexia and the frustration at the lack of control I have with it. (Figure 9)

The difference between the original photo and the model is quite drastic. The perspective is skewed and the foreground and objects are wrong-sized and misplaced. Much like Vincent's 'The Bedroom in Arles' (Figure 10) the perspective is entirely unique and entirely my own.

I desperately want to be able to convey what I see to others using my photography.

Thomas Demand's work investigates the persistence of images and their ability to embed themselves in a society's collective memory. (Demand, T) Directly linked to my exhibition are the similarities in our approach to recreating a 2d image, giving it life by creating it, in his case, a life-size image. (Figure 11)

At the same time, I chose to make my piece a recreation on a smaller scale to give me more access to improve while being easier to handle, and this has resulted in my work looking like a camera obscura image in 3d. Demand completes his work by destroying it after recreating the copy, so you never get to see the life-size model. Demand says in an interview 'What I

do enjoy is when people look at the work and then realise what it is,' I too also get a lot more from having the viewer realise what they are looking at.

I have found that a common mental block is being overwhelmed by the amount expected of me. I realised that if I could not make the workload smaller, I would instead make my piece smaller. Creating a mini world, starting with a small box. This provided a stage for me to work with something that was not overly sized allowing me to have only the thought of how to include everything I wanted in such a restricted frame. Based on a picture that I captured for fun that took me back to my main passion, I wanted to convey what I feel when I take pictures and to encourage the viewer to feel that too.

The process of creating my model began on some cardboard. Using clay to build the main aspects, such as the mountains and road. However, I also had to take into account the bends in the roads and walls that needed to gradually become smaller to give the effect of the road going off into the distance.

I was able to use small artificial trees, which I have in three different sizes, so this helped to give the illusion again of the trees in a realistic perspective going into the distance. I was also able to get a hold of slate, moss and tiny pinecones that brought together the small forest that was in the original photo in a realistic and effective manner.

The weight of my work was going to prove to be a challenge when it came to the moving process of the piece. With this in mind, I made a box painted black with an accessible door so I was able to have a supportive frame around my model, keeping it hidden and protected.

(Figure 12)

Creating an inverted perspective of my photo being seen in the camera rather than through it. This also linked up with the 180° view from my eyes in the original, landscape photo. Adding a viewfinder allows the perspective of a camera. Giving you a choice to use this box as a camera, but what you see becomes 3D, so this gives you the freedom to look around in a small space.

Mariele Neudecker is a versatile artist who works with a diverse range of media, including sculpture, installation, film, and photography. Through her art, she explores how cultural perceptions of the natural world are constructed and disseminated across time. With a keen eye for detail, she captures fleeting moments in time, turning them into timeless monuments that leave a lasting impact on the observer. (Neudecker, M. May 2021).

One of the remarkable pieces created by the artist is titled "THINGS CAN CHANGE IN A DAY". It is a wonderful display of mixed media, including water, acrylic medium, salt, and fibreglass. This artwork portrays a stunning forest-in-a-tank appearance that is reminiscent of an underwater world captured in a single frame. The artist's unique touch is visible as she lets the bubbles form naturally while pouring resin after placing the materials, thereby completing the aquatic atmosphere of the artwork.

Having a 360° view lets you absorb from a distance or up close. Neudecker's work often explores the cross-section between the sublime natural world and human interference. I would love to be able to incorporate the 360° views and freedom of space into my work as I have essentially closed my work off to being viewed in such freeness and coaxed the viewer into the one-eye hole, giving the only option to look in there or to not look at all. The colours and textures in Neudecker's work pull you into it like a magnet. She has created something

that doesn't allow you to just walk past it. These glowing yet foggy colours and feelings have details that you can see from all angles and even from above. (Figure 13)

When it came to exhibiting, I originally had a large black plinth, but when I placed it on top it began to merge into one, and the box shape was lost and gave off the look of a speed camera. Changing it by painting it white visually lightened the piece and separated it from the stand. The exhibit presented a model of a camera on a plinth. (Figure 14)

After spending so much time referring the photo back to the model, a decision to let others see the photo that I was referencing. I used a similar but smaller plinth, and placed it directly opposite my model, placing the original photo behind a sheet of glass or lens. giving off the illusion of the photo being taken again.

I printed multiple copies so anyone could take some home. Also, a comments book for people to write down their thoughts on my work. an interest to me so I could see different interpretations of my piece.

I made the box look like a camera because the inside of the box is what the camera sees. Because the camera is the photographer's eye, the inside of the box is what the photographer (me) sees. Therefore by looking into the box, the viewer sees what I see. This piece of work becomes a collaboration between my view and the audience. (Figure 15)

Conclusion:

I have come to the realisation that I am not whom I am betraying, not intentionally. Having convinced myself into this role of an artist or creator made for academic success, the outrageousness of the thought has been the constant filter over my eyes. I'm not this person. I do not know what I am, but the peace of not living up to an unrealistic goal is rewarding.

I feel there is no point in being an artist if everyone sees the same thing in the same way. The same image would be regurgitated over and over again. Being an artist is about offering a unique perspective.

I am an imposter that did not live up to the role, I was not able to keep up the facade like my peers. Trying to act like I know the discussion and debates during lectures. The fact I can't follow along with or form my own opinions or arguments makes me feel less involved.

I think all artists are imposters with our current uprisings in the art world. Art schools as institutions claim you only make something out of yourself as an artist if you can sell your work and make a living off that. But success is subjective and shouldn't dictate what makes a good artist, just look at Vincent. People only feel bad now, too little, too late. His work's meaning has only been described by his own words from the grave in his letters. And if people had given his unique way of seeing a chance, maybe we would have had more of his work.

I felt guilty about just displaying a photograph at my final exhibition. I fell into the trap of pretending to be a fine artist. I should have had the confidence to display my original, honest and ADHD expression. My Self-portrait that isn't a self-portrait. And I would have done it for me.

Figures

Figure 1



Figure 2



Figure 3

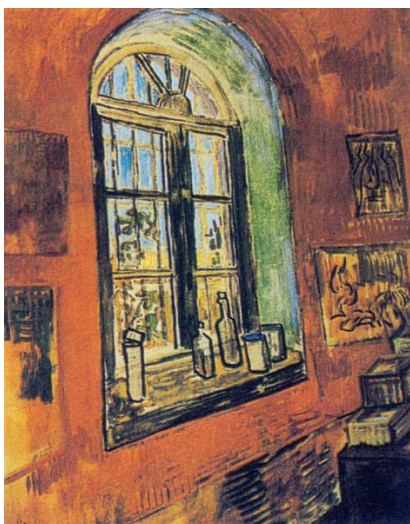


Figure 4



Figure 5



Figure 6



Figure 7



Figure 8

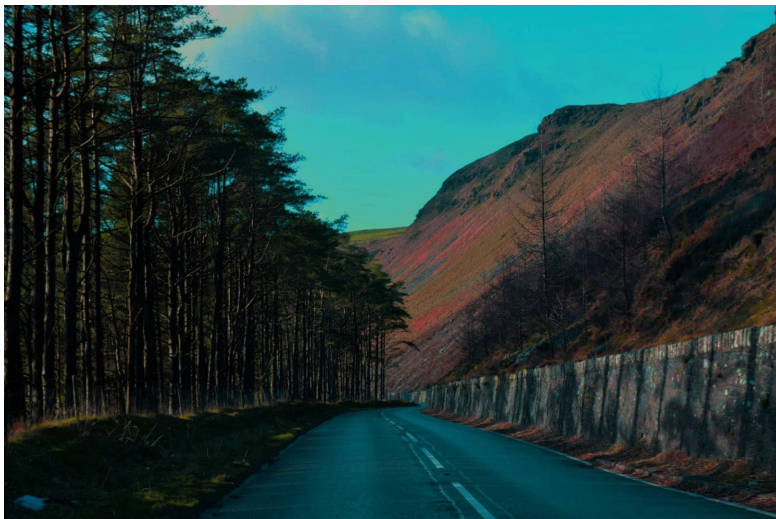


Figure 9



Figure 10

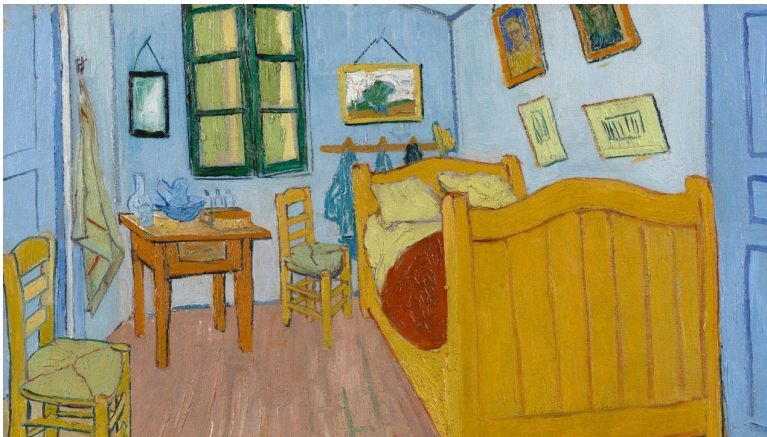


Figure 11



Figure 12



Figure 13



Figure 14



Figure 15



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