

Instagram Critique

Critique Facilitator: Liza Torrence

Participants: Julia Carter, Maggie Suter, Audrey Hall, Rebecca Hughes

Date, Location, and Time: 4/20/15, Richard Hall, 9 p.m.

The goal for this critique is to conduct a formal analysis on various random Instagram photos, some created by the participants of the critique and some created by famous “grammers,” in order to understand the qualities a photo must have to get maximum likes from their followers. There were 16 photos total, and the critique took about 20 minutes. My personal goals for this assignment was to get the participants to discuss the elements and principles of design, talk about the importance of a photo caption, and ultimately have fun with this critique. I planned my critique in that I would introduce the presentation by explaining my intentions in a brief way so that they could develop their own opinions and observations, and not get bored. When introducing the critique, I didn’t tell them what pictures would show up because I wanted an element of humor and surprise. The 16 works were viewed from my phone because I screen-shotted each Instagram post earlier that day so I didn’t have to go searching for each picture every time. This way I could show the picture to everyone individually, kind of like a story book, and swipe through the pictures after each discussion came to a stopping point. I wanted to create a manifesto that defined a “good” Instagram photo.

The first photo was taken by Julia, and it is a picture of her and Maggie at a bar sitting in a humorous, casual pose with aggressive, serious faces. Julia is leaning on Maggie and they are positioned in the right lower quarter of the picture, but Julia’s leg is extended through the photo reaching the left upper corner. I started this discussion by asking if they liked this picture, and why it got 128 likes (a lot based off of the amount of people who follow her). At first they just kind of said “its a cool picture, their faces are so serious but their stance is hilarious.” Eventually

though, they began talking about the composition. Audrey said, “her leg leads your eye into the picture.” I agreed and added, “it almost looks like they’re in a box and Julia’s leg is pushing against the inside of it.” They agreed. This was a good start. The second picture is also one of Julia’s, a hilarious picture of her on her high school graduation day where her back is facing the camera and you can see 7 of her friends looking straight at her in the background. Julia is holding onto her gown and pretending she is flashing her friends, and her friends faces are acting astonished to say the least. It’s hard to explain this picture, but it really is funny. The caption states, “high school went by in a flash.” This picture did receive a lot of likes, and the girls acknowledged that it was well planned. The idea of the picture has a quality of humor, which is one prime characteristic to note when forming our Instagram manifesto. We talked about how the perspective of this photo was on point, in that her body was angled perfectly and her friends were able to be seen. This was a successful gram. The next picture was talked about briefly and it was also one of Julia’s. It was a picture of me, Rebecca, and Julia singing karaoke in elf costumes because it was near Christmas. They liked this picture because of the humor aspect, but also, this was an activity that was out of the ordinary to everyday life. This is another important quality that went into our manifesto because people really dig cool activities on Instagram. The next picture is a gram by Maggie from our spring break trip in California. It is a very deep depth of field picture that involves a guardrail on a road where we signed our names, and the entire San Francisco Bay Area in the background, blurred. I asked the question, “why is this picture different than the others we have looked at so far,” and Audrey answered, “it doesn’t have people in it.” Audrey was correct. We decided that this was an example of an “artsy” photo, rather than one that is directly about individuals. They said that when you’re taking an instagram photo, you are either saying, “look at this picture because I/we look good/cool,” or

“look at this artsy/hipster photo I took.” It’s sad that Instagram is this shallow-minded, but they were right.

We went through the rest of the pictures quicker because we mostly compared them to the previous ones we saw. They were starting to repeat some of the characteristics they had already mentioned. This next picture was Maggie’s from last spring, and it was a picture of beautiful blooming flowers. We said the composition, color, and perspective were all really strong. It was an artsy photo. The next 3 pictures were all selfies of Audrey, but I chose them because they had very good graphic qualities. The first had a strong perspective looking up at her, and prominent backlighting by the sun. The tones of the picture were also very faded, which made the image more attractive. The next selfie of Audrey was a cropped black and white picture of her face. They talked about how they liked it because it was very simple, cropped and monotone. It was a beautiful picture. The last selfie of Audrey was a fun picture of her holding up her graphic signature, and a circle photo effect surrounding her. This picture also had a good graphic quality, was balanced, and a good sense of lighting. All three of her selfies were “look at this picture because I look good/cool” pictures. But all of them had good likes. The next 3 were mine, the first being a San Francisco picture with a clever caption (thanks to Julia), and a dance pose. They said people liked this picture because it’s “punny,” and impressive that I’m holding my leg. I’m also looking very excited. The next is a picture of me at a color fest where hundreds of people are throwing color up into the air. They talked about the composition and attractiveness of the color, but most importantly this picture was out of the ordinary of everyday life. The next picture was one I took with Lauren Bakker in Prague over the summer, and it was agreed that the composition was the strongest element. The next 3 were by a photographer called “bleachfilm,” and they are Instagram famous. All three pictures were very unique, and had amazingly creative photography angles. They loved these photos because of their uniqueness, composition, focus,

lighting, and idea. The last two pictures were of Miley Cyrus and Kendall Jenner, two celebrities who have countless instagram followers. This brought up the point that who you are has a big impact of amount of likes that you have, and the more followers (or fan base) you have, the more likes you will receive.

Overall, the critique went really well and I accomplished my goals. It was decided that our Instagram manifesto had various qualities for maximum likes: It could have an artsy approach (strong elements and principles of design), it could be a cool activity (something out of the ordinary from everyday life), it could be an attractive photo of the individual(s), or it could have a humorous aspect. All photos could have multiple qualities. As we discussed in class, the importance of wait time was really vital with my friends. At first they were hesitant to answer because they were unsure what I wanted, but after I gave them time to think they began throwing great ideas out. The questions I asked were also not yes/no questions, but rather they were meant to be open-ended about the elements and principles of design, and “why” the pictures were aesthetically pleasing. I really like my idea of critiquing instagram photos, especially with college students, and I like that we attempted to make a manifesto for what makes a good “gram.” However, I wish that I included bad photos, ones that received little to no likes and were not aesthetically pleasing. This would have made our conversation a little more cohesive.