

Critical Argument Paper Assignment # 1

The Cat Eye

New York City College of Technology

Contemporary Issues in Fashion

Dr. Sutton

Alyssa Noemi Skerret

In the world of beauty and fashion, trends often come and go, but some have managed to stay yet evolved by adapting to new styles and preferences. For example, the beauty practice “cat eyes,” is a makeup technique defined by a sleek, upward flick of eyeliner along the outer corners of the eyes. The cat eye, known for its boldness and elegance, has remained a popular trend in both everyday makeup and high-fashion looks. While social media and fashion celebrities have fueled its comeback, its history is considerably deeper than most people realize. Tracing back to ancient times, this beauty practice has historically served multiple purposes, from spiritual protection to status symbolization. By exploring the cat eye's current popularity and historical significance, we can understand how ancient practices continue to influence modern beauty trends such as the cat eye.

The cat eye, a striking and timeless makeup trend, remains incredibly popular in modern beauty culture. While its sleek, bold lines dominate today’s beauty trends, this iconic look has ancient roots. This style was worn by the queens from ancient Egypt such as Nefertiti and Cleopatra, who used minerals such as copper ore and malachite to achieve the look (Bateman,

2020). By embracing and refining this captivating style, these iconic queens left a lasting legacy on this beauty practice that continues to inspire beauty trends around the world today. Zahra Harker, who wrote for the *Los Angeles Times* discusses her admiration of the cat eye. Harker (2023) writes, “Coming of age as a Muslim with Lebanese and Egyptian heritage in the U.K., I was in constant pursuit of connections to my ethnic identity. Against a social backdrop that othered my family and me, I was drawn to Queen Nefertiti’s distinctive cat-eye. The ancient Egyptian queen and her lined eyes connected me to a

Figure 1
Ancient Egypt



Ancient Egyptian Wearing The Cat
URL:
<https://charlottesmakeupwebdotcom.wordpress.com/tag/ancient-egypt/>

constellation of beguiling non-Western women, including my ancestors; she sparked my interest in kohl, the earliest iteration of eyeliner.” (Hanker, 2023). Continuing on Hanker’s reflection, the cat eye has transcended cultural boundaries, becoming a powerful symbol of identity, beauty, and resilience for many women worldwide. Its ability to evoke a connection to heritage and empowerment speaks to the enduring influence of this ancient practice. Today, the cat eye is not only a beauty statement but also a celebration of personal and cultural expression, with modern interpretations ranging from classic, bold lines to more experimental and artistic variations. Its evolution highlights the factors of history, fashion, and self-identity, expressing its lasting relevance in the global beauty landscape. However, in ancient Egypt, many used this beauty

practice not just for enhancing the eye's appearance. For example, eyeliners carry spiritual significance, as they are believed to keep away evil. According to Ghanem (2018), “Eyeliner was a form of protection from the evil eye just as much as it was a beauty statement.” (Ghanem, 2018). The cat eye's purposes reflect the relationship between beauty and symbolism in ancient cultures. Not only did the cat eye serve as protection against evil but also shielded the eyes of Egyptians from the severe

Figure 2
Traditional Kohl



Traditional Kohl eyeliner being made for cosmetic and medical purposes
URL: <https://www.cnn.com/2024/02/29/style/eyeliner-kohl-cultural-history/index.html>

desert climate. Ghanem (2018) mentions, “Kohl was steadily gaining momentum in the Middle East. Bedouin men and women originally wore kohl, which is essentially crushed-up lead sulfide

as a means to protect the sensitive eye area from the harsh desert climate.” (Ghanem, 2018). Building on its protective qualities, it's important to explore the key ingredients of kohl, which played a crucial role in its effectiveness. Since kohl had been spread among the Arabian Peninsula, the preparation varied by region using natural materials. For instance, “Emiratis have historically preferred date seeds, for example, while in Lebanon, cedar honey and even the gallbladder of a hyena have been used.” (Hanker, 2024). These ingredients underscore the connection between beauty practices and the surrounding environment, where the composition of kohl became a representation of both function and cultural identity. This demonstrates that the cat eye served multiple purposes beyond being just a beauty practice as it shows the importance of daily life in ancient Egypt by combining practicality, ritual, and style. Today, in the U.S., modern eyeliners labeled as "kohl" give an impression of the traditional product's deep pigmentation and smooth texture. While ancient kohl contained harmful ingredients, today's eyeliners are mostly formulated with safer ingredients, ensuring a healthier beauty routine. Yet, these eyeliners are made with safer ingredients due to the FDA's ban on lead-based ingredients in ancient kohl (Sultan, 2022). This change ensures that contemporary consumers can enjoy eye makeup without the health risks associated with lead. Moreover, kohl is marketed to describe eyeliners as having a highly pigmented and smooth formula, yet the eyeliners don't contain the traditional ingredients in ancient kohl, such as lead (Sultan, 2022). The evolution of the cat eye, from its ancient roots to its modern and safer formulas shows the appeal of this iconic beauty practice while reflecting the cultural, historical, and practical influences that continue to shape beauty practices across time.

Although the cat eye all started with its ancient roots, it is safe to say that it has become an iconic makeup trend throughout the decades. Fashion and beauty influencers continue to

embrace this timeless look, symbolizing sophistication and boldness in contemporary culture.

Celebrities and makeup artists often recreate the dramatic lines of the ancient cat eye, blending tradition with modern aesthetics to make statements on runways and red carpets.

Today, the modern cat eye can be achieved in various ways, such as the reverse cat eye. For instance, the reverse cat flips the classic winged liner by emphasizing the lower lash line. This technique creates a smoky, seductive look, with the liner extending outward at the corner for a bold, feline shape (Turner, 2021). This method has gained popularity for its edgy, yet elegant appeal, making it a go-to choice for both casual and dramatic makeup looks.

We can see how drastically the cat eye has changed from ancient times to the modern day. For example, in ancient

Figure 3
Zendaya's Smoky Cat Eye



Vanity Fair 2022

URL:

<https://www.vogue.in/beauty/content/9-of-zendayas-best-beauty-looks-of-all-time>

Figure 4
Josephine Baker



Circa 1928

URL:

<https://www.vogue.in/beauty/content/the-fascinating-history-of-the-cat-eye-liner>

Egypt, the cat eye look

was created with thick lines from the eye upwards to the

hairline, or little flicks that stretched out parallel to the brow

(Bateman, 2020). In contrast, the evolution of the cat eye

beauty practice reflects a fascinating blend of ancient tradition

and modern innovation, proving that classic styles can

continuously reinvent themselves while remaining timeless.

Since the 1920s and continuing into the present day, the cat

eye has remained popular. Over time, it has been reimagined

countless times, reflecting the ever-changing styles throughout the years. In the world of beauty and fashion, iconic figures have left an everlasting mark like Josephine Baker, a true trailblazer. Baker was a French performer known for her captivating singing and dancing. During the 1920s, she popularized the famous cat eye makeup look with a combination of bold cat eye and dramatic lashes, which has become a timeless beauty trend that continues to be admired today (Russo, 2014). Baker's influence extended beyond her mesmerizing performances, as her embrace of the cat-eye makeup looks not only set a trend during the Roaring Twenties but also laid the foundation for a beauty aesthetic that celebrates boldness and individuality, inspiring generations to express themselves through makeup. Yet, the cat eye look emerged in the 1950s in America, popularized by Marilyn Monroe's makeup artist, Alan Snider. Snider would skillfully craft the winged eyeliner using a brown pencil to complement Monroe's eyes (Arielle, 2019). As

Figure 5

Reverse Cat Eye



Paris Fashion Week

URL:

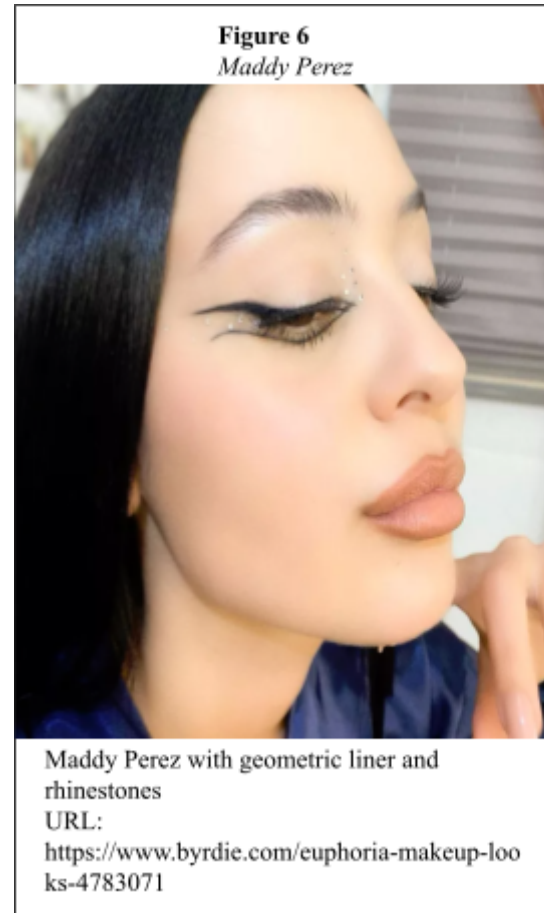
<https://www.vogue.in/beauty/content/9-of-zendaya-s-best-beauty-looks-of-all-time>

As a result, the cat eye has become a timeless beauty practice continuing to inspire makeup artists and fashion enthusiasts for generations to come. Today, Gothic individuals express themselves through their makeup which includes the cat eye. For example, goths often embrace a signature look characterized by dark smoky eyes, typically created with heavy black eyeliner and dark eyeshadows, completed with an exaggerated winged eyeliner to achieve a dramatic cat-eye look (Jolie Beauty, 2024). Overall, this beauty practice is a defining feature of goth culture, highlighting its emphasis on creativity in personal

expression. Another way the cat eye look has evolved is through the addition of more intricate detailing. In the HBO series *Euphoria*, the cat eye has been spotlighted with bedazzles and artistic embellishments, showcasing its versatility in modern beauty trends. As an illustration, Maddy Perez, one of the main characters, frequently wears the cat eye in different ways, such as with geometric black liner and clear rhinestones (Rebecca, 2024). The evolution of the cat eye reflects how beauty practices continue to push creative boundaries, blending classic techniques with bold, modern twists to make a statement.

In conclusion, the appeal of the cat eye illustrates the rich interplay between history, culture, and contemporary beauty trends. From its origin in ancient Egypt, where it served not only as a form of adornment but also as a symbol of protection and status, to its modern-day interpretations that celebrate individuality and artistic expression, the cat eye has evolved while retaining its fundamental

essence. This iconic beauty practice has transcended time and geography, resonating with diverse communities and adapting to changing aesthetics, as seen in its reinvention by fashion influencers and celebrities. Whether through the sleek lines favored in high fashion or the more experimental variations revealed in popular media like the tv series *Euphoria*, the cat eye remains a powerful statement of identity and creativity. As we explore the intricate layers of this beauty practice, it becomes clear that the cat eye is not merely a trend; it is a testament to the resilience of cultural heritage and the dynamic nature of beauty, illustrating how ancient practices continue to shape and inspire modern beauty narratives.



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