

Kamila Jacewicz, 3rd year

Introducion: at the end

Paragraph 1: (+ Identity info from 2nd year essay)

During my studies at UWTSD, Swansea, I have explored a wide range of patterns and themes. These themes include architectural motifs, geometric designs, folk style, floral compositions, to insects. From this exploration, I finally arrived at enjoying creating designs with a dark aesthetics nature. This is a field I continue to explore that is rich in patterns and colour.

According to Wikipedia (2025), Dark aesthetics belong to the wider field of alternative style, a category that refers to visual practices outside the mainstream. Alternative style is characterized by symbolic imagery, subcultural references and a focus on emotional atmosphere rather than commercial fashion trends. It also develops as a response to ideas about individuality, self-expression and a critical view of conventional norms. Many of these aesthetics are shaped by music culture and the visual identity of specific bands or artistic movements.

Within alternative style, several aesthetics are distinguished by their characteristic patterns and symbols. Gothic combines dark florals, lace and architectural motifs. Witchcore incorporates moons, stars, herbs and tarot symbols. Punk often shows aggressive motifs, chains, graffiti and skulls, while the grunge style emphasises stripes and checks in muted colours. Biker fashion presents leather textures adorned with skulls, flames, and rebellious symbols. Together, these styles form a dark aesthetic with a mysterious, arcane atmosphere that defines the visual identity of dark aesthetics. In the book, Fred Davis observes that whatever the style:

“ [...] clothing features as fabric, color, texture, cut, weight, weave, stitching, transparency, and whatever else makes a difference in how the garment or its surrounding ensemble of apparel is responded to in a community of clothes-wearers” (Davis, 1992, p. 13). line spacing

This highlights that every element contributes to its interpretation and the way identity is expressed within a groups that follow specific styles. Dark aesthetics resonate as a visual language of mystery, introspection, and individuality. Although, others may recognise, on that others may perceive and interpret these motifs differently.

Photo of moodboard dark aesthetic style?

That style strongly informs my own visual vocabulary and pattern-making process, especially through motifs that feature dark colours and carry a mysterious, slightly eerie aura. These elements resonate with me most, adding character not only to clothing but also to interior spaces, through features such as lace curtains with floral motifs, wall decorations with insects, and wall art combining crosses with cosmic motifs.

Building on these inspirations, my early design in this aesthetic was of a wallpaper with a repeating motif of bats and grapes on a cream background. It was a simple, Gothic pattern created for a design Surface Pattern Design Competition I-dott. Another project was a decorative lampshade for Anglepoise, where the design was precisely cut on a laser cutter machine into delicate firefly shapes, their faint glow casting delicate, shifting shadows across the room at night. I also designed a butterfly wing pattern in deep blue and black color, with overlapping wings digitally created using Photoshop. This pattern could be perfect for bedding or a rug. Building on these digital explorations, I designed a spiderweb lace pattern in Illustrator, which was then precisely cut using a laser cutter machine. These beginnings are simple, but they taught me how dark patterns create atmosphere; that they can be a delicate decoration or a stronger accent.

My fascination with such motifs goes back to my childhood, when alternative style was still niche and no brands existed to support it, so most things had to be created through DIY (Do It Yourself). People, including myself, mainly dressed in black, not because it was a fully developed aesthetic, but because it was the only visual language we had access to. Wearing black made me more attentive to texture, small details and symbolic motifs, and eventually helped me recognise how these elements could evolve into what is now understood as dark aesthetics. However, in recent years, brands such as Disturbia, Killstar or the Polish label Restyle have emerged, enriching the style by adding insect motifs, dark florals, and pagan symbolism to plain black garments. I see myself in a similar role, contributing my own patterns to this growing movement, helping people express their true selves and stand out from the crowd. (643)

Paragraph 2: (+ Designers, inspirations info)

The fascination with dark patterns and symbolic motifs is rooted in a broader cultural context. Many of these visual languages originate from subcultural movements, where clothing, accessories, and personal style were used as tools for self-expression, resistance to mainstream norms, and the creation of a unique identity.

Dark aesthetic itself can be understood as a hybrid visual and cultural style that incorporates motifs, textures, and symbols from these earlier subcultures. Gothic traditions contribute lace, dark florals, architectural motifs, and a sense of melancholy grandeur; witchcore introduces celestial symbols, moons, stars, herbs, tarot imagery, and pagan references; punk adds rebellious icons, chains, graffiti, and skulls; while emo and grunge inform striped and checked patterns in muted, moody colours. Biker fashion provides leather textures, skulls, flames, and a defiant attitude that resonates through clothing and accessories. By merging these elements, dark aesthetic carries a complex symbolic vocabulary that communicates mystery, introspection, and a subtle narrative through patterns. Each motif not only conveys its subcultural heritage but also contributes to a broader, emotionally evocative atmosphere.

The translation of these symbols into contemporary design is evident in the work of influential designers and brands. Vivienne Westwood's early punk collections transformed rebellious imagery into high-fashion patterning, while Alexander McQueen explored gothic, macabre, and romantic motifs across garments and prints, demonstrating how visual storytelling can be embedded in texture, cut, and motif. These works illustrate the versatility of dark aesthetic: patterns can evoke mood, define identity, and bridge the gap between personal expression and wearable art. Observing these designers revealed to me the potential of pattern-making as a medium to convey atmosphere and character, and inspired me to explore my own symbolic motifs in both clothing and interior design.

In addition, the proliferation of contemporary brands and online platforms has transformed what was once niche into a widely accessible aesthetic. Shops like Killstar, Disturbia, and Born Dead Clothing reinterpret subcultural motifs occult symbols, nocturnal creatures, and dark flora within wearable fashion, while Polish labels such as Restyle and Rebel Madness translate gothic and witchcore patterns into clothing and accessories that are commercially available. These brands not only maintain symbolic depth but also offer insight into how motifs can

function across mediums and audiences. For me, studying their patterning strategies and motifs highlighted the ways textures, repeats, and layering can be applied, revealing possibilities for combining fashion and interior elements while remaining faithful to the aesthetic's mysterious and evocative character.

(403)

Paragraph 3: (future and goals?)

As my career is just beginning, I see the first step as gaining professional experience in established companies that have already conquered the alternative fashion market. Working alongside designers who understand current trends, customer preferences, and production realities would allow me to deepen my knowledge of the dark aesthetic industry. This phase is not about long-term commitment, but about learning the craft how to scale a pattern for mass printing, how to predict which motifs resonate on social media, and how to balance creativity with commercial needs. However, I am fully aware of the challenges within larger structures.

Observing customer comments online, people on the street, and corporate behaviours, I notice recurring issues: overproduction, anonymous designer credit, and environmental harm. I do not wish to contribute to these negatives. My goal is to move toward smaller, value-driven companies those that reach clients who consciously build their own style, avoid blind trend-following, and prioritise sustainability. If such a place does not exist, I am prepared to create it myself.

Mystelth.com, founded by Agnieszka Łaszek. Each garment clearly lists the name of the pattern designer, ensuring that artists are fully credited, recognised, and included in the brand's narrative rather than being anonymised or excluded. (203)

Bibliography:

Wikipedia contributors. (2025). *Alternative fashion*. In Wikipedia. Retrieved November 21, 2025, from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alternative_fashion

Subculture the meaning of style – Dick Hebdige

Inside subculture The Postmodern Meaning of Style – David Muggleton

The philosophy of punk more than noise! - Craig O'hara

The Rebel sell how to counterculture became consumer culture – Joseph Heath and Andrew Potter

Fashion, Culture and Identity – Fred Davis

Comment:

Paragraph 1 has been checked with my tutor, Eleri. She told me that I can't use definitions from Wikipedia and sent me links to The Guardian reviews, where I should look for definitions of “dark aesthetic” and “alternative style”.

Paragraphs 2 and 3 are currently in progress and will be edited during my next meetings with Eleri.