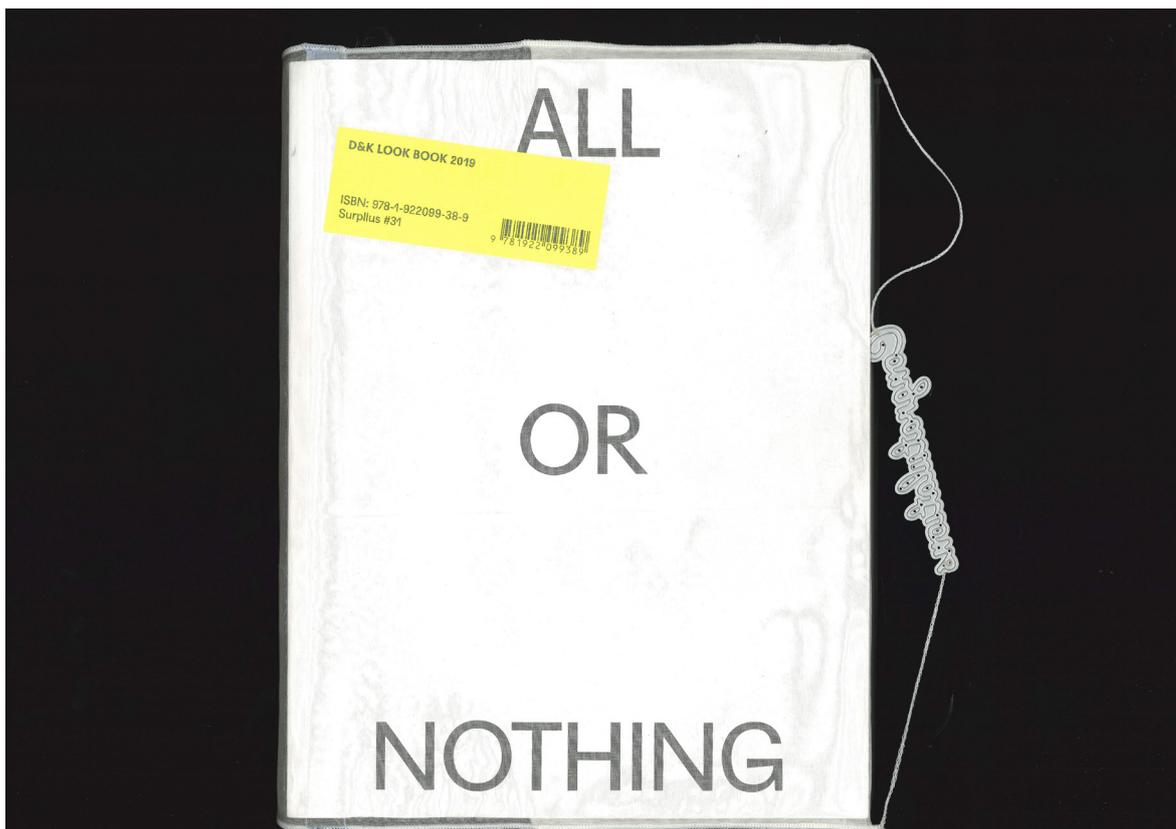


# Opening up the lookbook

A reflection on the  
launch of *D&K LOOK  
BOOK 2019* and *Mode  
and Mode* issue seven

Laura Gardner



Seasonal publishing in fashion—in the forms of lookbooks and magazines—has a special quality within the broader framework of the industry, and the objects that move through it. Publishing activities—magazines and lookbooks—function as a timekeeper to the seasonal flow of fashion. The use of print media as a creative medium persists as a seasonal convention of fashion, despite the digital conditions in which we now live. The concept of a ‘fashion publication’, and the images and text it houses, is explored through two new experimental publications: the *D&K LOOK BOOK 2019* and *Mode and Mode* issue seven, co-published and launched late last year.



Co-launch D&K LOOK BOOK 2019 and Mode and Mode issue seven. Warehouse (2020). Photo: Roos Quakernaat.

## The Lookbook

Lookbooks are a unique form in the seasonal practices of publishing fashion. A ‘lookbook’ is an in-house publication produced by a designer to capture and communicate a collection to the fashion industry. Traditionally, these are publications created for the industry to show the pieces in a collection and any relevant price, colour and fabric information. Their service is also to document and translate a collection and provide reference material for magazine editors and buyers. In this sense, they reflect how a brand ultimately wishes their collection to be understood. They condition the garments (and a collection’s related themes) and, as Jay Hess and Simone Pasztorek note, ‘become a physical archive of the fashion label’<sup>1</sup>.

The functions of a lookbook as a seasonal testimony to a designer’s collection is a practice that was initiated in the twentieth century, with couturiers like Paul Poiret, Lucile and Jean Patou, functioning to bridge a designer’s vision with industry tastemakers. These conventions and traditional functions of the lookbook were upended in the 1980s and 1990s through the graphic collaborations of avant-garde designers<sup>2</sup>. Designers and fashion labels like Yohji Yamamoto, Comme des Garçons, and Maison Martin Margiela questioned the conventions of this mode of fashion publishing by experimenting with image, format and material to push the boundaries of what a lookbook could be. Walter Van Beirendonck, for example, became the first to produce a CD-Rom lookbook for his autumn/winter 1995 W&LT collection ‘Paradise Pleasure Productions’, and Dutch design duo Keupr van/Bentm, in 1999,

made a lookbook without a collection at all in their ‘Friction/Parade’. The effect of these publishing experiments was both to expand the conventions and reinforce the presence of the formal conventions of the lookbook within a seasonal fashion media.

One of the recent ironies of fashion publications is that the ephemeral, seasonal media produced by designers have today become desirable objects in their own right. In-house (and therefore exclusive) publications by Comme des Garçons and Maison Martin Margiela, for example, now reach high figures, often surpassing the price of second-hand garments by the same labels, through dedicated publications retailers such as IDEA Books (in London’s Dover Street Market), November Books (London) and Komiyama (Tokyo), among many others<sup>3</sup>. This rarefying and commodification of avant-garde brands and their forms of printed matter contradicts with their original intentions as ephemeral publications. It is these ironies (and others) that the recently published, and correspondingly launched *D&K LOOK BOOK 2019* addresses.



The *D&K LOOK BOOK 2019* takes the premise of a lookbook to the extreme, expanding on the form to reflect back and question the materials of fashion. Published by Surplus, and designed by Brad Haylock, the *D&K LOOK BOOK 2019* interrogates the concept of the ‘lookbook’ via the experimental fashion research practice D&K (or Dolci & Kabana, formed by Ricarda Bigolin and Chantal Kirby<sup>4</sup>). Like similarly art-aligned fashion projects by Tobias Kasper and Atelier E.B, D&K explore the concept of fashion from outside of the seasonal operations. The subject of the publication is their 2017 collection ‘All or Nothing’<sup>5</sup>, a series of outfits performed by a model in an event at RMIT Design Hub over a duration of several hours. The image-based publication brings together stills from event footage, candid behind-the-scenes documentation, and extensive use of ‘front, back and side’ images. The deluge of images, capturing both the model and the event with little, if any, editing, recreates the original performance and the functions of a lookbook.

## Behind the scenes

This over-documentation makes the latent fetish for ‘behind-the-scenes’, insider views of fashion visible as you flick through the publication which vividly shows the mundane surroundings and expressions of the show onlookers. You can’t help but be drawn in. By including everything, the publication questions the evaluation of images—of bad and good images—and the role of ‘editing’ as a trope of fashion (for example, the many references to ‘the edit’ in online shopping and print magazines). Bigolin, the publication’s author, describes the aim of the lookbook as to ‘question the ubiquity and mass consumption of fashion (images) and their relationship to the products depicted’<sup>6</sup>. In the D&K publication, lookbook conventions are overridden by swamping the publication with almost every image that documented the event.

Another way in which the D&K lookbook ‘questions’ fashion is through its magazine-like form. At 27 by 20,7 centimetres, the lookbook has been designed to mirror the exact dimensions and paper stock of an issue of *Vogue Italia*—a reference to the conventions of fashion publishing. The book expands a lookbook into a magazine, confusing the typologies of fashion publishing.

A series of essays from Femke de Vries, Matthew Linde, Nella Themelios, Ricarda Bigolin, José Teunissen and Michael Beverland provide diverse texts on fashion and the ideas manifested in D&K’s project. The text pieces, prose-style reflections, an interview, and essays, provide a discussion on the conventions of a fashion show, branding, collection archetypes and so forth. Nella Themelios describes the performance of ‘D&K All or Nothing’, curator Matthew Linde writes about the unique local context of D&K in reflecting on other Melbourne-based projects Centre for Style, H.B. Peace and Rare Candy. And Femke de Vries utilises the technique of patchwriting to explore the formation of archetypal garments through writing.



Co-launch D&K LOOK BOOK 2019 and Mode and Mode issue seven. Warehouse (2020). Photo: Roos Quakernaat.

## Writing fashion

We chose the D&K text works as the subject of *Mode and Mode* <sup>7</sup> seven, the publication I co-publish with Karina Soraya. The focus of the issue was D&K's critical use of text to explore the gestures of fashion and brand construction across exhibition and performance-based projects. The issue was published and co-launched with *D&K LOOK BOOK 2019*, collecting the complete body of text works by D&K (2012–2019). We felt that looking at the works together in this volume would illuminate D&K's explorations of fashion through experimental use of writing. The special character of text in fashion—such as the way in which it is used for aesthetic or ornamental purposes—is central to their written works. They have used text—including ficto-critical prose, patchwriting, poetry, and scriptwriting—to reconstitute components of fashion, such as the garment, atmospheric conditions of retail space, and packaging ephemera. Our desires and expectations around the real object of fashion, that one that we are potentially purchasing and wearing, are inextricably linked to how it is presented to us (whether that be in the form of image, text or packaging). The issue of *Mode and Mode* aimed to show how D&K's interrogation of fashion language within (and as) branding, highlights the plasticity of words, which are always both meaningless and meaningful.



Mode and Mode seven

Together the *D&K LOOK BOOK 2019* and *Mode and Mode* explore two key modes of communication in fashion: image and text. In D&K's lookbook, the image reconstitutes the show, providing an exhausting visual description of the event. For *Mode and Mode*, we wanted the issue to become a caption to the lookbook, in the same way the text quintessentially captions fashion images in magazines.

## Performing fashion

To coincide with the launch of both publications, San Serriffe and Melbourne's Colour Nightclub hosted the performance of the 'D&K Smuggling Covers', a series of garments produced to launch and perform

66 Text functions dynamically within D&K's output, their written pieces take on many forms often manipulating the writing conventions to explore aesthetic and commercial aspects of high and low fashion. They have used text—including ficto-critical prose, cut and paste collage, poetry, and scriptwriting—to reconstitute components of fashion, such as the garment, atmospheric conditions of retail space, and packaging ephemera. The ways in which we relate to the real object of fashion—that we are potentially purchasing and wearing—becomes inextricably linked to its packaging, and thus, with our desires and expectations.

Perception in fashion is highly volatile. Unboxing branded packaging, for example, can carry the ecstasy of a high fashion experience as much as owning and wearing the garment itself. This is a paradox D&K address in their writing, particularly in the publication and poem of their 2013 exhibition 'fashionasconsumerfeeling'. This work was a sheet of tissue paper, hand-scribbled in a limited edition that featured a text written that used excerpts of commercial fashion and heavy packaging, collaged with stream-of-consciousness consumer affects. The fractured narrative of the poem pitches the aesthetic qualities of fashion writing against the volatile experience of desire ('Core a hand-on for that hemline'). The form of the publication is unconventional, echoing packaging from a high fashion retail setting, to pose the support material as the substance of the experience of fashion.

In another exhibition 'Chore Chair' at George Paxon Gallery (2014), D&K constructed a 'Dysfunctional Press Release', made up of five permutations of the same one-page text. This approach disrupted 'press release' conventions with excerpts of poetic text, that (as with 'fashionasconsumerfeeling') reinserted businesslike language ('For immediate release') with the intensity of a first-person voice ('Meaning softly into your ear'). This gesture reveals the absurdity within the conventions of writing in both art and fashion (and the 'press release' operates across both), and—as in Andrea Fraser's deconstruction of museum guide Jane Cassleton—critiques the authenticity of such forms within an institutional context.

D&K continues to conflates and obscure brand identity, relating the experience of a brand construction to the ways in which we construct identities as lovers, friends and enemies. In this way, they propose that their identity is one of constant dysfunction: the correct output of a consistently unfulfilling process of trying to attain

an identity, as itself, the identity of the brand. Meaning softly into your ear. The absurdities that arise from clear communication and clear voices or encourage hasty reactions are criticized. Party, while cracks edges break! keep your mouth glued in your eyes.

Many of D&K's texts are also performed, placing the designers within the work as its mouthpieces. In their text work 'the centre' (created as part of the project 'All or Nothing' and presented at Neuph Bar in 2017), one voice is read in the titles and descriptions for the collection pieces ('D&K extra: 'house lips' silk polo shirt'); the other voice speaks poetic fragments of digital, celebrity and fashion cultures. There is often a dialectical interplay in D&K's writing—a back and forth between high and low, personal and professional—and here it is physically materialised in two voices. This tension is used productively to experiment and erigize the surface qualities of fashion language and perverely construct an obscured brand image.

D&K follows  
Buy expensive clothes.  
Really expensive clothes.  
Improve in many  
Freaks for days.

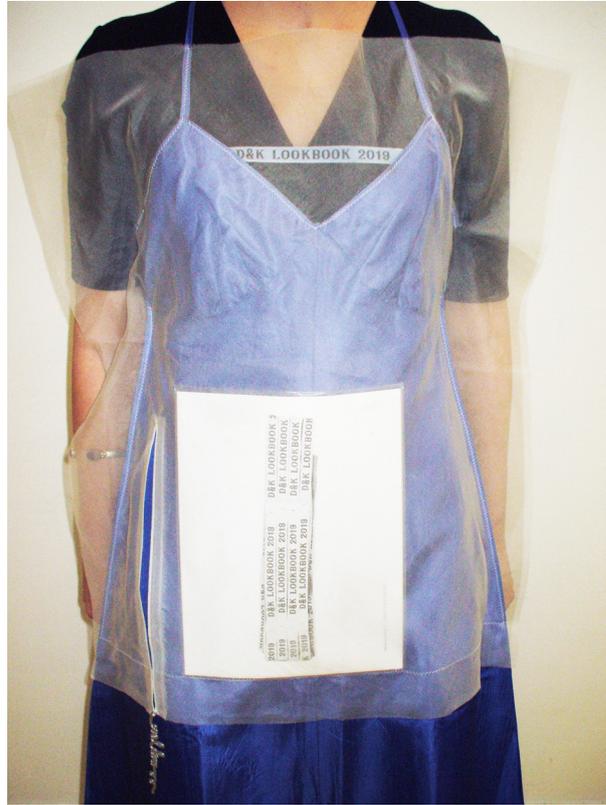
Compiled together in this issue, *Mode and Mode* seven presents the text works of fashion practice D&K as a companion publication to *D&K LOOK BOOK 2019*. We are happy to take up this role, as we hope to elucidate the ways in which text and publishing become companions to the garment in the production of fashion. D&K's text works demonstrate this equitably. Their interrogation of fashion language in (and as) branding highlights the plasticity of words, which are always both meaningless and meaningful.



p. 24 'DK 00' installation at Museum Boijmans van Beuningen, Rotterdam in 2014. Photographs by Nana Legen and Kurjo Milder.

p. 18 'DK's 'Rage Reef' installed at China Stage gallery, Melbourne, for the exhibition 'L'Abolish Coverage', 2014.

the lookbook. This added another layer of complexity to the publication—a methodology that D&K embraces. The ‘covers’ are produced from second-hand garments and curtains that are added with a layer of organza to form a protective publication ‘pocket’. The events were held last year at San Serriffe in early December, and Colour Nightclub later that month. At these, a group of eight models were dressed in garments described as ‘D&K covers’. These held the publications in book-sized pockets, which were also carried by the models in folded dust jackets created from recycled curtains. The garments were both covers for the body, and the publications.



Co-launch D&K LOOK BOOK 2019 and *Mode and Mode* issue seven. Warehouse (2020). Photo: Roos Quakernaat.

1  
Hess, J. & Pasztopek, S. (2010). *Graphic design for fashion*, London: Laurence King, p. 145.

2  
Pecorari, M. (2013). “Zones-in-between”: The ontology of a fashion praxis’, in *Couture Graphique: fashion, graphic design and the body* (J. Brand, Teunissen José, & H. van der Voet, eds.). Houten: Terra Lannoo.

3  
McDowell, F. (2016), “Old” glossies and “new” histories: Fashion, dress and historical space’ in *Fashion Theory*, vol. 20, no. 3, p. 299.

4  
D&K was founded by Ricarda Bigolin and Nella Themelios in 2012. Currently D&K is formed by Chantal Kirby and Ricarda Bigolin.

5  
‘D&K All or Nothing’ was originally presented at RMIT Design Hub and at The Swedish School of Textiles in Borås in 2017.

6  
From D&K’s press release for the launch of *D&K LOOKBOOK 2019*.

7  
*Mode and Mode* is a periodical about printed matter and writing practices in fashion outside the constraints of the commercial industry. Each issue follows the methodology of experimental publishing and centers on a ‘fashion publisher’ at the historical, commercial or geographical margins of fashion.

Preparations for the launch show took place in San Serriffe’s office, where the models were dressed and styled from the precarious vantage point of the mezzanine, which overlooks the yellow floor plan of the store. In from the cobbled street of Amsterdam’s red light district where San Serriffe is located, the floor forms a glow around the models as they stand around casually, drinking, leafing through the stock.



Warehouse FOCUS provides in-depth reflection on Warehouse projects through the lense of guest authors.