H O L E K E H O L

ISSUE #3

THE K-HOLE
BRAND ANXIETY
MATRIX

In 2012, Storm A approached the Eastern seaboard. Since the previous storm had been such a disappointment, nobody was sure if they needed to take it seriously. New weather models predicted Storm A would be significantly worse. In a surprising turn of events, Storm A actually followed its projected path.

For one week in the Acela corridor, highs and lows became truly indistinguishable. The lights were still on in Goldman Sachs when CNN reported a Twitter rumor that the floor of the stock exchange was covered in three feet of water. Waves crashed over houses, destroying people's lives and reshaping the coastlines of New York and New Jersey.

When Storm B washed ashore two days later, it hit people with no phone, no power, and no heat. There was no time to forget about Storm A. Despite the fact that warm hurricane winds were replaced with heavy snow, it was difficult to process that Storm B was entirely different.

It's 2013. Nobody knows when and how Storm C will come, but we know it's coming. Unfortunately, every storm comes with its own unforeseen problems (and shopping list). Consumer experiences have always made people anxious.

Activity tracking devices tell us what we're "actually" doing. The data they provide exists to make us less nervous,

yet we feel increasingly pressured to do a better job. Data should allow us to lead longer, healthier, happier lives. But we don't necessarily want to live longer any more, just at 100%. The same information that compels us to be rational actors disproves the very idea that we might be. The information is available, but fragmented. It's not necessarily helping us paint a bigger picture of our lives.

The divide between performance anxiety and a feeling of frictionless ease swings on the consumer's response to information. It sucks to be broke, but it sucks even more to receive daily low balance notifications. We know our preferences are being calculated and used to predict our next moves, but we still don't feel like we can take our hands off the joystick. The job of the advanced consumer is managing anxiety, period.

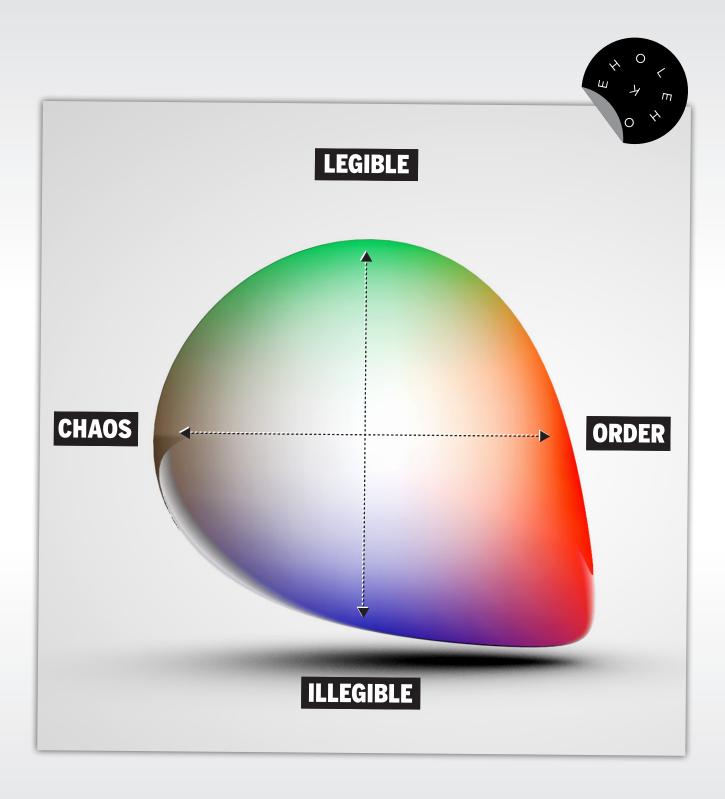# EVERY PARTY IS A COORDINATED CRISIS RESPONSE :)

At K-HOLE we recognize that there will never be any sort of consensus as to why we are anxious. Unlike fear, anxiety is a response to an imprecise threat. Not the knife pressed to your back, but the possibility that everyone knows what you did last summer.

THE K-HOLE
BRAND ANXIETY
MATRIX

WE DESIGNED THE
K-HOLE BRAND ANXIETY MATRIX
OVER A COUPLE OF DAYS IN A
QUIET, COMFORTABLE PLACE
TO HELP ANSWER OUR
QUESTIONS ABOUT ANXIETY
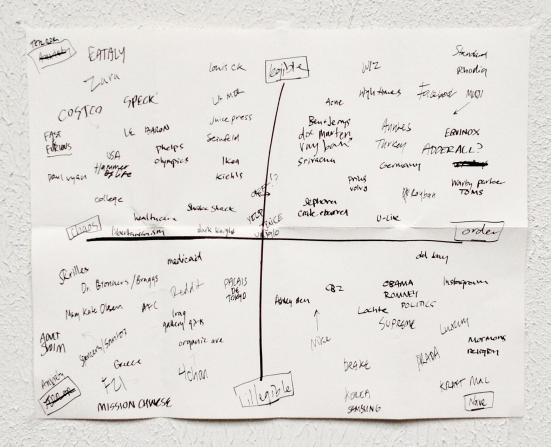
LEGIBLE

CHAOS

ORDER

ILLEGIBLE

Before we could find answers, we needed to define the terms we would use to describe the different sources of our feelings. Are we freaking out as a result of our lack of understanding of the world? Are we responding to a known unknown? Or has something just flitted through the blind spot in our peripheral vision?

1. DO BRANDS MAKE US ANXIOUS?

2. WHEN DO WE WANT TO FEEL NORMAL, AND WHEN DO WE WANT TO FEEL ABNORMAL?

3. DO WE HAVE ANY SOLUTIONS TO OUR PROBLEMS?

The K-HOLE Brand Anxiety Matrix uses two axes to plot brands, products, services, celebrities and ideas. The x-axis plots the internal coherence of any given experience (Chaos/Order); the y-axis plots the way that coherence manifests in the world (Legible/Illegible). The K-HOLE Brand Anxiety Matrix is not an attempt to quantify anxiety, it's a tool for describing anxiety's different vibes.

TENSOR ANXIETY

EATALY

Zara

COSTCO   SPECK

FAST
FURIOUS   LE BARON

          USA   Phelps
Paul ryan   Hammer   Olympics
              OF LIFE

      college

         healthcare
                    Shake Shack
Chaos libertarianism   dark knight

louis ck   legible   WIZ   Standard
                                          Rhodia
LA MILK
                        Acne   High times   Facebook MUJI
juice press
                  Ben & Jerrys
Seinfeld   doc Marten   Annies   EQUINOX
                  ray ban   Turkey   ADDERALL?
Ikea
Kiehls   Sriracha   Germany
                                          Warby parker
                          prius   volvo   TOMS
                                        Rayban
                    Sephora
                    cafe starred
                YELP   PRICE   U-Line   order
                         UNIQLO

Skrillex   medicaid   del bury
   Dr. Bronners / Braggs
                    Reddit   PACAIS   Ashley Olsen   CB2   OBAMA   Instagram
  Mary Kate Olsen   A$C   DE TOKYO   ROMNEY
                            Iraq   Lochte POLITICS
Adult   Spencers/Sontag gallery 97%   SUPREME
Swim   organic ave   Nike   Luxury
     Greece   MORMONS
                                                          PRADA   RELIGION
ANXIETY   F21   4chan   DRAKE
          illegible   KRAFT MAC
  MISSION CHINESE   KOREA   Naive
                                             SAMSUNG

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LEGIBLE ORDER

<u>Legible Order</u> is a control variable. It's a standard with reason standing behind it. It's the supermodel that makes clothes look so good, you barely notice she's the one wearing them. Legible Order works best when you don't even notice it's there.

Legible Order is comfort. It's Annie's Mac and Cheese — pangs of childhood indulgence without the nagging fear of Yellow #5. It's the ability to discriminate and manage known threats (one bowl won't make me obese) while maintaining distance from the unknown ones (will sodium phosphate break my DNA?). Legible Order is based on depressive realism. It recognizes that the unknown can be exciting,

but also dangerous. Like Annie's Mac and Cheese, Legible Order is not a path to self-discovery.

Legible Order is surveillance. It's the impossibility of moving through daily life without being captured in one form of digital media or another. It's the total redundancy of choosing whether or not to have a Facebook page, because your friends have already tagged photos of you anyways. It's a poke from someone you slept with once 2 years ago. Just enough to say, "Hey, I'm available and possibly cyberstalking you!" Legible Order is ubiquitous. Absence does not amount to nonparticipation.

LEGIBLE CHAOS

Legible Chaos identifies what is both reflexive and uncertain. That not everything's gonna be fine. It's the quadrant of the K-HOLE Brand Anxiety Matrix that acknowledges that it's not just the world that's spinning, but you as well. Despite this, we're not left twirling in the abyss: we have tools to make sense of our uncertainty. We have each other. Our bodies have needs. We might be totally fucked, but at least it'll be interesting.

Legible Chaos lacks the sense that certain forms of progress are good, that there's an ideal destination we can all strive towards. In this quadrant you'll find your gynecologist, your therapist, Jerry Seinfeld and Louis CK — anyone, really,

who believes that crazy shit happens all the time, but at the end of the day we can at least talk about it. Legible Chaos also houses persistently random brands like Costco and Zara. These brands recognize that there is no such thing as a one-size-fits-all solution, that adapting to the smallest of changes in consumer's lives is all-important. Moving forward requires change.
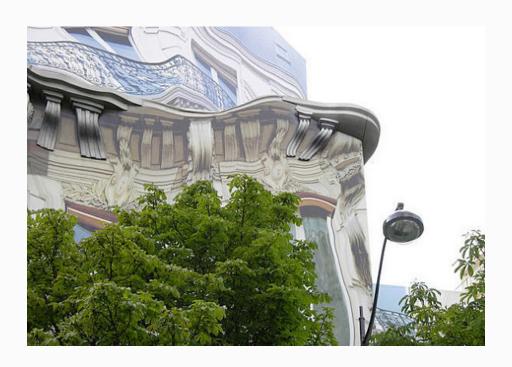
LEGIBLE

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<u>Illegible Order</u> works the hardest to maintain credibility. The latent discipline of the brands in this quadrant makes them very appealing for anxiety management. Take us to your leader: it promises a universe where at least some logic prevails. At its peak, Illegible Order is the best version of normal. But nothing looks more desperate than someone else's old reasoning.
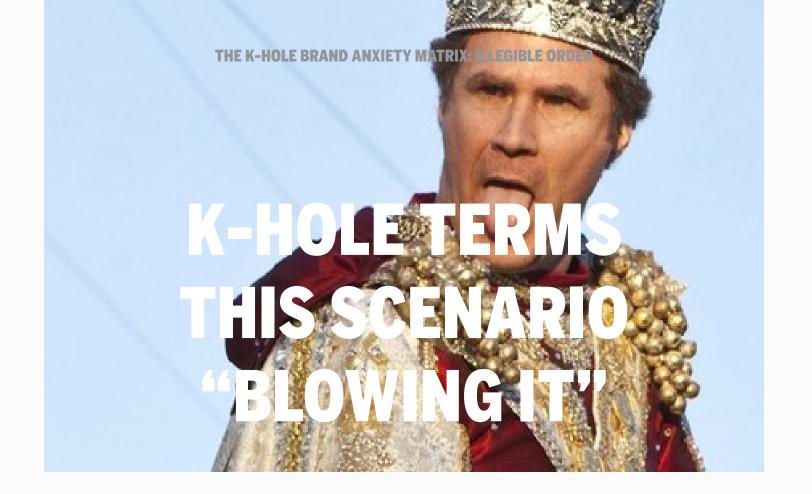

"What would you wear to a meeting with Comme des Garcons?" a colleague asked over burgers at the Time Warner center. "Uniqlo and Nike," we replied simultaneously.

Illegible Order is completely unhackable. It houses the black box brands that externalize your experiences to the point that you're just watching yourself wear Rag & Bone. Nonetheless, it feels nice to be taken care of. You can be sure a master plan exists somewhere, yet the details are "currently offline." This sense of mastery can be appealing, sexy, and auratic in the case of fashion and luxury; off-putting or eerie in the case of governments and religion; or enticingly naive in the case of tech IPOs.
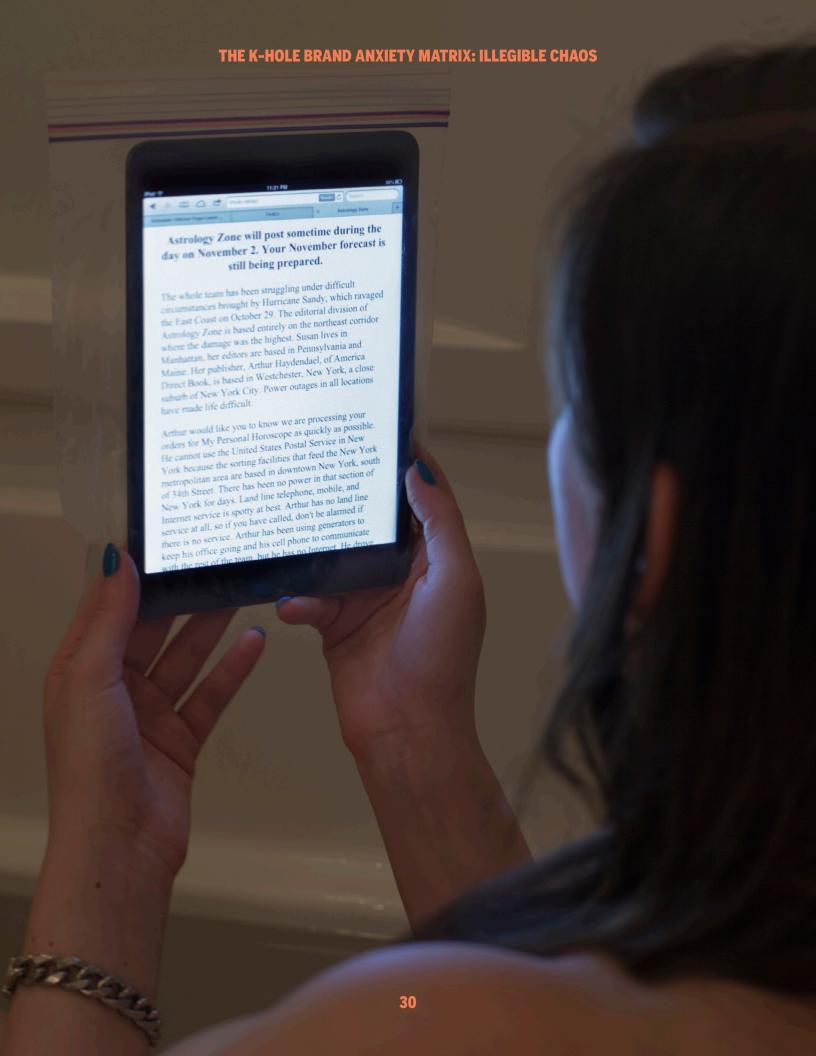
Illegible Order is full of secrets. Like parents, whether these secrets attract or repel you depends on how well they keep their acts together. Illegible Order is in constant danger of letting its simplistic veneer break down into dreary legibility, or becoming undisciplined and revealing that its master plan was just wishful thinking all along.

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K-HOLE TERMS THIS SCENARIO "BLOWING IT"

ILLEGIBLE CHAOS

Astrology Zone will post sometime during the day on November 2. Your November forecast is still being prepared.

The whole team has been struggling under difficult circumstances brought by Hurricane Sandy, which ravaged the East Coast on October 29. The editorial division of Astrology Zone is based entirely on the northeast corridor where the damage was the highest. Susan lives in Manhattan, her editors are based in Pennsylvania and Maine. Her publisher, Arthur Haydendael, of America Direct Book, is based in Westchester, New York, a close suburb of New York City. Power outages in all locations have made life difficult.

Arthur would like you to know we are processing your orders for My Personal Horoscope as quickly as possible. He cannot use the United States Postal Service in New York because the sorting facilities that feed the New York metropolitan area are based in downtown New York, south of 34th Street. There has been no power in that section of New York for days. Land line telephone, mobile, and Internet service is spotty at best. Arthur has no land line service at all, so if you have called, don't be alarmed if there is no service. Arthur has been using generators to keep his office going and his cell phone to communicate with the rest of the team, but he has no Internet. He drove

Illegible Chaos is like the Blue Man Group, there's only one rule: that everyone has to be painted blue. But really who are they? What do they sound like? Who do they work for? You think you understand, because they propose themselves as a big sloppy show – and like LiLo or composting, it seems obvious.
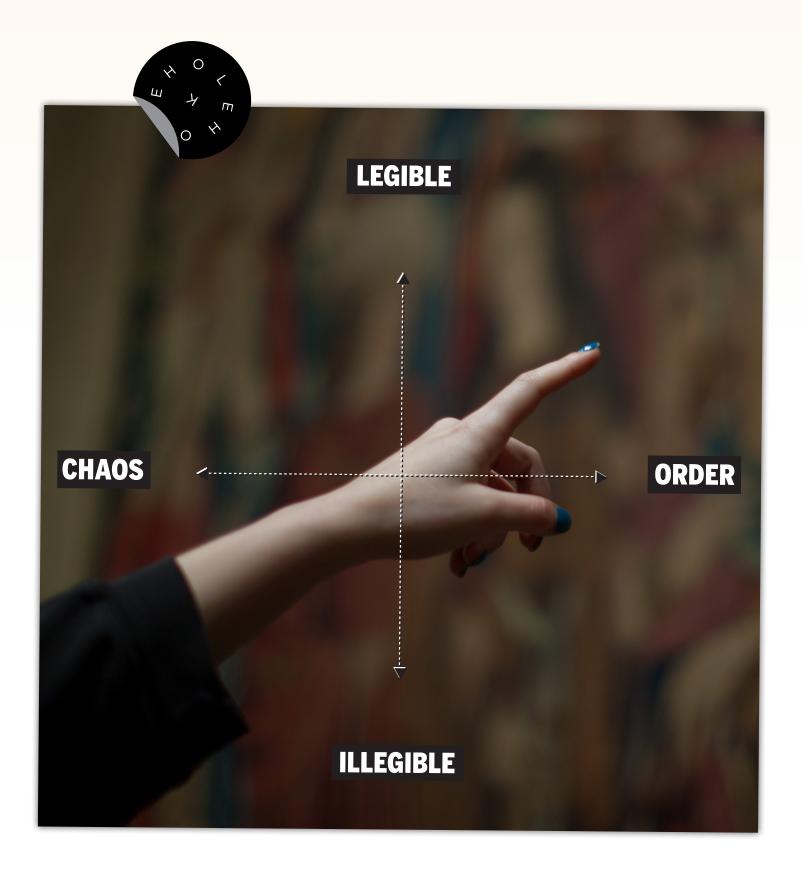

Like, "Oh, I get it, how can I not get it." But you totally don't get it. And you'll stay on the "getting it" train until it transports you to some really fucked up place. Then you'll look back on what you thought was a series of decisions and realize that you've made only one.

When encountering an aggressively uncomplicated situation, the questioning mind will search for hidden complexities whether they exist or not. When false patterns are mapped onto total chaos, the most overtly stated brands can become completely unintelligible. The longer you stare at your compost heap, the smellier it becomes.

Continued engagement with Illegible Chaos takes the form of a positive feedback loop, in which both sides are staring each other dead in the eyes, saying "WTF." The content retrofits itself into a pre-existing structure without conforming to its logic. It exactly mirrors the plot of The Hangover.

LEGIBLE

CHAOS

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K-HOLE INVITES YOU TO CATEGORIZE THE FOLLOWING CASE STUDIES

ISABEL MARANT INTERNAL WEDGE SNEAKERS

The recent proliferation of wedge sneakers was a direct response to Nike's burgeoning Freedom. The sneaker was beaten down by the boot for too long, and the Marant wedges are the haute high street version. Remember the Timberland Manolo Blahnik stilettos of 2002? Those were the wedge sneaker from when there was still a working class and a leisure class. The working class gave the boot. The leisure class gave the heel. Stone soup: what are you bringing to the picnic? The Marant wedge sneakers are our version of it. But since we don't have lower and upper class any more, since all brands are luxury brands, we have the bubble class and then just savages in poverty everywhere else, we get this blob wedge thing. The height got absorbed into the sneaker. The iMac got slurped right in. You can't buy Isabel Marant on the Internet.

GLOBSTER

Company Q tracks everything except consumer purchase histories. Using social media interactions it maps and quantifies spheres of influence on a 1-100 scale. It's the anti-Yelp, a ranking system of consumers rather than for consumers. Company Q understands that people are platforms, and not all consumers are created equal.

But don't be fooled by the neat numerical value. Company Q is less of a black box algorithm and more of a black hole. It creates more questions than it answers. By 2013, many brands had given up on carving consumers into market segments and retreated to behavior modeling instead. After all, why should 46-year-old Asian males from the Rust Belt have any coherent sense of taste?

Company R realized that user tracking is more useful to consumers than corporations. Following the high-end dating sites that invite consumers to pay to discover themselves,

Company R created a free and more precise online service. Consumers grant Company R full access to their personal purchase history. From there, Company R draws on the overlapping brand affinities of their users to recommend new social interactions.

Company R cross-references Company Q's portfolios of social media data to make sure they won't introduce you to anyone you already know. New friends, lovers, and one-night stands are connected based on who's using the same contact solution. In short, Company R takes the social out of social media. Every purchase leads to a new person.

DEODORANT

Early prepubescence teaches you the unacceptability of smelling like yourself in public. It's an unsolvable problem that will follow you to the grave. Your only options are temporary, and rarely work. Raspberry-blissed out, you reach for Teen Spirit. For most, deodorant is *the* formative encounter with the olfactory world. Many luxury fashion brands release their first fragrance at a similarly adolescent stage. Spritz perfume, and you are willfully engaging with your environment. You are lounging in Hermes' Garden on the Nile. You are saying yes and participating. But deodorant comes from a place of resistance. (Any smell but me; any place but here; any time but now.) New Yorkers wear black in order to be noticed less, and we wear deodorants for the same reason, although the choices are much more colorful. You can go rogue in the aisles of Whole Foods, grind up on a crystal, or throw all caution to the wind with aluminum chlorohydrate. Botoxed pits, why not?
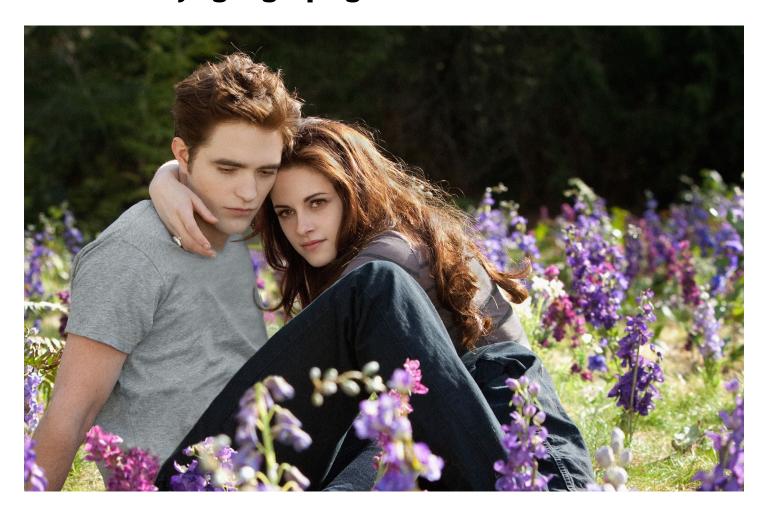
MIRENA

All forms of birth control effectively hack your reproductive system. In Futurist visions, solutions come in pill form - you change your software. The IUD, on the other hand, is more in line with Maker culture and its insistence on personal hardware, little pieces of plastic, and references to the fashions of the 1970s.

Unlike condoms, NuvaRings, or careful timing, the IUD-hardware-system can actually improve your sex life because there's less to do. You don't feel like you're sacrificing control; it's about streamlining. You make one decision and stick with it.

We don't know what crazy things our birth control pills will make us do, and we still buy pregnancy tests when we feel weird for whatever reason. The IUD doesn't affect our bodies the same way because it's more like an accessory –

a protective amulet or charm. It's not magic (despite the fact that nobody totally understands how it works); it's just metal.

"Just get the best thing and don't worry about anything." You'll have your Barbour jacket and your IUD longer than you'll have your next laptop. What other purchases of this scale, commitment, and longevity are made by young women who aren't trying to get pregnant?

LAPKA

Lapka is a set of four tiny environmental sensors encased in synthetic ivory and uncoated Brazilian sapele. When plugged into the headphone jack of your iPhone, Lapka's app reveals important stuff we can't see: radioactivity, electromagnetic fields, humidity, and nitrates in raw produce. It's not augmented reality, it's reality.

Most of the time, when specialists describe these forces, it's a binary conversation: either you're safe or you're fucked. It's either irrelevant or scary. Lapka gives environmental information to people without explaining how it should be used. It can be a balm or a trigger. After all, you're the only one who can really say if you're comfortable.

"Everything I'm wearing is exactly what I want to be wearing." Lapka differentiates the everyday, turning anxiety into opportunity. It's what fashion, in the best case scenario, can do: make you more capable of addressing the world.

K-HOLE IS A
TREND FORECASTING REPORT
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New York, NY

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