

vol. 1



to vol. 2

## **collecting me(dia); a statement.**

My mother always tells me, "Your bag is too heavy!" and I always respond, "but I need everything in it!" It's so interesting to think about the ways we decide the things we need and the things we don't, and the ways we express who we are through our material possessions.

As students and workers and commuters and consumers, our bags are often essential parts of our lives- places to carry our wallets and textbooks and water bottles and gum. But they're also places for things small and seemingly insignificant- scribbled notes and old receipts, beloved pins and clinking keychains. And bags are a lot of other things, too. Sometimes they're symbols of status, from a luxury or niche brand; sometimes they're symbols of love or passion, of certain colors or certain characters or certain themes; sometimes they're sentimental, matching with a friend, or a gift; sometimes they're practical, waterproof, or with plenty of pockets. Then there's the things we put within them and the ways we organize them, the way that sometimes there are smaller bags within pouches within the larger bags, revealing themselves like a matryoshka doll; sometimes things are loose and crumpled and forgotten in the dark depths of the bag rarely reached. It's fascinating to think how much of our personality is within our possessions, like a detachable part of us.

When it comes to the "What's in my bag" trend, more layers are revealed as we consciously decide how to present ourselves with what we

own and what we carry, as well as how we present the things themselves. People participate in the trends in different forms and different ways- some people illustrate it; some take photos of it laid out like a puzzle; some people explain their reasoning in a video; some showcase it by taking the things out, while some do by putting them in. It's an introduction that can happen without a voice or a face. It humanizes idols and connects people within their communities; it's a dialogue and a recommendation; it's an advertisement of the products and of the self. I became interested in this project because I often found myself pondering the kinds of lives people lived behind the screen, about the simultaneous identifying personality and anonymity of faceless, voiceless posts, and because I was always looking for ideas to modify the contents of my own bag.

This project is ultimately an exploration of people as walking and living collections in a literal sense of the word, and aims to begin an introspection of the ways we label, organize, and present ourselves. In particular, I am interested in contrasts between the explicit and the implied, between the pictorial and physical, and between impersonality and personality. This contrast is represented in my collection in two ways: in the presentation format, and the medium.

The first, primary part is an index of the items in my school bag, presented on a single webpage (accessible at [m-ys.github.io/CollectingMe](https://m-ys.github.io/CollectingMe)). At a glance it is clerical and sterile, like a ledger or classification chart, with items written as they are. There's a clear organizational structure by part, but little else. However, a visitor might find

that there is more information to be discovered when they hover over an item, where a tooltip appears, providing commentary on it, often personal, sometimes superficial. It reminds me a bit of an inventory in a game, of items collected over a journey and their accompanying captions. I use this to represent the initially perceived impersonality of material possessions as simple words and numbers, but also an acknowledgement of personal modes of organization. The tooltips that appear offer more detail, but do not complete the picture of a person.

The second part is this book in which you may be reading this, which is comprised of captionless photos. The items within the index are pictured here, and you may notice, or realize, that the tooltips are indeed the captions. Both the index and the photos within this book essentially show the same thing, an incomplete yet detailed "picture" of a person, contained within the possessions- contained with the photographs and the index. You may also find discrepancies in the organization and the detail of the catalogue between these two parts. Which representation do you prefer? Do they represent the same person?

If you are reading this, you likely know me to a certain extent, but I wonder how much more you may gain by viewing these two parts of the collection. The mix of physical and digital in this collection also speak to how different parts make a whole, an increasingly complete picture of me. But never a truly complete one, because I, too, have curated this collection.

It is genuine, but constructed in the way I have chosen to communicate it by arranging and showing and labeling my collection of items.

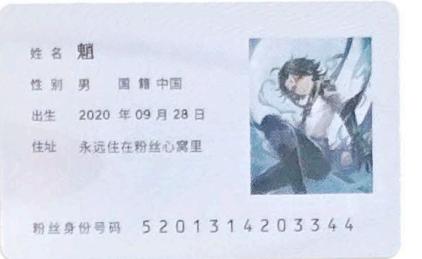
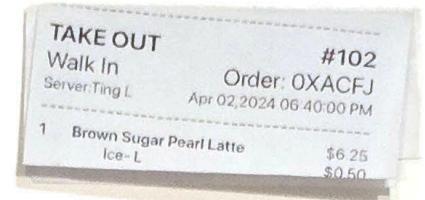
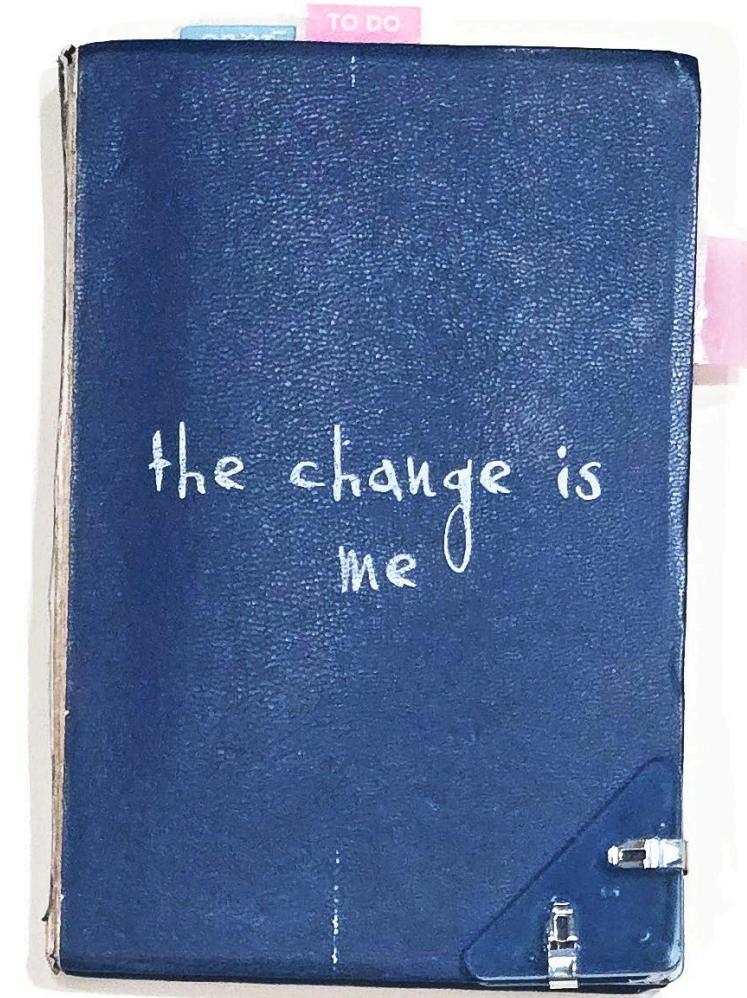
The third part, also presented in a book (Volume 2), is a collection of contributions from peers, colleagues, and friends who have kindly shared their bags and parts of themselves. I have made minimal edits, if any, to their submissions. I invite you to ponder who they might be and the lives they might live.

What is in your bag right now? How would its contents introduce you?

※ On this digital version of Volume 1, you can access Volume 2 by clicking on to vol. 2 on the first page. It can also be accessed directly at [m-ys.github.io/CollectingMe/Volume2.pdf](https://m-ys.github.io/CollectingMe/Volume2.pdf).







The water was higher than it had ever been before, and was quickly rising by the hour and by the hour. It had never rained so heavily for so long in all the years I had been here and it felt strange.

We have now spent classes reviewing instrumental variables, and a specific subset of these called

## VISIT JAPAN

理解を通じて

I was woken the next morning by a knock at the door. It was short and disrupted quickly into the patter of the rain shower. Judging by the wetness of speeding rivulets on the foggy windows and the humidity in the air. Didn't mind it didn't make much difference to him. Anyhow, filling these basins would quickly into the patter of the rain shower. Judging by the wetness of speeding rivulets on the lighthouse door were to ever fail. Still come back later though.

### STRUCTURAL MODELS (cont)

2/29

No policy change actually happened

Counterfactuals: Results

modeled change in policy to estimate what would come out of it

CORPORATE HEADQUARTERS & WELFARE 4/2  
NONPROFIT GROWTH IN U.S. CITIES (Chris Bruno)

### Motivation

research usually society → corp; not corp → society  
nonprofits support comm. health on issues gov & corp do not

Ming-yan Maggie Song

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natural experiment in exposure to launch of FAF in Brazil  
more competition = persistent reduction in deposit mkt conc.  
increase in deposits overall (need \$ in banks to use FAF)

### Overview of the Results

more competition = persistent reduction in deposit mkt conc.  
increase in deposits overall (need \$ in banks to use FAF)

3/19/2024

Quant. marketing dept.

Wharton Mostly Useless History The Potential for Targeting Interventions Anya Shchetkina Ron Berman

2

Discussion

- Why do you think it is important to have an argument addressing company's role?
- For you as a customer, vs from the other customer.
- Which information about the company would you not like to know?

3

Motivation

A/B tests are a common way to measure user behavior. If there are user features that are not being used, it may be because they are not motivated enough to use them.

4

INDUSTRIALIZATION: URBAN REFORM 3/7/24

- Triangle Shirtwaist factory (URGAN)
  - death while being obedient to the system - not in protest
- Lithgow Miners (RURAC)
  - strike (global) of miners go on strike → tent colony
  - tent colony burnt to the ground
- mistrreatment of industrial workers.
  - 10 days war - killed Chinese strikebreaking miners not part of the union
- immigration & Migration
  - Jacob Riis - Danish immigrant photographer in NY
    - "How the Other Half Lives"

INDUSTRIALIZATION OF AGRICULTURE & URBANIZATION IN US (FOOD AND FARMS: SCI, TECH, NAT) 3/7/24

- KEY THEMES
  - Nature
  - Knowledge
  - Expertise
  - Technology
  - Science
- Farm trends
  - fewer total farms w/ not necessarily less land - consolidation
  - mechanization
  - more money needed to run farm - capitalization
    - e.g. purchasing seeds, paying non-family laborers
    - sharp decrease in US population that lived on farms
    - 1920: turning point urban pop > rural pop
- Great Depression (1929) & Dust Bowl (1930s) & WWII (1930s-40s)
  - atomic bomb + nuclear weapons
- Farming and Expertise
  - farm products become abstract commodities
  - book farming (learning from reading rather than experience)

① Preservation & Conservation 3/7/24

- worry about the loss of the frontier/wilderness
- preservationists concerned about the "wild"
- strong physically strong population by race
- conservationists "efficient use of land"
- don't want land set aside or unproductive
- (1930s - New Deal) more cars, roads, access to urban areas
- while urban response to urban sprawl
- increasing concerns about pollution
- (1964 Wilderness Act)
- wilderness as places where man is only one

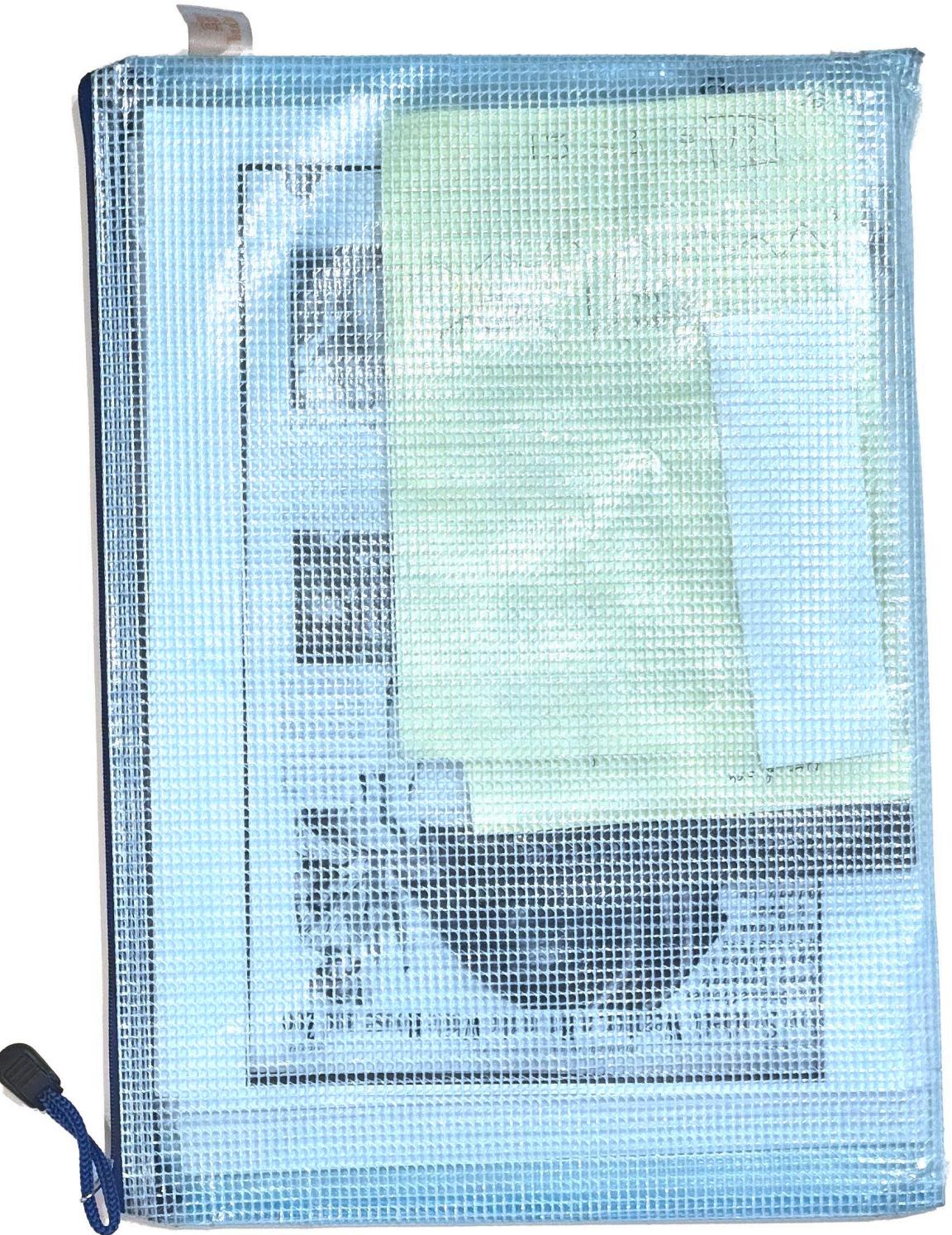
② Industrial Hygiene 3/7/24

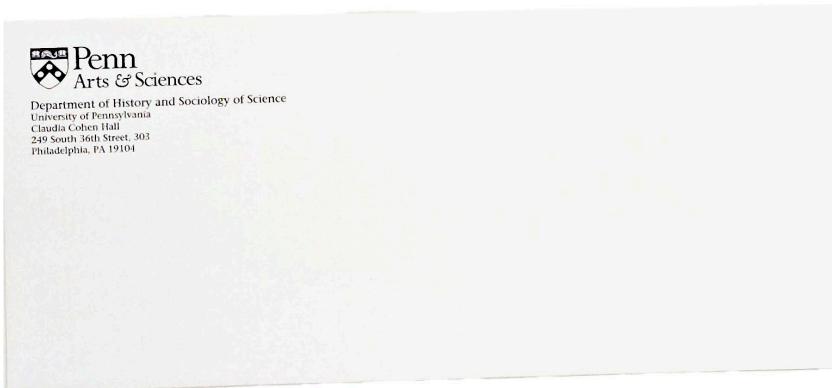
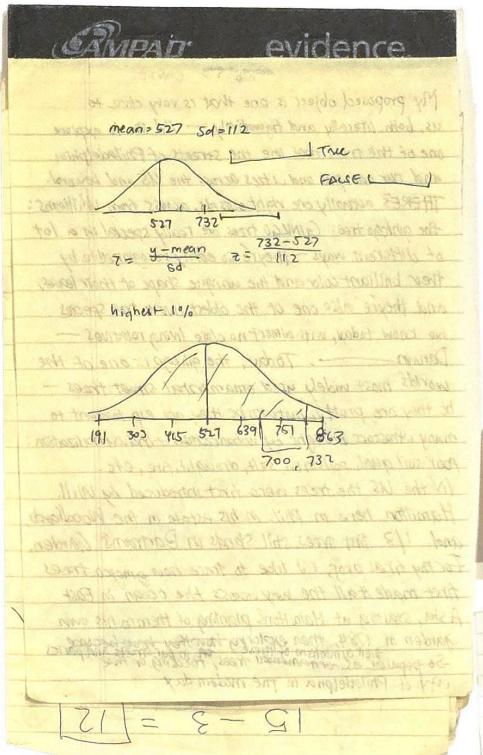
- really unsafe working conditions in US
- AI (e.g. Hamilton - industrial pharmacologist)
- turning individual tragedies into a pattern
- site of origin of working people in cities

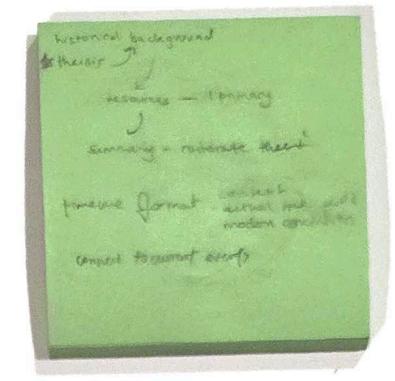
③ Suburban Homes 3/7/24

- fast development # good development
- Rachel Carson - Silent Spring DDT, female sex hormones













## **people without faces.**

It is nothing new to acknowledge the value of personal possessions and the glimpse they give into a personal life. Museums may be filled with priceless pieces of art, but they're also filled with pens and letters and hats and pots. There are formal collections at museums, but many other collections at museums and elsewhere have also acknowledged the various meanings of our bags as things intimately related to stories of self and humanity.

Backpacks are central in many curated collections, often to convey messages perhaps, in a sense, more poignant than mine. A project by Amanda Krugliak, Richard Barnes, and Jason De León showcases rows and rows of found backpacks from a desert migration trail through the deserts of Arizona [1]. They're symbols of illegal migration, of desperation, of politics, and of death. But each backpack belonged to an individual person who carried it across the desert. They held pills and toothbrushes and pills and birth certificates and magazines. Like me, the creators were interested in how material culture exists in the ordinary and the ephemeral and in the ambiguity within these complex representations of people. On these migrant trails, bags left behind are both debris and traces of people no longer there.

For others, backpacks are symbols of the struggles of youth, tied closely with their association with school [2]. They're unique, patterned, and personal. For the student they hold schoolbooks and pens and papers; for

the homeless and the journeyer they hold the essentials; for the fashionista they may hold very little at all- the bag itself is the statement (but the fashionable handbag also often means more than just fashion [3]). Sometimes a person is all three.

In an essay called "The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction," Ursula K. Le Guin proposes that the first cultural invention was a container, a receptacle, and that it is something so human to put something with meaning into a bag or basket or pouch or home or bundle (which she argues, is a different sort of container, for people) [4]. It's counter to the proposition that the first significant invention of man was the spear, a symbol of heroism and of violence. A novel- which is a container for words-, she writes, is not about violence and victory and heroes but of humans and things that mean things to and among us. Likewise, a representation of the bag as container is a representation us and relationships within it; the container comes out of not only necessity but care and sentiment and also conflict, like a crumpled piece of paper or when the frame of your glasses catch on the corner of a book. It represents the complexities of being human veiled behind a mundane, layered pile.

Bags and containers are personal not only because they are so uniquely individual, but also because we have particular sentiments and attachments to the things we put within them. Relationships are often facilitated by transactions of giving, taking, holding, sharing, and so on. The container makes it possible to do so, by enacting a boundary that separates the

inside from the outside and the attached from the detached. In an introduction to a forum on containers, Andrew Shryock and Daniel Lord Smail propose that the significance of the container lies within two things: that it applies order to its contents, and that they are time machines, "meddl[ing] with natural forms of decay" [5]. It makes sense to me. Why do our bags have pockets of different shapes and sizes and different openings and closings, and why do we put bags within pouches within larger bags? Even one of my simplest imagination of a tote bag on a day when I carry nothing much at all demonstrates this: a wallet contains my bills and coins, which would otherwise spill loose; my bottle contains water; my glasses case contains my glasses and a lens wipe. The tote bag contains three items, but also so many more. They prevent my bills from getting ripped or crumpled; from the bending of my glasses frames; of the contamination of whatever I choose to drink for the day.

And so, the bag has so much potential as a personal introduction, as meaning, and as a medium. What about the way people choose to present their collections in a "What's in my Bag" post? It's a way for people to curate and share themselves behind a certain amount of anonymity, to connect with people who share their "vibes" or "aesthetic" or passions. For the younger generation, it's a way to connect with figures they admire, like Kpop idols [6], to establish a identity of being quirky and different and passionate and unique. For some, it's a nod to our understandings of a capitalistic lifestyle in which "we are what we consume," a

way of getting to know each other across social media feeds and consumer trends [7].

In addition to a sometimes explicit expression of identity, it also appeals to the emotional satisfaction of seeing things, in a sense, "unboxed" from their containers and then organized in satisfying grids of right angles and spectrums of color. In recent years there has been popular fixation with unboxing videos and depictions of things arranged in an "oddly satisfying" manner. Critical scholarship of the unboxing videos attributes their popularity to a variety of factors, including not only their content but the way that the content is produced and received by eager viewers [8]. Sharif Mowlabocus traces their lineage to educational and informative videos like reviews, where content producers explain functionalities of new items and technologies that they are often the first to have access to. I do find that I look at "What's in my bag" posts for the same reason: to gather intel on items that I think might be useful to carry around with me (and one by one, the number of items in my bag grows).

The authors also note that previously, it was a mundane and absolutely ordinary action to open a box. The ordinariness of it was only unordinary, or extraordinary, when it was for a special event like a birthday or a holiday where the item holds additional meaning because of *who* it came from and *why*, rather than *what* it was. It speaks to the importance of our human relationships in the items we have, give, and use. They propose that unboxing

videos have made what was simply ordinary into an extraordinary event, evoking emotions of happiness and anticipation and desire.

Similarly, we as viewers and doers both feel a strong emotion or sense of satisfaction when we organize things “perfectly” or arrange them in certain, “oddly satisfying” ways, as evidenced by the existence of blogs and forums dedicated to such imagery [9]. As a viewer, we relish in the visual expanses in the work of the perhaps anonymous people who arranged them so. The Office of Collecting and Design, a self proclaimed “collection of collections,” posts on their Instagram “Guest Flatlays,” arrangements of items in their collection by those who visit the museum [10]. They’re often organized neatly—sometimes by item type, sometimes by shape and sometimes by color. The act of “knolling,” or the practice of aligning objects in 90 degree angles, was popularized by Tom Sachs, who offers the mantra “Always be knolling” as part of his ten absolute workshop rules [11]. Thus, we find that “What’s in my bag” posts are actually, in some ways, complex exchanges of identity and emotion, a dual-sided communication that happens behind a screen and an image in exchanges of happiness and satisfaction.

Finally, I would like to speak a few words about the digital part of this project: the index. The index is another part of a whole that is often overlooked and deemed mundane and impersonal. Its utility is in its simplicity and apparently straightforward manner of communicating information. To be useful, it should be self-explanatory in that each entry

presents precisely what the item it represents is and where one might find it. But they also have a complex history and are not as impersonal as they might seem, because they too are made by someone, following often personally or socially understood ways of categorization and organization. I was inspired by taxonomies and home inventories and ledgers and other lists of our possessions— even for things like insurance claims. We classify things according to our understandings of them and the relationships among them. I find the mediums of the photobook and the index and the qualities of the physical and digital interesting dialogues in representation and being.

#### some notes on making.

This project was created for the class *Collecting Media* taught by Shannon Mattern at the University of Pennsylvania in Spring 2024. My project name, *Collecting Me(dia)*, is a play on this title, in which I propose a direct connection between the collection and the self. I am very grateful for her teaching, guidance and support!

Contents of Volume 1 are entirely my own, while contents of Volume 2 were crowdsourced by open invitation within my community and related circles. I did not collect their names or identities except for a pseudonym of their own choosing to distinguish entries. I invited contributors to answer the core question of “What’s in my bag?” The only criteria was that they felt their contribution was complete. The physical versions of these books are intended to be printed on matte paper of tabloid size and assembled as a saddle-stitched booklet.

Photos in this book, Volume 1, are of the items in my bag on May 2, 2024. They were taken with a Samsung Galaxy S24 Ultra and edited in Adobe Photoshop. This book was formatted and typeset in Adobe InDesign. The typeface is Avenir Next, designed by Adrian Frutiger and Akira Kobayashi.

The website was coded by myself using HTML and CSS and is hosted on Github at [m-ys.github.io/CollectingMe](https://m-ys.github.io/CollectingMe). It was initially inspired by the photograph portfolio of Paul Spehr, accessible at <http://photographic-works.studiospehr.com/>, but it has changed much along the way.

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- [10] Office of Collecting. Instagram account, @office.of.collecting. Accessed May 2, 2024. <https://www.instagram.com/office.of.collecting/?hl=en>.

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#### more reading; the implicit.

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