

# Collectivity: Part 1

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the *Camera Obscura* collective

In honor of the journal's fortieth anniversary, this special issue of *Camera Obscura*—the first of a two-part series—considers theories and practices of collectivity. Collectives often emerge in periods of crisis in response to new social, economic, and technological conditions. *Camera Obscura's* feminist editorial collective has functioned in this way since its beginnings in the 1970s, a time when many forms of cooperative action proliferated. In this period, collectives formed around issues of gender, race, and politics, with many organizing around forms of media production. In the last ten to fifteen years, a growing constellation of collectives, many international, has emerged, configuring artists and activists in new political and cultural formations. These collectives are a response to developments like the growing impact of digital media and mobile technologies; new paradigms of relational aesthetics; new configurations of labor and precarity; and the rise of neoliberal policy, which has worked to erode the public sphere and shared resources in favor of the idea of individual responsibility. In contrast, the theory and practice of collectivity emphasize participation, consensus, and working toward common goals. However, as anyone who has been part of a collective knows, these formations are never free of difficulty and disagreement—

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difficulties that relate to communication as well as to the very dynamics of gender, sexuality, class, race, and multinationalism that demand collective responses. This special issue explores these potentials and challenges through pieces—both full-length analyses and short-form reflections—that address such topics as collaboration in photography, cinema, and video; utopias and dystopias; history and memory; modes of singleness and of togetherness; technology, embodiment, and intimacy; and feminist and queer collective practices in media and activism in various times and places.



Figure 1. Detail of frame grab from *Self-Portrait with Three Women* (dir. Zhang Mengqi, China, 2010)