



QUÉBEC. A place in transition. A province in Canada. A Sovereign Nation. A collective imagining fuelled by a history (one of the many) of class and racial oppression in Canada. This issue of PUBLIC attempts to stand in many places at once, to explore some of the popular, juridical and historical discourses that make up Québec's cultural nationalism.

The political force of Québec nationalism both past and present, like all nationalisms, grows out of the processes of social modernity: secular rationality, mass communications and literacy, political democratization, industrialization and capitalist expansion. By the late fifties, the modernization of Québec's governmental and industrial infrastructure came to encompass a cultural revolution — generally identified as the Quiet Revolution. The definition of national identity in terms of culture challenged the traditional colonial category of the French Canadian, making way for a modern secular discourse grounded in *l'identitaire québécois*. For over three decades this has provided the means to articulate a political project directed towards sovereignty. This does not mean, however, that cultural identity in Québec is a fixed and transparent term. It is both carved out of and into collective experiences of belonging, and as such is an historical process.

The different essays collected here address the phenomenology of being in Québec: the meanings of its cultural identity, its popular myths (both rural and urban), its borders and distinct cultural geographies, its prosaic discourses, the political imperatives and contradictions underlying the right of a people to self-determination. While the Parti Québécois lost a recent referendum on sovereignty, it did so only by a slim margin. Many believe that the next referendum, to take place most likely within two years, will succeed. We hope that this issue of PUBLIC contributes a nuanced understanding of this moment in Québec's history, where the future is not yet written and yet . . .

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