Sylvie Readman, À contretemps II : site spécifique, Galerie Laroche Joncas. August 23–September 23, 2017

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See table of contents

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In this photographic essay, Sylvie Readman brilliantly addresses the strange topography of the abandoned military base at Saint-Hubert, Quebec, in terms of non-place and liminal space. Her fortuitous discovery of this site has resulted in some of her most memorable images to date.

The Saint-Hubert base was a locus of some notable historical events – to cite but a salient few, the arrival in 1930 of the British-made R-100 airship; its effecting world. These are the institutional edifices required for the acceleration of passengers and goods are the sine qua non of non-place.

For three years, Readman documented the base devotedly from stem to stern, summoning up a past that powerfully impinges on the present and future tenses. The phenomenon of excess is indissolubly wed here to the space of recess. Readman powerfully exposes the phenomenal interconnect- edness between her images and the subjects that they depict, and she brings the temporal into play with seeming effortlessness. Her interstitial map of non-places is marked by a numinous, spectral dimension invoked not only through the markers of abandonment but through an overcast palette and frequent X-ray-like treatment of the image. This zone of entropic decay is one that the viewer projects into with alacrity, and one is transformed as a result.

Airports are non-places because one’s identity virtually disappears as one enters the airport. The abandoned military base is a hypertrophied specimen of this space that exists somewhere “between here and there,” in what sociologist Bruno Latour has termed a liminal space. The solitude and similitude that mark the non-place are inscribed in Readman’s images with deft auratic finesse. The images of the abandoned military base speak to the past, a supermodern present tense, and a future that is paradoxically already nipping at our heels.