

## DREAMSCAPE WITH LAKE: C FODOREANU'S SACALAIJA

By Peter Frank

Doesn't it seem sometimes as if you've dreamt your past? All those people you encountered, all those places you knew, all those things you did, however fresh in mind they may be, return to you as if you conjured them, the first time as well as this, and they remain nebulous, obscure, framed by shadow, memorialized in mental snapshots that go in and out of focus. Childhood, especially, seems recollected as a barely interrupted cascade of events and configurations, a tumult of fond remembrances and occasional horrors through which you still struggle to make sense of life and habit. You have dreamt your youth in accordance with a self-contradicting notion of time: things happened that can never happen again, and yet they keep happening in your imagination – or, rather, in the cauldron of your deeper consciousness.

Childhood is a time of deeply explored topographies, especially for a dedicated memory-dreamer like C Fodoreanu, who obsesses on and aestheticizes the lake at the center of his boyhood. Lake Sacalaia is a notably deep, if otherwise typical, body of water in southeastern Europe, nestled in Cluj County in Romanian Transylvania. Fodoreanu's family and neighbors are Romanian by ethnicity and citizenship but have long shared the province with Hungarians and other peoples of the old Austrian Empire. Indeed, the region has seen many rulers, from Romans to Ottomans, barbarian chieftains to Habsburgs. Fodoreanu's parents lived under fascism; he was born under communism. But even as history may explain how people came to the shores of Lake Sacalaia, and perhaps even how an ancient Roman town, complete with basilica, came to sit on the lake's distant bottom, it cannot tell us how the lake's freshness and brightness, its mystery and depth, came to infuse Fodoreanu's reveries. That immanent water belongs to the boy, and the man who remembers him, alone. The lake – not ubiquitous portraits of Ceausescu nor the icons his father made for the Orthodox Church – was the murky, elusive heart of his pre-adult experience.

Of course, the legend of Sacalaia – or legends, ranging from that engulfed settlement to the presence of Ness-like pond monsters – fired the youth's imagination. But the lake's physical features, and its anecdotal presence in Fodoreanu's early life, are what he now tries to recapture with a variety of means that expand technically and formally on the medium of the photograph. He has, in fact, produced a whole series of photographic prints that are based on double-exposed negatives taken in his youth, with his first camera, featuring grainy silhouettes of Fodoreanu and his brother Mihai hard at play on Sacalaia's banks and across its surface.

Fodoreanu has since approached the lake and its environs from a variety of angles, techniques, flavors, and attitudes, never losing sight of the water, and never losing sight of the mystic phenomenon Sacalaia remains for him. He never really ruminates on the Roman village deep below; rather, he keeps the commonly held myths and mementos of his birthplace out of plain sight, as they pale in intensity beside the sharp but fleeting impressions Sacalaia afforded him and, for all intents and purposes, no one else. Fodoreanu's project is no tourist guide, but

neither is it a mere recapitulation of local lore. Fodoreanu's lake is his alone, and he makes art of it from the inside out --- from the dreamt to the dream to the act of dreaming.

The recollection of a dream calls for more than just words or images. For all his devotion to the camera, Fodoreanu conceives of his task as immersive, and presents each series of Sacalaiasmu as some sort of installation, some sort of spatial dynamic that embraces, even engulfs, the viewer just as the lake and its presence in his memory swallows Fodoreanu all over again. It is more than the dream he wants to share with us; it is the dreamt -- the lake -- *and* the condition of dreaming -- the tenebrous image, the decaying photographs from decades ago and the renewed color and movement he finds going back to the lake now. Latter-day visits allow Fodoreanu some contemplation of the surrounding landscape, the fertile plains of eastern Transylvania. He even creates a series of near-abstractions based on aerial photographs. These are not mere data; as dark and seemingly bottomless as the lake they surround, these seeming eruptions funnel vaguely toward a locus of memory, the heart of darkness at the core of an incredible lightness of being. C Fodoreanu does not document his dear Lake Sacalaia, he documents, and reawakens, his dreams of it.

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