

Carole Naggar

Chim's Children

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Dawid Szymin was born on November 20, 1911 to a middle-class Jewish family in Warsaw. The son of a Yiddish publisher, he would go on to fame as a photographer and founder of Magnum Photos as « Chim » and, later, under the Americanized name David Robert Seymour. His reportage, « Children of Europe, » on the millions of post-War refugees that he photographed in six countries in the late 1940s, would become his most famous collection of images. (1) It was the logical continuation of many other stories on children that he had done since the previous decade.

When Chim was born Warsaw had the largest Jewish population in Europe: out of the three and a half million Polish Jews, 340,000 lived in the capital. On Friday afternoons, every single business including the Stock Exchange closed. (2) It was a world, though, that would soon vanish, and its disappearance, including much of his own family, would profoundly affect Chim's professional and personal life.

The Szymins had a large apartment on Nowolipki Street, and Dawid's father's business was on the same street at number 7. Passionate for literature and encouraged by his writer friends such as Sholem Asch, Isaac Bashevis Singer, Sholem Aleichem, Leon Feiberg, Moshe Mandelman, Chaim Plotin, Anatol Stern, Abraham Sutskever, as well as the American Jewish writers Jonah Rosenfeld and Barukh Glazman, Benjamin Szymin became a co-owner of *Central*, a publishing house co-founded by Abraham Leib Shelkowitz, known as Ben Avigdor.

Central began to publish the best authors in Yiddish and Hebrew. At that time Yiddish was not only the linguistic thread of the community but a very lively vector

for identity and has been described by historian Henri Minczeles as « a place for countless battles on the spirit's battlefield. » (3)

Central also went on to publish a number of European classics such as Victor Hugo and Knut Hamsun (4)

The Szymin apartment was a meeting place for these writers and passionate discussions took place over dinner. « Dawid and his older sister Hala were brought up in an atmosphere of idealism and a quest for beauty and cultural values. » (5)

This peaceful atmosphere was shattered by the beginnings of World War I. When Warsaw was bombed the family moved to Minsk. But the political situation proved unstable there too and in 1916 they established themselves in Odessa where Dawid, who already spoke Polish and Yiddish, learned Russian via immersion in a public school. Soon, Odessa was engulfed in a civil war. In 1918 when Poland acceded to independence the Szymin family was able to move back to Warsaw. Meanwhile *Central's* reputation grew with its catalogue that, by the eve of World War II, would contain more than 100 titles.

In January 1920 Dawid enrolled at the Boys Gymnasium of the Ascolah Society. The school report of his last year, May 1929, suggests a mediocre student. He was more interested in piano and chess than in studying and worked just enough to pass his « maturity » exam. (6)

The Szymins spend their summers in Otwock at Pensjonat Zacheta, a family-owned bed-and-breakfast run by his aunt with his mother Regina's help. Otwock was a small resort 15 miles southeast of Warsaw, connected to the capital by an electric train. Known for its healthy climate, it had a beautiful landscape of pine forests and sand dunes and a Jewish community of about 12,000 people.

Dawid's destiny seemed to be already determined: his father wanted him to work in the family business. In 1929 he enrolled him in the *Staatliche Akademie für*

Graphische Kunst und Buchgewerbe (The Graphic Art and Book Arts Academy) in Leipzig where he arrived in early October, just a few days after the huge September 22 demonstrations against fascism.

The school was one of the most renowned in Europe , and over the years many had come to study there , including Walter Peterhans, who went on to create the photography course at the Dessau Bauhaus, and René Zuber, who later became a well-known photographer in Paris as well as a friend of André Kertész. It was also Dawid's first exposure to an international community: the students came from as far as Turkey, China, Japan and the United States. During the two years of his studies, Szymin learnt to use the most up-to-date techniques of typography (with famed Jan Tschichold as his teacher), etching and photo-reproduction in book-making, including color reproduction .(7)

The school was also where he developed his interest in photography, with Walter Peterhans and Hugo Erfurth as his teachers. Most importantly, Lazlo Moholy-Nagy , then the head of the Dessau Bauhaus, came once a week to teach students the techniques of photo-collage. Moholy-Nagy's influence on Szymin was profound and could be observed only two years later in the first photographs he took in Paris, where the dynamic geometric patterns, the strong light and shadows in opposition, the bird's-eye views and close-ups all reflected Moholy's teachings. He was also fascinated by the posters of Cassandre, Colin and other French masters.

A train ride to Stuttgart took him to *Film Und Foto*, the most extensive international photography exhibition of the time. There was much to discover, including photographers based in Paris such as Atget, Man Ray, Berenice Abbott, Florence Henri, André Kertész, Germaine Krull, Eli Lotar and Maurice Tabard.

Szymin concluded his studies in February 1931 and returned to Warsaw. But he found that since his departure economic and political conditions had taken a turn for the worse. Fascism and anti-semitism were on the rise, boycotts and attacks on

Jewish businesses a frequent occurrence. His community, which once had a cultural impact comparable with that of the Jewish community in New York City today, now felt frightened, vulnerable and powerless. Many wanted to emigrate but quotas were strict. Szymin wanted to escape the looming fate of his generation, which has been called « the no-future generation.»

With his family's financial help he decided to enroll at the Sorbonne in Paris for a degree in Science with a major in advanced chemistry and physics. He arrived in Paris in the Spring of 1932. (8) But realizing how bad his family's financial situation had become, Szymin decided to support himself and started a collaboration as a correspondent with *Ruan*, a photo agency in Warsaw dedicated to news and advertising, and he began to shoot book illustrations.

The following year he contacted a friend of the family, David Rappaport, who owned a small photo agency, *Agence Rapp*. (9) From the agency he borrowed a Vidom, a 35-mm camera, and soon became a photo-reporter, aided by the technical knowledge he had acquired in Leipzig. In his first Paris photographs Szymin is drawn to the vulnerable and the dispossessed: beggars, clochards, street kids, scrap metal workers, shantytowns on the outskirts of Paris. Attracted to the more traditional trades—maybe because they were closer to his street life experience in Warsaw—he also photographed welders, carpenters and butchers in Les Halles, flea market vendors, shipyard workers. In the Marais he found scenes reminiscent of the Warsaw ghetto and also photographed the Jewish social services.

In Spring of 1933, one year after he had arrived in Paris, he wrote Ewa, a childhood friend who was living in Warsaw : « Many things have changed. I work, I run around, I see fascinating things, I am learning to know Paris, I am starting to be part of it... As you know I am not working on the reproductions (lithographs) anymore, I am a reporter, or more precisely, a photoreporter. Recently I have worked on a very interesting reportage about night workers. It has kept me busy for the last two weeks, it needs a lot of preparation, obtaining information, looking for contacts

with all sorts of people with diverse occupations. I have done a reportage on taxi drivers at night, in a garage, my other subjects were construction workers in the subway, a bakery, a printing press.

« Last night I have spent in Les Halles, I brought two friends with me (it is unpleasant to work alone at night and there are always people who want to join me for such an adventure). It was extremely interesting : in the meat-packing district they gave us a triumphant reception with wine...They let us come into the huge cold rooms. And then I photographed the vegetables. I had all sorts of fascinating adventures but I am too tired now, after a sleepless night, to describe the scent of this unique experience to you. In two weeks I am going to the north for a few days. I have an assignment on miners' life, all expenses paid! » (10)

He sold pictures to *Paris-Soir*, *Ce Soir* and *Voilà*, and to match his new life chose a new name, « Chim, » for his byline. Shorter and easier to pronounce in a French context, « Chim » also evokes his former name while erasing his Jewishness. It symbolizes the distance he was beginning to take from his youth in Warsaw and his family, as well as his identification with a new milieu, both international and secular, as he turned towards the values of socialism and humanism. In spite of any nostalgia that remained, it becomes clear that his life is now in Paris.

In December, 1933 he wrote Ewa : « Socially, I am moving toward new circles, I am moving away from the Polish comrades. I am more among photographers, people who think, who are interested in the same problems as I am. However I am still a foreigner and I miss the togetherness of our Polish group. I have met a German girl who has become rather well-known in the French press and she feels the same. We are trying to join a kind of organization of revolutionary photographers, maybe that will create a circle of good people...» (11)

It is probably at a meeting of that organization, the AEAR (Association des Ecrivains et Artistes Révolutionnaires) that Chim and Henri Cartier-Bresson met, although

there are also stories of them meeting on a bus. Chim introduced Cartier-Bresson to Hungarian emigré Robert Capa, whom Chim had met earlier that year at the Café du Dôme in Montparnasse, and the three struck up a friendship. Besides their passion for photography, they shared a similar political orientation, their love of women and of good times—from bars and pinball games to good restaurants, nightclubs and the races.

It is in the Spring of 1934 that Chim's career was really launched, when he was hired as a full-time reporter by the weekly magazine *Regards*. The large-format magazine saw itself as a platform with a mission to educate and instruct French workers. Apart from Chim, photographers included Cartier-Bresson, Capa, Gerda Taro and Brassai. Egon Erwin Kisch, a famous reporter and one of the magazine's contributors, thus defined photo-reportage : « Nothing is more amazing than the simple truth, nothing is more exotic than our own surroundings, nothing is more fantastic in effect than objective description. And nothing is more remarkable than the time in which we live. » (12) Photography might be truthful but it has never been neutral; most photographers at the time saw it as a means to express their feelings and their point of view, and to redress social inequality. They were driven by the hope of changing the world while they recorded it.

During the next two years Chim, soon dubbed « Special Correspondent », authored a number of reportages focusing on French social life. One of them is on street kids in Marseille, in the poor *Panier* neighborhood near Marseille's harbor. (13) This is the first time that he focused on disfranchised children and it is immediately apparent how well he relates to them. We see here some of the same qualities that will be at work fourteen years later in his famous work on children after the Second World War.

Thus Chim joined and became a pioneer in a new age of photojournalism, where photographers work in 35mm with more light-sensitive films, close to the action, often using the new Leica that has just come on the market. However the integrity of

the photograph as we know it today is not respected at *Regards* where, as in most magazines of the time, photographs are seen less as having their own visual language than as a means to an end: they are casually cut up in circles or trapezoids, superimposed, partly obscured by titles or columns of text, mounted together as in a scrambled visual puzzle.

Despite the final presentation of some of the photographs, *Regards* is truly the place of Chim's apprenticeship, where he developed a specific style and learned journalistic techniques : how to make background checks, how to use existing lighting, how to tell a concise story in pictures, how to best collaborate with a writer. In contrast with Cartier-Bresson, Chim never was a « decisive moment » proponent believing in the importance of the fractional second, and his style best asserts itself in sequences of photographs rather than individual pictures.

In the Spring of 1936 Chim was sent to Spain as « Special Correspondent » for *Regards*, and, together with Robert Capa and Gerda Taro, covered the Spanish Civil War for the thousand days of its duration. Through the spring and summer he traveled all over the Spanish territory, making pictures such as one of a mother nursing while she listens to a socialist deputy's speech, will become icons of the war along with Capa's famous « Falling Soldier .»

Unlike most war correspondents, Chim not only photographed moments of action but also tried to understand the war's causes and its repercussions. This was the first war where civilian populations were consciously targeted, and he was intent on capturing the lives of women and children behind the front lines and in the bombed cities, as well as the relationships between the army and civilian populations.

His reportages on children were numerous. For example, in August of 1936 (14) he photographed a Madrid orphanage, capturing intimate, close-up scenes of the children's everyday life as they eat or make the Republican salute and sing songs, marching through the hallways. It is obvious that he was well liked and accepted by

the children, who even let him photograph while showering. In September he photographed scouts outside the Palacio de los Duques de Osuna in Toledo, and again the scenes are playful and relaxed: children are reading Mickey Mouse cartoons, riding a Sphinx-shaped stone sculpture or eating at communal tables. (15)

But as the war progressed Chim's photographs of children lost their happy, playful tone as he depicted refugees who had fled the bombed cities of Sevilla and Irun to a stadium covered in rows of tables and beds on the hillside of Monjuich in Barcelona's hills. (16) The following January he made images of children in a Basque village classroom who were, despite the dire situation, concentrating on their studies. Among the ruins of Gijon in the Asturias he made an iconic photograph of the war: two children, one wearing a helmet, playing in the rubble.(17) In Minorca, frightened children are waiting out the bombs in an underground shelter. (18)

His last story of the Civil War, a melancholy one, was published early in 1939 when, between January 27 and February 10, approximately a half-million Spaniards retreated into France. Families pushing two-wheeled carts piled high with mattresses, utensils and dolls covered the roads from Barcelona to Port Bou. In Chim's photographs, long columns of grim refugees, often whole families, bundled up in wool covers against the bitter cold, snaking through the Perthus Pass, their figures blurred by the fog. (19) Chim's profound sadness and disenchantment is almost palpable in those images, the last of his 30-month coverage of the Spanish Civil War.

In 1939, the Republican Government in exile arranged for the transfer of 150,000 refugees to Mexico and South America, the only countries that agreed to take them. *Match* sent Chim and George Soria on a reportage aboard the SS Sinaia, the boat that will transport 1,600 Republican refugees to Vera Cruz, Mexico. They are among the few non-Spaniards aboard as the ship leaves Sète. During the three-week trip via Madeira and Puerto Rico, Chim first photographed Europe as it disappeared behind them with the last glimpses of Gibraltar while many of the refugees stood in silence,

not knowing if they would ever return. Those on board included many of the political intelligentsia whose lives in France were most at risk as well as cultural activists, politicians, workers and peasants, some of them with their whole families.

He photographed all aspects of life aboard, from the everyday meals and feeding of small children, to sleep and cultural evenings of music, chess or theater, as well as the birth of the first child aboard, Susanna Sinaia del Mar, named after Susana Gamboa whose husband had helped organize the transport. (20)

After a rigorous training period, during World War II Chim worked as an interpreter of aerial photographs in Medmenham, near London. Like the code breakers, interpreters played a key role in the Allied victory. No attack could take place without their preparatory work; they did the groundwork for the Normandy landings. Promoted to lieutenant, Chim received a Bronze medal and, with his new American citizenship, the name of David Robert Seymour.(21)

On May 22, 1947, Seymour became a co-founder of the cooperative Magnum Photos, together with Robert Capa, Henri Cartier-Bresson and George Rodger. It was to be a cooperative that would be run by and for the photographers, now recognized as full authors who would think up their own stories and own their copyrights. Magnum Photos still exists today, representing some sixty-five of the best contemporary photographers.

Then, on March 10, 1948, Chim received a telegram from John Grierson, Deputy Director of UNICEF: “when are you returning paris. most anxious discuss immediate photographic journey to eastern european countries grierson” (22)

Immediately Chim was assigned as a “special consultant « to photograph the condition of European children who survived World War II, and to show UNICEF in action as it provided 13 million children with bare necessities such as powdered milk, soup and shoes, and vaccinations against tuberculosis and other diseases.

The UNICEF assignment that Chim had accepted soon became a labor of love: instead of his usual \$100-a-day fee, he accepted \$2,600 for a job that would take over three months and bring him to six countries (Germany, Austria, Greece, Hungary, Italy and Poland). Not only did he shoot 257 rolls of film—considerably more than the assignment required—but he went beyond mere illustration of UNICEF’s work and succeeded in creating a deeper, broader portrait of the children. (23)

As always, they were the most vulnerable victims of the conflict that had raged for six years. Many of them had known nothing but war. The numbers were staggering: 1,700,000 orphans in Poland, with 100,000 in Warsaw alone; 50,000 in Czechoslovakia, 200,000 in Hungary with an additional one million homeless children. In Greece, one out of every eight children was an orphan. There were 40,000 *sciuscita*, or street children, in Milan, 65,000 in Rome and 75,000 in Naples, part of the 3 million homeless children in Italy. (24)

The abandoned children had spent their first years in underground shelters, bombed streets, ghettos on fire, refugee trains, and concentration camps. They had grown up in a world of fear. Living mostly in groups, many were active in the black market and pilfered in order to live. The girls frequently had no other choice than to sell cigarettes or turn to prostitution. Chim, using the voice of a child in his “Letter to a grown-up,” reminds us that we should not pass judgment on the children: “The day-to-day struggle for individual survival was our book of morals. Do not be surprised, then, by what we are today.” (25)

In Germany, notably in Essen and Berlin, Seymour photographed children living in underground cellars and bunkers in the midst of cities reduced to ruins. A family of eight might share a single room. Children are in tatters, and often barefoot. On a photograph of a man walking with his children in front of the ruined Brandenburg gate, the photographer’s shadow is visible on the ground. He also

photographed Red Cross employees distributing food to children. In one of his most striking pictures, a young woman pushes a baby carriage in the midst of the ruins of Essen. A soft light falls on the carriage. The contrast between the peaceful, sleeping baby in his white blankets in the foreground and the darkened background of soot, smoke and ruins is so strong that the image almost seems like a photomontage. Seymour's equanimity is obvious in the pictures: far from carrying a grudge against Germany, he is able to perceive and convey the fate of children as victims within the broader context of the war.

In Austria, Seymour covers the UNICEF food program: everyday, the organization cooks one hundred thousand hot lunches for children—a meat and vegetable soup—while the government distributes bread. It is obvious right away that Seymour's photographs go beyond his assignment's parameters. He is trying to build and transmit a general picture of childhood after the war, transcending geographic details to articulate their generalized plight. He excels at portraying emotions and these shine through the children's faces from one picture to the next, describing lives pared down to the necessities of survival.

In Vienna, in an old military arsenal transformed into a camp for displaced persons from Sudetenland, he photographs the orphans' asleep in lined-up wooden beds that look like troughs; there is another picture of five children who sleep together on the ground, sharing a blanket. At meal time a young girl in a drab, oversized blouse is sitting, with her right elbow on a wooden table, her left hand clutching a chunk of bread. An oblique ray of light falls on her face, her hand and the bread, which she holds without bringing it to her mouth; it is as if she is suffering from a hunger that no food could possibly satisfy. Her dreamy, haunted expression becomes a symbol of so many, going beyond an individual portrait.

Another place where Seymour has worked is hospitals and clinics. In Vienna, tuberculosis cases have grown by 50% after the war. In a hospital for children with tuberculosis, in the Bellevue neighborhood, he made a remarkable portrait of a small girl with tuberculosis of the spine. Standing between two beds against which

she leans a bit with the tip of her fingers, she wears a laced surgical corset. But what Seymour has caught is her incredibly luminous smile, her improbable joy.

In a photograph taken in a bird's-eye view just before food distribution in a school, a crowd of children seems to overflow the frame, each holding towards us an empty enameled cup. The repetition of this same gesture and the same worried expression on the children's faces has a claustrophobic intensity.

Beyond necessities such as food, health and sleep, Seymour photographs the children's tentative games. In a Vienna kindergarden, he focuses on a group of small girls sitting on the floor under high windows. Floods of light illuminate their faces and the wooden floor. Grimacing in worry, unable to relax, the girls hold onto primitive dolls made of rags as if to a lifeline. It seems as if the dolls are the children's mothers, not the other way around. Even playing seems fraught with a heavy weight. Extreme seriousness and concentration is also the expression on the face of a young boy Seymour photographed in the ruins of Favoriten, a workmen neighborhood: with pieces of wood and cardboard, the boy is building an Indian village on top of the large rubble of a destroyed wall. Werner Bischof, who would become his colleague at Magnum Photos, photographed a very similar scene three years earlier in Freiburg, Germany. (26)

Sometimes it is the indirect view that works best, as when Seymour photographs objects instead of faces in postwar Europe. One of the things that children desperately needed was shoes, but because of the total lack of leather, most school children go barefoot. He photographed, as a still life, a pile of second-hand shoes, full of holes, donated from Switzerland and Sweden.

Greece, which had been occupied first by the Italians and then by the Germans, and where a fierce partisan resistance had occurred, was the country next visited by Seymour. Children there were victims not only of World War II but of a civil war that was tearing their country apart. In 1948, 28,000 children were evacuated for

their protection and sent either to the island of Leos, or to several Eastern European countries. In some of his most moving images, groups of children are boarding the ship Samos, sleeping on deck or reading letters from home.

Seymour worked in Athens and in the Saloniki region, where most schools had been evacuated and occupied by troops. In Chortiatis, a mountain village near Saloniki burnt down by the Germans in retaliation, school was held in a church and children did their gymnastics outdoors, in front of their burnt-out school. Riding a donkey, Seymour went to the mountain village of Oxia, where he brought a first pair of shoes to the only child who had stayed in the village . He wrote : "For a long time four-year old Elefteria just stared at the new shoes. Finally, her grandmother was allowed to put them on her feet. Then the ice was broken. Elefteria ran through the village, laughing with delight. Her happiness was absolutely perfect." (27) His sequence of photographs are like a short film that describe Elefteria's story. It is the progression and the accumulation of moments that here best told the story.

Seymour's next trip was to Italy where he focused on the phenomenon of street children and their survival either outside or inside the system. In Naples alone there were 75,000 street children, living mostly in groups, and active in the black market or pilfering in order to survive. The girls frequently had no choice but to sell cigarettes or become prostitutes. Many kids, such as those he photographed in Monte Cassino, made a living by collecting shrapnel that they resold to scrap metal buyers, sometimes losing limbs in the process.

Some of his best pictures were taken at the Albergo dei Poveri. At the end of the war, the Albergo, a palatial building founded in 1752 by King Charles III of Naples and Sicily, was turned into a reformatory where young vagrants, prostitutes and thieves were placed by order of the Juvenile Court. Boys and girls were kept in separate buildings, and the girls were taught embroidery by Catholic nuns, who saw this type of work as educational and redemptive.

On his assignment, Chim used a 35mm Leica and a medium-format Rollei. Working with the Leica, he followed the girls at recess to the yard, where they joined in a ring, then sat in a circle under the care of a nun wearing a full habit. Using his Rollei, he photographed the boys' orchestra and gymnastics session, and the children lined up in rows, as if –somewhat ironically—for a family portrait. In the room where the girls were sewing, Chim was drawn towards the oldest, an adolescent. According to the caption he provided, she had been raped, but subsequent captions often mistakenly identify her as 'a young prostitute.

Her beautiful face bears a haunted expression; a patch of light rests on her body as well as her embroidery, and briefly illuminates her left cheek. Behind her, a soiled wall marked with scratches speaks of the Palace's lost splendour. The shot is slightly fuzzy and goes beyond literal documentatio with a dreamlike quality. From each square of image to the next, we can now follow Chim as he walked around the room, slowly, silently, undoubtedly with his cat-like movements, exploring one face after another in tight frames. Though he was far from tall, he must have crouched to be at the children's height.

One photograph shows the girls seated in rows, as if in a classroom, clothed in loose and drab uniforms. Except for this frame, Chim chose to isolate his subjects, as if to echo their own solitude and alienation. None of them grins, but they return the photographer's attentive gaze with seriousness and maybe a hint of hope, perhaps feeling that they have been seen outside a penal system, recognized and respectfully singled out as individuals. (28)

In Rome some of Seymour's most poignant pictures were taken at the Villa Savoia, an institution taking care of children maimed by war, accidents, playing with war's surplus ammunition, etc.. It is remarkable that in his pictures a group of boys who have lost limbs are shown happily playing ball in the sunshine, while a closeup on a blind boy without arms shows his extreme concentration as he reads a book with his lips. Without the captions, we would not know that he has no arms: Seymour has

focused on the act of reading as redemptive. It is typical of him to suggest rather than demonstrate, and to focus on the positive aspects of the children's lives, the fact that they are trying to take charge, rather than simply showing them as victims.

In Hungary Seymour focused especially on social experiments involving children and teenagers. In a high school in Seged, the teachers who have no lab equipment for their physics and chemistry classes devised substitutes such as old light bulbs or empty ink bottles for containers. On a home-made scale, weights are made from pieces of wire and bottles are used for Bunsen burners.

Chim photographed the intensity of concentration on the children's faces: they are intent on making up for the years they have lost in the war and are completely focused on their studies. The town of Hajduhadhaza is the seat of an experiment in autonomy: 350 boys and girls, orphans, vagabond or delinquent are trying to live in a self-sufficient way in a camp that they consider home. They elect their own government, a mayor and a municipal council, cultivate the land, take care of their animals, go to school and learn a trade with professional instructors. Again, Chim's images show the children in their workplace, such as carpentry or shoe-making workshops, agricultural work or open-air classes.

When photographing orphaned Jewish children, often traumatized camp survivors, Chim worked in several different locations. In Warsaw he found out that at the edge of the Jewish ghetto, entirely razed by the Germans, a high school was still standing. It was the only intact building in the ghetto. He followed the students in their dark uniforms as they walked on the path along the ruins; they stopped for an informal group portrait and an image of children climbing on building ruins. He also visited a school for mentally disturbed children, many of them concentration camp survivors, as their teachers asked them to draw their houses with chalk on a blackboard as a way to assess their progress. As we know from pictures on Seymour's contact sheet, several children, including Genia and Woytek, composed articulate, balanced drawings: houses have roofs, families are intact and gardens are full of flowers. But

not so for Terezka: all she can come up with is an inchoate scrawl, the expression of her deep trauma. The expression in her haunted eyes, pure fear and confusion, is unforgettable.

In Otwock, Semour photographed at Dom Diecka, an orphanage for Jewish children. The institution had taken over the building of the Pensjonat Zacheta, owned by his aunt and that his parents had helped to run. This is where he spent his summers as a child. In this emotionally charged context, he photographed the children's games in the yard and made some « family portraits ,» aligning them in the garden. We can only guess at his deep emotions as he went back to this place of easy summer life to confirm his parents' death and witness the destruction of his past.

He also photographed at the Zofiowka Sanatorium, a former psychiatric institution turned into a hospital for tubercular diseases. He photographed children doing gymnastics on the terrace. Working from a high floor, he played around with the geometrical arrangements of the children's bodies and their shadows on the floor tiles. He also worked in the big dining room while they were having meals at the long tables. These pictures recall those of refugee children taken at the Monjuic stadium in Barcelona during the Spanish Civil War.

In 1948 Chim's goal, as demonstrated in the text below—one of his rare commentaries on his own photographs—makes clear his own take on the project, both in a practical and spiritual sense:

“Everywhere I went, I saw children express the dream of a full and peaceful life, in the ruins of their parents' world. But to give this world back to them—helping them understand and work through the trauma they experienced, with a cure for body and soul—this represents a challenge never encountered before.” (29)

With his photographs, Chim may have been hoping to both express the childrens' plea, and, in his own way, to contribute to a “cure for body and soul” by raising the

public's consciousness. It is as if he was attempting to make himself whole, as well as making them whole, through the photograph, as if the photograph was a form of *Tikkum Olam*, a mending of the world.

This trip will be Chim's last to Eastern Europe and the war's territory. Two years later he will settle in Italy, and, although a Polish Jew, choose to call himself « a Mediterranean ». He must have hoped that the sun of Greece and Italy would melt away the shadows of his past.

In 1956, at the time of the Hungarian Revolution, he chooses not to go there and tells a close friend, Judith Friedberg, that he « still does not feel ready to return to that part of the world. » (30)

The last letter that he and his sister received from their parents was dated from the end of 1941. On August 19, 1942, the Germans shot most of the Jews of Otwock living in the ghetto, and brought the others by train transport to the Treblinka concentration camp. By the end of the war, Chim had lost hope that he would ever see his parents and Polish friends again.

When in 1948 he went back to Eastern Europe, and especially to Poland, he was walking through the mined territory of his destroyed memory. While in Paris he had distanced himself from his Jewish identity ; but now he was, like those he photographed, an orphan and a survivor. It is this unconscious recognition between the photographer and his subjects that floods these faces and, sixty-five years after the photographs were taken, gives them their still poignant appeal.. Chim's photographs of the children are his family album. This spiritual family will remain his only one: the man who loved children will never have any of his own.

A few years later in 1956 Chim was killed at the Suez Canal by an Egyptian machine-gunner. He would die in search of photographs after the ceasefire of the Israeli-Egyptian war, a last casualty.

Carole Naggar

Notes

- (1) Some of his images were published in the UNESCO 1949 publication « Children of Europe ». In 2013, I published « Chim's Children of War » (Umbrage) with additional, unseen or rarely seen images chosen from his archive.
- (2) Jewish virtual library, YVO, New York.
- (3) Henri Minczeles, *Une histoire des Juifs de Pologne: Religion, Culture, Politique*, Paris, Fondation pour la Shoah, 2006
- (4) The Ben Shneiderman Archive, Bethesda, Maryland
- (5) Quote from an unknown friend of the Szymin family at Chim's memorial, New York, November 1956. The Ben Shneiderman Archive, Bethesda, Maryland.
- (6) Chim's school papers, Ben Shneiderman Archive, Bethesda, Maryland.
- (7) Though the building was destroyed during World War 2, the Akademie archive and the archives of the City of Leipzig have kept Chim's grades as well as the names of his teacher. See also Archives of the Museum for Geschichte der Stadt Leipzig (Historical Museum of the City of Leipzig).
- (8) The Ben Shneiderman Archive Bethesda, Maryland
- (9) His press card can be seen on the site "davidseymour.com" in the "Archive" section.
- (10) Letter to Ewa, spring 1933, davidseymour.com, Archive section
- (11) Letter to Ewa, summer 1934, davidseymour.com, Archive section
- (12) Quoted by Christopher Phillips in pamphlet of exhibition « David Seymour (Chim): The Early Years, 1933–1939”, International Center of Photography, New York, November 14,1986- January 11, 1987

- (13) “Marius, fils de Marseille”, *Regards*, October 19, 26, and November 2, with text by Louis Gazagnaire.
- (14) See “The Mexican Suitcase”, ICP/Steidl 2010, “Chim, Madrid, August/September 1936”, ms 49, frames 009 to 031.
- (15) See “The Mexican Suitcase”, ICP/Steidl 2010, Toledo, September 1936, from ms50, frames 021 to 046.
- (16) Ibidem, ms 46,47,48, frames 035 to 082, and *Regards* #150, November 26, 1936 “Heures tragiques de Madrid”, with text by A.Soullilou.
- (17) Ibidem, ms 25, Gijon, February 1937, pp.135-136.
- (18) “Island Stronghold Defies Franco”, in *Weekly Illustrated*, December 31, 1938 and “Minorque Veille”, *Regards*, Feb.9, 1939
- (19) in *Regards*, Feb.2, 1939, “Qu’ils soient en France les bienvenus.” and *Ce Soir*, Jan.30, “Cortège de souffrance à nos frontières”.
- (20) In *Ce Soir*, Aug 15, 1939 “L’inoubliable accueil de Vera-Cruz”, *Regards*, August 17 “Ceux qui sont partis”, August 19, *Illustrated* “Mexico-Bound With Refugees” and *Life*, July 17, 1939, text by Hamilton Fish Armstrong.
- (21) davidseymour.com, in Archive section.
- (22) The Ben Shneiderman Archive, Bethesda, Maryland.
- (23) The UNESCO Courier, February 1949, Vol 2, number 1: “The Children of Europe, a UNESCO Photo Story”, pp.5-9
- (24) Ibidem
- (25) Ibidem
- (26) See magnumphotos.com Werner Bischof, “Boy playing in the bombed city of Freiburg am Breisgau, 1945”.

- (27) Seymour's captions in Magnum Photos New York office.
- (28) See Carole Naggar "Girl Sewing" in Magnum Contact Sheets, edited by Kristen Lubben, Thames and Hudson, London, 2011
- (29) In the UNESCO Courier, February 1949, Vol 2, number 1 : "The Children of Europe, a UNESCO Photo Story", pp.5-9
- (30) Letter from Judith Friedberg to Inge Bondi, December 1, 1956. Magnum Foundation Archive, New York, gift from Inge Bondi.

Carole Naggar

Born in Egypt in 1951, Carole Naggar has lived in Paris until 1987, when she moved to New York. In France she worked as a cultural journalist, writer and curator, authoring a number of books and catalogues among which the first *Dictionnaire des Photographes* (Dictionary of Photographers, Le Seuil, 1982). After moving to the US Naggar continued her work as a poet, artist and photography historian. Among her recent publications are *Werner Bischof: Carnets de Route* (Delpire, 2008) *David Seymour Chim* (Photopoche, 2011) and *Christer Stromholm : Postscriptum* (Max Ström, 2012). She is a regular contributor to *Aperture* magazine (texts on Marc Garanger, Eikoh Hosoe, Robert Doisneau, Willy Ronis, Jean Depara and others) and to *TimeLightBox* (online publication). Her book *Chim : Children of War* has been published in April 2013 and her lead essay on Chim appears in the ICP retrospective catalogue *We Went Back* (January 2013). She is currently at work on Chim's biography.