This book draws on a wide range of theoretical perspectives – from Chaney and Bourdieu to Berger, Sontag and Bakhtin – and from ideas about nostalgia to theories of consumption, nation, and ethnicity. The ethnographic detail in each chapter is impressive, and in my view is the real core of the book. It is a resource which will be widely used by Russian, Soviet and postsocialist specialists, by anthropologists, sociologists and geographers, and by anyone interested in cultural studies, material culture and consumption, and place and ethnicity.

—Dr. Frances Pine, Goldsmiths, University of London

Lifestyle in Siberia and the Russian North breaks new ground by exploring the concept of lifestyle from a distinctly anthropological perspective. Showcasing the collective work of ten experienced scholars in the field, the book goes beyond concepts of tradition that have often been the focus of previous research, to explain how political, economic and technological changes in Russia have created a wide range of new possibilities and constraints in the pursuit of different ways of life.

Each contribution is drawn from meticulous first-hand field research, and the authors engage with theoretical questions such as whether and how the concept of lifestyle can be extended beyond its conventionally urban, Euro-American context and employed in a markedly different setting. Lifestyle in Siberia and the Russian North builds on the contributors' clear commitment to diversifying the field and providing a novel and invaluable insight into this vast and dynamic region.

This book provides inspiring reading for students and teachers of Anthropology, Sociology and Cultural Studies and for anyone interested in Russia and its regions. By providing ethnographic case studies, it is also a useful basis for teaching anthropological methods and concepts, both at graduate and undergraduate level. Rigorous and innovative, it marks an important contribution to the study of Siberia and the Russian North.

As with all Open Book publications, this entire book is available to read for free on the publisher's website. Printed and digital editions, together with supplementary digital material, can also be found at www.openbookpublishers.com.
This chapter explores the potential of the visual material in the study of lifestyles. It revisits one of the two fundamental questions of this volume: what is the mutual relation between changing technology and infrastructure on one hand, and lifestyles as exposed by changing visual forms of self-presentation on the other? The main task is an analysis of photographs that the research team compiled through photo elicitation interviews. The capacity of the photo elicitation method lies in the ways the photographs — concurrently visual records, mnemonic devices, sensory stimuli, representations of the past, and sites of interaction with the researcher — stimulate individuals to consider and narrate their life experience. What will emerge from this analysis is a conspicuous difference between the notion of individual integrity conceived of as happiness and depicted by the photographs, and the expression of incompleteness in the verbal accounts in the process of interviewing. The

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impact of changing technology on visual representations of happiness is doubtless; nevertheless, conventions and aesthetic standards have a proven tenacity in the visual characteristics under consideration, such as composition, the size of the face in relation to the overall size of the picture, and the height of the horizon.

On the notion of happiness

The first image he told me about was of three children on the road in Iceland in 1965. [...] He said that for him it was an image of happiness and also that he had tried several times to link it to other images but it never worked. He wrote me: ‘One day I will have to put it all alone at the beginning of the film with a long piece of black leader. If they don’t see happiness in the picture, at least they’ll see the black.

Chris Marker, *Sans Soleil* (1983: 00:00:42-00:01:14)

In describing the North of Russia, Siberia, and the Far East, outsiders would without hesitation use the word “desolate”, while locals would sometimes with sarcasm, sometimes with sincere worries, stick to the word “dull” as in the oft-heard statement, “there is nothing to do there” (*tam delat’ nechego*). When it comes to statistics, Siberia seems to be a gloomy place indeed: life expectancy at birth is markedly below the world average; tuberculosis rates are comparatively high; violent deaths (caused by accidents, suicide, or homicide) occur on a regular basis; alcoholism is comparatively widespread and often calls forth or aggravates the phenomena just mentioned. These worrying trends have been documented and discussed in a number of publications.

Such an unsettling image is more likely to be found in rural indigenous communities, but the urban or non-indigenous population is not completely spared of it either. I remember two photos that a local woman showed me, with the words I am paraphrasing here: “Would you reckon that these two snapshots depict the same man?”

One photograph portrayed a handsome young Russian soldier during his military service; the other taken about 25 years later, showed an

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2 For simplicity, I shall use the term Siberia from now on for all three geographic names.

alcoholic who looked much older than he actually was when the photo was taken. “This is my relative. You see how Chukotka has changed him!” Such fragments of personal experience confirm and even surpass the diagnosis mentioned above.

The more I think of my field site, the more names of my informants who died tragically or violently come to my mind. When I think of Zhenia, a Yupik Eskimo woman in her early twenties who committed suicide in 2012, I think of her subtle smile. I have neither the right to speak for her on this occasion, nor do I equate a smile with happiness, but I am sure that despite Zhenia’s discomfort with this world, she must have experienced happiness in her life, even if only a tiny ray of it. For the sake of these bits and pieces of good which people sense, define for themselves, reflect, try to remember, and sometimes fail to recall in the critical moments of unease, I shall look at the evidence of happiness in Siberian lives and make sense of it anthropologically. Such an attempt shall not be taken as escapism from the tensions that affect so many people’s lives. On the contrary — and here I agree with Barbara Rose Johnston et al. (2012) — it shall reveal how happiness as a sensory force may provoke a transformation of human lives in order to (re-)define, sustain, fulfil, and/or dream of what one should be, wants to be, and can afford (or manage) to be (see the Appendix to this volume).

In this sense, happiness in social terms trespasses on its linguistic origin, the “linguistic world-picture” as Al’bert Baiburin and Alexandra Piir (2009: 218) put it. For instance, the Russian word schastie implies three meanings: “the complete fulfilment of someone’s wishes” (Dal’, in Baiburin & Piir 2009: 217–18), “lucky chance”, and a metaphysical “kind fate” (Baiburin & Piir 2009: 218), limited in stock and destined. The word for happiness in Sakha language — d’ol — resembles the first two Russian meanings, “the fulfilment of a wish” and “unexpected success” (Afanas’ev et al. 1994: 65), but a broader interpretation includes such word categories as happiness-child, happiness-work, or happiness-love (Yemelianov, 1965: 213); the Central Siberian Yupik language does not contain the term happiness as such but related meanings can be formed from the corresponding roots: quyallek — joy (the root quay — to be glad), nunakilleq — pleasure or satisfaction (the root nunaki — to feel pleasure), and kentalnguq — someone who is lucky in something, e.g.
hunting or gambling (*kenta* — root for luck and lucky person). The Yupik stories collected by Georgii A. Menovshchikov (1969) clearly show the presence of dreams of happiness. The protagonists wish to have a decent family, good health, capable children, an abundance of food, comfort, security, and social justice. We could go on with the diverse linguistic meanings present in our Siberian field sites; the key categories are similar. However, it is the current social meaning of the term “happiness” which is the focus of our attention.

In a social context, happiness is part of an individual lifestyle project, its “architect” and “companion”, and sometimes its ultimate goal. We seek to do what we think will make us happy, even if it does not necessarily end up this way. Happiness is woven into a common braid of meanings with aspirations, expectations, values, and choices that are manifest in individual self-formation. Since self-formation would not be possible without making *personal* choices in a particular *social* setting with all its prospects and limitations, happiness would not be achievable, or at least dream-able, without rendering oneself to the interaction between what one imagines choosing, what choice one actually makes, and what in the given circumstances is affordable to be chosen and, if possible, accomplished at the end of the day.

When people reflect lifestyles, they do so through a prism of a certain *durée*, pointing out at least some adversities and challenges, major turning points, and significant moments. Although the importance of life (as perceived by the individual) does not necessarily equal happiness, the former conditions the latter. While significant moments might be unhappy, full of tension, challenge, and struggle (e.g. failure at university exams, loss of the reindeer herd, marital infidelity, etc.), happy moments *cannot* be insignificant (e.g. the birth of a child, falling in love, successful hunt, etc.).

In this study, I am interested in how people in Siberia define happiness, what is common in the awareness of choice-making which is to sustain the achievement of happiness, and how happiness is expressed in order to transgress individual experience and be shared within the community. I shall examine the phenomenon in the context of social transformation, hence my major concern: how do changing

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4 Linguistic assistance was kindly provided by Nikolai Vakhtin, personal communication (3 May 2014).
circumstances (social setting, technology, and infrastructure) affect people’s understanding of what happiness is all about?

My analysis draws on the photo elicitation interviews conducted for our comparative project (see Appendix). The main study material contains 484 home photographs archived by seventy informants from ten different field research sites accompanied by in-depth photo elicitation interviews. I am specifically interested in the visual portrayal of the individual and the social notion of happiness. The initial assumption is that the snapshots preserved in the home archives are predominantly visual accounts of well-being, not the opposite. In fact, it is double happiness they re-evoke: they contain joyful moments and are visually pleasing.

Without a doubt, private collections also contain unhappy pictures. For example, an informant preserved a photo of her and her beloved man; when they broke up, she cut out his face from the picture. When I asked why she still keeps the picture, which I considered spoiled, she simply replied: “Look, how happy I was back then!” This example shows that happiness is transient; visual and verbal accounts reveal the flickering between the categories “happy” and “unhappy”. Most pictures selected by our informants are from happy times. It is only the story which reveals that the moment before and/or after the snapshot was taken, was uneasy. For example, a man tells a story about his son’s daughter. A small house was built at the stoibishche (camp) for the young family in order to have a place to stay when visiting the parents. The whole family was staying together. But after his son had died, his wife remarried and ceased to come to the stoibisch he with her daughter. One photo shows the whole family at the stoibishche and another portrays Grandpa with his granddaughter. The images depict those happier times.

In addition, I shall analyse the impact of visual technology on conventions of depicting “happiness”. The aim is to examine the genres, aesthetic conventions, and visual forms that appeal to our informants and why. I assume that although our informants selected the images primarily according to their content, the visual characteristics of the chosen images are not accidental. I acknowledge that due to failing

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5 The photographs were not necessarily taken by the informants themselves. In most cases, they were taken by a different person (see below). Seventy interviews were analysed out of the total of 79 photo elicitation interviews conducted by the research team. The nine photo elicitation interviews that were not analysed were transcribed and shared with significant delay, thus preventing their inclusion here.
technology or insufficient competence not all the happy moments of our lives have been captured visually, photographically; some of these, however, may be kept in memories. Oral narratives about the absent images of happiness are therefore also considered.

By confronting social and technological changes of the Soviet and post-Soviet modernisation project with individual perceptions and depictions of happiness, I shall be able to reveal not only how the concept of happiness has been changing in Siberia throughout the last five decades but also to argue how the pursuit of happiness has been changing people’s lives. This latter moment is of particular significance if confronted with the harmful, self-destructive practices described in the beginning of this chapter. Making sense of things requires contrast and differentiation. In order to reveal with our informants the different fragments of happiness in their pictures, I shall constantly keep in mind the black strip of tragedies in their communities.

Photo elicitation interviews

In order to answer the above questions, I turned to the photographs as well as the narratives collected during the photo elicitation interviews. In social research, the photo elicitation method has been tested in diverse contexts and in a variety of forms (Bunster 1978; Bunster, Chaney & Young 1989; Collier & Collier 1986; Empson 2011; Harper, 1987, 2001, 2002; Harper et al. 2005; Smith & Woodward 1999; Tucker & Dempsey 1991). The coexistence of images and words in these studies is a vital part of the data collection. The scholars point to the strength of photographs to act on the immediate experience of the interview and to stimulate the personal narratives on this occasion. And yet once the data collection is finished, the images are treated as if they fit the stories as nothing more than illustrations. I shall attempt to rectify this situation by acknowledging the power of the visual (Rose 2007: 35) throughout the entire research process. I shall pay equal attention to the relationship between the images and the words, the images themselves, and those narratives which go beyond the images.

The procedure of the photo elicitation interview went as follows: in each of the ten regions, informants with whom the team members of our research project had had previous contact and with whom, as
they assumed, conducting such an interview would be feasible, were chosen. The overall sample contained women and men of different age groups from rural and urban settings and diverse professional backgrounds (“traditional” and “non-traditional” activities, manual-labour professions, intellectual work, etc.). Each informant was asked to choose six photographs amongst all the pictures she or he had access to. The request for a definite number of images was taken as a rough guideline by some informants (some chose more, some chose less) and taken literally by others (one Khanty woman chose seven images in order to avoid “the number six”, perceived as unlucky by many Khanty people). The type, genre, and other characteristics of the photos were not restricted.

The photo selection process was stimulated by the researcher’s statement: “Please select and show the researcher six photographs that characterise your personality in different periods of your life” (Прошу вас выбрать и показать исследователю шесть фотографий, которые характеризуют Вас как личность в разные периоды вашей жизни). The statement was formulated deliberately in such a way to give the informants enough room for their own choice- and self-making. Therefore, the ways in which each informant understood the statement and set the criteria of photo selection were also a significant part of the study (e.g. such motivations as “I’ll choose those pictures which show how successful I am”, “I’ll choose only those pictures which are comprehensible for a foreigner and which can demonstrate to her/him my native culture”, “Well, how to respond correctly to this task?”, “I have no clue. I’ll just choose the first ones that I put my hands on”, etc.). In some interviews, the individual researcher’s particular topic had an influence on the content of the photo elicitation interview and the choice of photos, as informants anticipated they would speak about a particular aspect of their life. To ask what, how, and why photos were selected or omitted was part of this process. Some of these photo selections were done by the informants in front of the researchers and thoroughly recorded.

Analytical instruments

In each interview, the photographs represented a means of study: the stimuli of a narrative, feedback, sites of interaction, mnemonic devices,
tools for the reconstruction of events, and illustrations of some, even abstract statements. In the analytical part, however, the images became the objects of study, the representations. Their three interdependent modes — content, meaning, and expressiveness — are examined by content analysis, semantic analysis, and compositional interpretation respectively.

There is a tendency for social scientists to leave the duty of examining images to art and media specialists. The function of the image is restricted to the following: “[…] photography for social researchers is simply a means to certain ends, which visual methods are able to achieve rather than in terms what photographs inherently are” (Knowles & Sweetman 2004: 6). I suggest that such boundary delineation is limiting. Visual analysis in social research, using the assumption that images are representations, allows each photograph to be considered as “a sight which has been recreated and reproduced” (Berger 1972: 9) and as an “important means through which social life happens” (Rose 2007: xiii). These two aspects, visual and social, coexist and shall be conceived as such.

The effects of the images are entangled with social practices. And yet none of it would be possible if the appearance of the images lacked its own particular significance. Visual analysis, in this case, semantic and component analysis of the images, is important because it is through their very appearance that images appeal to and affect people. Parallel to the analysis of the social setting in which the images are embedded, a visual examination of each image shall be carried out, during which the content and meaning of the images are thoroughly studied.

The study of visual expressiveness is based on the fact that a combination of visual elements reflects organisations of experience and feeling. Plastic and spatial organisation, line, colour, texture, perspective (relationships of size, distance, representation of depth), light modulation, etc. can point to the ways that social settings structure visual conventions as well as to the ways that people conceive their feeling visually. The visual elements or their groupings may function as “visual idioms” (Kepes [1944] 1995) — stabilised visual forms with figurative meaning which can point to a specific visual convention or aesthetic preference.

For example, “the selfie” image, which has become a visual convention in contemporary social networking sites, contains several
elements which point to its expressiveness: face size, background quality (blurred, in focus, complementary, etc.), framing (cut out face(s), completeness), space organisation (in the foreground and background or between the subject(s) and objects) and after-effects (arranged by the use of apps or specialised software). Some, like the focus, may refer to technical and aesthetic ability. With the improved image resolution of the latest gadgets, the expected outcome is to produce high definition photographs. Any failure to do so is excused by the fact that the image is an “amateur” one (as opposed to a professional one) and “it will just do”. At the same time, a blur, not just a “mistake” but a visual idiom, may refer to the “here-and-now” moment and as evidence of a full, satisfying life.

The sense of visual preference is equally traced through our encounters with the informants, whose competence of talking about the pictures was never called into question. The issue of embarrassment based on some technical imperfections was rarely articulated and did not cause any disruption in communication between the researcher and the informant. Despite researchers’ initial doubts, most of the informants were able to verbalise why the particular image had an appeal to them. They have a complex idea of what a photo is, and the agency it can have. People also talk about the effect the images can have; according to them, the images emit a “feeling” or “energy” of the times when the pictures were taken; one informant chose a photo of a coming typhoon because she liked the physicality of the natural phenomenon. The content of the images is not the only concern here; visual representational efficacy is equally at stake. The informants’ understanding of the photos follows the existing theory: the images are never merely visual but, in fact, they conjure up synaesthetic and kinaesthetic effects; the visual provokes other sensory responses (Edensor 2005, in Rose 2007: 248).

Images never stand alone. If even one image is singled out, as the introductory quote suggests, something precedes and follows it (e.g. a black strip as a visual idiom of a pause). Similar to Gillian Rose, György Kepes accentuates social relatedness and interdependence as important aspects of visual experience. Both scholars rightly urge us to take a relation-minded stance rather than an object-minded one; in other words, to see in the images not atomically separated objects but order, relatedness, and structure(s) (Kepes [1944] 1995; Rose 2007). In addition
to the analysis of the semantics, composition and “visual idiom”, another step has to be made. In order to reveal the social categories and patterns hidden behind the visual features and to link them to a broader social setting, the pictures must be examined side by side with the informants’ narratives. These data show how people make choices about each image, evaluate its significance, appeal, relevance (to their visual experience, to their life, as well as to the researcher’s task) and look for the links which connect the selected images to each other. Some informants tend to organise the images into a collage, some stack them in a pile, some order them in a line. This visual order is closely related to the narrative structure of each informant’s story and, again, should not be overlooked in the analytical process of what happiness means in Siberia. Some informants prefer to narrate finished stories, and others engage in an open investigation of their lives.

Basic characteristics of the selected images

Out of all 484 images selected from the private collections, 67 photos were made by a professional photographer (passport portraits, studio photos, wedding images, reportage shots, newspaper scraps) and 417 were amateur pictures, out of which there are eight selfies: five made with the help of a self-timer and three with a so-called “long arm”.

Eleven photos were developed and printed by the informants in a home darkroom, out of which nine images were also photographed by the informants: one is a selfie made by a self-timer, five represent other people or events, and three are landscape images. The remaining two images portray our informant but were taken by someone else. Most images in the collection were photographed by someone other than the informant, mostly because he or she did not own a camera, or wanted to be depicted in the picture (without having to master the self-timer or the “long-arm” selfie).

What features do the selected images have? Apart from authorship, the selection is quite heterogeneous. There are several styles of visual

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6 In the last five years, the practice of taking selfies with a “long arm” has become much more widespread; in the collection of photographs compiled for the research project in 2010–2012, it is of rather small significance. See the penultimate section of this chapter for an interpretation. The “selfie stick” is a device that was not popular among our informants at the time of our field research.
appearance and forms of representation. The time span between the oldest and the most recent photograph is over eighty years (1930–2012). The images were produced with the help of diverse equipment and in specific technological settings, from manual single-lens reflex cameras (mostly Lomo, Zenit, or Fed), fully automatic compact cameras (Kodak, Polaroid) instant cameras, digital compact cameras (firstly without, then with HD video recording), to built-in cameras in mobile phones and tablets, etc. As is typical for home photography (and regardless of the camera), a standard all-in-focus imaging prevails, unless technological failure occurs. Only in five pictures is depth of field used for compositional means, which means that the background is blurred and the foreground is in focus or vice versa; however, three out of these images were made by professional photographers.

The images also differ in terms of condition. In each household, there are different ways of archiving: cardboard boxes, scrapbooks, photo album sleeves, or “just in a muddle”, CD, USB flash drives, external hard disks, SD cards, or online (directly in an email folder or on social networking sites). Some people prefer to literally dig memories out of the box in a contingent order. Some, by contrast, spend more time ordering their photographs. They make special albums with quotations, hand-made decorations and stickers; they say that they “put their soul” into such pieces of work and, therefore, do it during peaceful vacation time. This time-consuming practice has not ceased even in the digital age. Some of those who possess mostly digital photos have set up a folder on their computer or external hard drive titled “The Best” and, at the same time, they have some experience with the actual printing of digital photos.

Last but not least, in each case the image has gone through a particular social life: it was received as a gift from an army buddy; cut out from a local newspaper dedicated to an exemplary worker (stakhanovets, see Fig. 6.1); circulated among several households before it reached the final owner; or “just taken for myself, for good memories”. If it was not the photo itself which was exchanged, it was the camera at the time of shooting. For example, one informant explains that when he went on a safari trip, he deliberately exchanged his camera with another visitor: “[...] I was shooting him on his camera, he was shooting me on my camera so that I would get pictures of me and he would have pictures
of himself”. This practice shows how travelling can turn into an act of reciprocal exchange. Some photographs receive considerable respect: they are decorated with embroidery, put in a frame, hung on a wall, or placed in the living-room glass cabinet. Some “old” pictures, as the informants call them (usually black-and-white images), exist as a single original and are, therefore considered precious. Such photographs are given to a child who departs for university studies or leaves home after marriage; this is done on a special occasion with heart-breaking words, as some informants claimed.

Regardless of whether the photographs were selected in chronological order, each image signifying an important life period, or drawn from one folder made in the same year, the overall visual data set is indeed diverse in terms of the (visual) experience it represents; a single question asked by an interviewer stimulated the informants to think of their lives through images and resulted in a photo collection which covers a broad range in terms of content, meaning, expressiveness, and social context.

Is it possible to reveal a pattern in such a mix of (visual) experiences? Can the features of visual representation be adequately cross-examined and linked with verbal data, having compiled such a hodgepodge of photographs? Beyond any doubt, there is a common strand in the data, both visual and verbal. It consists of three main elements: personal biography narrated along with the chosen pictures, which reflects how
modern institutions influence the way people conceive of themselves; *modern institutions*, taken in a broad sense, which manage people’s possessions, intellectual and physical capacities, relationships, and self-perception, including the sense of “being happy”; and *the visual* itself, as a result of technological and institutional developments, which have the expressive power and social dimension to be an effective instrument for self-presentation.

Let’s start with the visual. The focus in this study is on the selection of the visual rather than visual production. The pattern of visual preference in connection with the notion of well-being, not the skill or competence, is what is being examined. The informants might not know about all of the technological details that went into making the photos (or how photos are made *per se*), but they do make a choice about the image that will represent a significant fragment of their life, and they insist on preserving it. There are cases when the informant changed his or her decision and selected a new image. All of these choices were made consciously, and what is even more important, thoughtfully. One can argue that the selection was done simply on the basis of content. For instance, an informant would like to show his devotion to his mother, select a photo related to her and narrate a story about her. What photo does he choose? Most likely, in accordance with the visual convention related to the representation of persons in a particular cultural setting (I shall return to this convention in the analysis of portraits), he selects a portrait of his mother. Here comes the complexity of his choice: there are, let’s say, at least two pictures of his mother in his collection. Which one does he choose? The one in which she is younger and, as he thinks, prettier? The one where the size, light, colour, and texture are more appealing? Does he prefer the photo where he is pictured with her or just a single portrait of her? These and many more questions arise.

Despite the entanglement of many factors present in such a choice, there is a high probability that within a particular sample such selection is based on at least one pattern of aesthetic preference; in several studies it has been shown that a visual idiom such as composition, particularly expressed by the height of the horizon, is linked to a degree of the analytical or holistic affordance of the individual (Masuda & Nisbett 2001, 2006; Miyamoto, Nisbett & Masuda 2006; Istomin, Panáková & Heady 2014). Other scholars point out that another visual idiom related
to proportionality — the golden section rule — has an impact on aesthetic preference (Benjafield & Adams-Weber 1976). In the sections to follow, the correlation between the compositional parameters (height of the horizon, perspective, and face size of the subjects) and the origin of the images (time, location, authorship) will be examined.

Aside from the visual itself, the images provide the narrated biography with rich material. The selected images are not atomic units, they are in some cases loosely, and in others tightly linked to each other; yet, all are tied to the biographical stories of the seventy individuals. The narratives told along with the photos provide insights into the mediation of the meaning between anthropologist and informant of what it takes “to live a life” and, if possible, “to live a happy one”.

The interplay of the personal accounts, selected photos and the immediate experience of the photo elicitation interviews serve to place subjective experience in the context of lifestyles, which themselves are produced and reproduced within complex supra-individual, traditional and modern institutional frameworks. Not only does the network of possibilities configure individuals’ choices and actions (Bourdieu 1990), it also frames the personal awareness of people’s lives as if they were individual projects of self-making (Giddens 1991: 1).

Susan Sontag identifies visual media as a key feature of the “modern”: “[...] a society becomes ‘modern’ when one of its chief activities is producing and consuming images, when images that have extraordinary powers to determine our demands upon reality and are themselves coveted substitutes for first-hand experience become indispensable to the health of the economy, the stability of the polity, and the pursuit of private happiness” (Sontag, [1977] 2005: 119). If the institutional setting influences the ways in which individuals structure, organise, reflect, remember, and represent their experience visually, the selected photos together with the narratives are likely to show a particular pattern of the structuring. The organising principle of the visual can then be linked with a specific institutional framing, e.g. foregrounding obedience and conformism in a well-ordered, symmetrically arranged school group portrait.

The institutional dimension is present in the sample through the diverse visual conventions which have evolved over time. In relation to the research questions, this shall be an advantage. My aim is to
confront the changing institutional framing of the personal perception of happiness with the changing preference of a particular visual convention. The very nature of photography stems from the capacity to trace, frame, and preserve the time; not only does each image portray a moment in history, but the series of images from different time periods manifests the technological and institutional changes (“technological” in terms of the capacities to create an image, whereas “institutional” in terms of what is desirable to be depicted and in which way). Particularly, one cannot leave unnoticed how the time flow, durée, is materialised in the different visual qualities.

Let me give you one example. The visual property which is most notably linked to the time change as a result of industrial and technological progress is texture. As Kepes wrote, neither the unaided eye nor a machine could follow all the surface qualities and visual properties of the newly developed materials: softness, hardness, roughness, smoothness, etc. Photography, however, with its optical, visual, and technical qualities had indeed the capacity to capture textures (Kepes [1944] 1995: 150). In this sense, texture is a technological change inscribed directly in the photographic image. Texture has also become the only visible sign indicating spatial relationships and organisation (ibid: 151). It does not only portray the time span, it preserves it: whereas colour (with its particular features such as hue, brightness, and saturation) can fade and cease to be a marker of time (the photos in our sample made in the 1990s look older than those from the 1980s), texture persists. Regardless of whether they are analogue, digital, or digitally manipulated, the texture of the portrayed objects reveals the kind of visual and social life the picture has gone through.

Now, apart from the visual qualities, there are other visible elements in each picture which point to the changing institutional framing over time: (i) the style of the subjects (posing, body arrangement, clothing, hair style, etc.); (ii) the occasion which was considered worth photographing; and (iii) the visual appearance of the photograph. For instance, the photographs show self-stylisation through clothing: work outfits or school uniforms (in pre-1990s photos), ethnic costumes (in the Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Okrug, Irkutsk, and Buryatia), trendy fashion (urban residents in Novosibirsk or rural youth in Sakha, Chukotka, and the Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Okrug) as a manifestation of being
“contemporary” and “knowledgeable”, or “anti-glamour” garments in the reactions of some middle-class youth in Novosibirsk to the dominance of mainstream fashion trends.

Modernity the Siberian way

David Chaney (1996: 159) considers the precondition of lifestyles to be modernity. Although he writes about lifestyles in the context of capitalist countries, they are equally developed in centralised economies. The modernisation project, which started in the Russian territories in the nineteenth century, has further evolved under dramatic historical and political conditions: Bolshevik revolution, Civil War, War Communism, New Economic Policy, Stalinism, etc. The legitimacy and thus persistence of the regime was dependent on several successful flagship projects; and the transformation of Russia’s vast and remote periphery, Siberia, was one of them.

The sovietisation process in Siberia followed the same pattern as elsewhere, and yet with a decade-long delay and higher inconsistency (Ssorin-Chaikov 2003) due to the geographical and climatic specifics of the region. The small, scattered settlements and nomadic camps of the native Siberian peoples were gradually conglomerated into larger villages with kolchoz or sovkhoz farms as part of the amalgamation policy (politika ukrupneniiia) over a period that started in 1928 and extended into the 1980s. Standardised modern institutions for education, medicine, local administration, industry, and agriculture were established throughout the Soviet Union. “Culture” turned into social obligation; cultural workers were to stimulate the natives to become culturally and morally “true” Soviet citizens. The intensification of industry reached the major Siberian centres in the 1950s and 1960s. Factories and mines were built in tandem with urban settlements, encouraging the gradual urbanisation of the population. Large-scale industrial projects tended to be built and run by Slavic incomers who migrated to the new industrial towns. In the late 1960s, the achievements and

7 For instance, Novoe Chaplino came into existence in 1958 by putting together the people of Staroe Chaplino (Ungaaziq, at that time this hamlet already included some Yupik clans from other places, e.g. Siqlluk) with some other Yupik settlements (e.g. Avan, Kivak, Aslliq) and moving them to the shore of Tkachen Bay.
accoutrements of the “golden” five-year plan arrived to Siberia: apartment houses, refrigerators, television sets, the Smena-8M photo camera, and Soviet tea with an elephant on the packaging. Nikita Khrushchev made some palpable ideological concessions in regard to the consumption of material goods in order to legitimise socialism in geopolitically difficult times (Crowley & Reid 2010: 14). Initially, the regime had given the utopian promise of material pleasures in some “later” historical period (ibid: 3). However, in the 1960s such pleasures became real. As a result, people of different ethnic origins who had already learnt to identify with the Soviet project, additionally came to submit to consumerism. Without proper infrastructure in the rural territories, however, only a trip to Moscow (or the regional capital, to some degree) could satisfy the consumers’ needs; hence, the origin of shopping travel (poekhali zakupat’sia/otovarivat’sia), which persists even today.

The two dimensions of well-being, Soviet citizenship and consumerism, fell apart under the political and economic circumstances of the 1990s. The withdrawal of people, resources, and services was so massive that in some places such as Chukotka (at that time a part of Magadan Oblast), even after the recuperation period since 2000, the highest numbers of the Soviet era have not been reached. Those people who stayed (mostly the native population) found themselves without jobs, transportation, adequate pensions, and in some cases even heating and hot water in the middle of a Siberian winter. Extensive new investments in the 2000s, aimed at renewing the extraction of natural resources, led to the return of consumerism. Similarly, since 2000, recentralisation has fostered identification with the Russian state, demonstrated among other things by the obligatory military-patriotic youth education programme (voenno-patrioticheskoe vospitanie molodezhi) (Laruelle 2008; see also Chapter 11 in this volume) and youth and children organisations such as Nashi (Ours) or Mishki (Teddy Bears) with high loyalty to the state (Baiburin & Piir, 2009: 252; Hemment 2015).

8 The five-year plan for 1966–1970 proved to be the most successful (GNP increased by thirteen per cent) and therefore is referred to as the “golden” one. Kosygin’s reforms introduced a series of new economic strategies, e.g. producers’ interest in gaining revenue, which stimulated the state-directed economy.
Home photography in Siberia

The first traces of photography in Siberia date back to the beginning of the twentieth century. As home media, however, photography was introduced into everyday life during Khrushchev’s peak era of Soviet modernisation. While reporters and professional photographers recorded the state’s achievements in the sphere of construction and production, along with the life of the institutions (workers’ communes, workplaces, and schools), people used photography as a reminder and evidence of their well-being. Although visually, home photography in Siberia is a Soviet cultural product, socially it is primarily a phenomenon of modernity: mechanical reproduction (Benjamin 1977) turns the visual into consumer products and photographing into a testimony of tangible well-being. As to Siberia, the question then is whether distinct local patterns of visual representation entered the general Soviet model. In other words, is there a particular and preferred photographic image of Siberian happiness?

Siberian home photography shows two dominant features: on the one hand, it follows the standard middle-brow aesthetics, which can be labelled “Soviet”; on the other, there is a set of qualities that emerged from the eternally unfinished and thus provisional state of existence. In order to cope with the institutional and infrastructural incongruities, *bricolage* (Lévi-Strauss 1966; de Certeau [1974] 1984) seemed to be a handy approach. Triggered by the uneven and inconsistent influx of people, material, finances and technology to Siberia, *bricolage* became a way of patching missing elements through the assemblage and re-assemblage of the existing ones. *Bricolage* is “the purest notion of variation on a theme by mere recombination” (Friedman 2001: 47); this technique has also been applied to home photography.

*Bricolage*

The following examples refer to *bricolage* as a way of representing significant and/or happy moments without disturbing the visual convention imported from the urban environment. The status photos of any Soviet citizen in front of monuments such as statues of political leaders, the eternal fire, or war memorials can be found in large numbers in the Siberian collections. However, pictures in front of the statues of
famous writers or painters are less common. The established standard in the city, still alive today, is altered by recombination. For instance, the Pushkin statue on the Ploshchad’ isskustv in St Petersburg, a common place where a local middle-class couple would take their wedding photo to emphasise their status, is altered by the Siberians with another object or place, more likely to be a status marker recognised in the province. While visiting the city, village people often pose in front of the building of a Ministry or novelties of the “civilised world”; for example, men take pictures of themselves standing in front of an expensive motorbike, a trendy car, or with the latest model of a rifle in the hunter’s shop, while women pose in new fashion releases in the shopping malls.

![Christmas celebration in a private living room, Altai Republic, 2004.](image)

Another form of recombination is found in the photographic memorabilia of one’s achievements: here anything of a respectful or rare character that the protagonists put in front or behind themselves can be viewed as a trophy. Hunting and tourist trophies prevail. And yet, in the Far Northern regions, where grapes or watermelons are rare, a fruit can easily become a trophy. Another example of *bricolage*, in this case an imperfect imitation of the urban convention, is a group portrait (mostly family or communal gatherings) in the living room with a display cabinet or hanging carpet in the background (Fig. 6.2). Such display refers primarily to the cohesion of and “happy moments” in the
family (see Bourdieu et al. [1965] 1990 for a similar case in France from the 1960s) but may relate to any other reference group. In the Siberian arrangement, however, the Russia-wide standard of home decoration is contrasted with the traditional household. Members of local intellectual elites arrange their homes to the standards they themselves perceive as Russian-like, and they prefer to present their reference groups, such as families or church groups, through such portraits with the carpet in the background. In this way, they define “happiness” by the capacity to show their homes as cultivated places, which would confirm their support for the Soviet civilising mission.

The principle of *bricolage*, as mentioned above, echoed a spatially disproportionate availability of different (visual) technologies as well as an uneven distribution of specialists and supplies. Centrality and peripherality have a direct impact on the ways in which technical innovations come isolated to the settlement and are appropriated in a hit-or-miss way. The time delay of the incoming novelty usually had an impact on how, if at all, it was appropriated and could result in any visual convention. What is peculiar about the remote regions of Siberia is the fact that new technological devices would usually be introduced as “lone” items (e.g. brought from the city centres during business trips, studies, or vacations), i.e. taken out of the proper context. For instance, an analogue compact camera would be purchased in the city without having a facility, a film lab, in the native village to retrieve the pictures from the film. It could take up to two years, until the next allowed vacation leave, when the person could go to the city to have the film developed and photos printed. To give another example, local amateur photographers who learnt during their studies in the city how to make their own black-and-white prints often encountered shortages of chemicals and other supplies in their home village.

Similarly, the opening of the borders initiated a new round of the inconsistent spread of technology, this time from abroad. Instant cameras, incompatible with anything there was on the market before or after, reached Chukotka in the early 1990s when the local Yupik people started visiting their relatives across the border in Alaska. Just for comparison, the popular use of these cameras in the United States dates back to as early as 1972 when Polaroid introduced its *SX-70* followed by Kodak, which in 1976 entered the instant market with its
Kodak EK4. The use of this technology in Chukotka was limited literally by the number of visits abroad, because at home no proper supplies, such as cartridges, were available. Such a camera became for locals a mere “gimmick” (dikovinka), a first exemplary product of a throw-away approach to things, very markedly in contrast to the compulsive hoarding of Soviet times.

All of these examples may seem to refer to photographic production only. However, they directly point to the absence of any distinct convention in aesthetic preference. The cases show that numerous technological novelties in photography could not be widely adopted in Siberia, since infrastructure, long-term occurrence, and camera owners’ active experimenting with aesthetic forms were lacking. In such conditions, neither a shooting style, nor any distinct aesthetic preference can be easily established. The technology which becomes obsolete so fast fails to generate any lasting visual standards. More importantly, however, these incongruities lead to a specific framing of reality. Technology and infrastructure condition and limit the ways local people are able to, or even dare to see and visualise their lives preserving the instants and spells of well-being.

Aside from its bricolage-like nature, Siberian home photography abides by middle-brow standards. Formal school education, the introduction of technology from/by major Soviet centres, and centralised management of artistic activities through the Houses of Culture (Donahoe & Habeck 2011) directly contributed to middle-brow aesthetic preferences. Majority aesthetic standards (be it Soviet or contemporary Russian ones) endure in the most remote Siberian regions with a degree of variation.

Pursuing the golden section rule

Let us consider one of the key visual characteristics: the composition of the image. This parameter can be quite broad and analysed in many ways; I will focus on the height of the horizon. Its most common manifestation in middle-brow image production is the golden section rule, which envisages a relation of 61.8 to 38.2 per cent as aesthetically most pleasing. The horizon displayed on the image should be located at approximately 61.8 per cent or approximately 38.2 per cent of the
image’s height (counted from the bottom margin). As there are both vertically (175) and horizontally (309) oriented pictures in the collection, the horizon was counted as the percentage relative to the height of the photo. Out of 484 images, there are 375 which show an identifiable horizon (N=375, out of which 250 are horizontally and 125 vertically oriented). 9 I was also interested in whether the sample revealed any changes in the composition throughout the decades.

The results show that there was almost no change in the height of the horizon throughout the decades. A very slight change between the 1960s and 1980s as well as between the 1960s and 2000s can be observed. It seems that in the 1960s, the height of the horizon was lower but the values are insignificant. Overall, the height of the horizon has remained relatively stable over more than four decades.

What is intriguing, however, is the fact that the stable value of the mean height of the horizon as measured from the bottom margin in the vertically oriented photos approaches the value of the golden section rule (about 38 per cent from the bottom margin), while in the horizontally oriented images it tends towards the midpoint (about 44 per cent). 10 This once again proves that the aesthetic preference in Siberia in regard to photography complies with imported visual standards.

The question is whether the standard aesthetic rule is equally applied in the rural and urban environments. In the selection of all photos provided by the urban informants, the height of the horizon increases in each decade towards the present, i.e. from about 27 per cent (in the 1950s) to about 46 per cent (in the 2000s), whereas the selection of the rural informants shows the opposite: a decrease in the horizon from about 57 per cent (in the 1950s) to about 44 per cent (in the 2000s). As the distribution is uneven and old photos are not sufficiently represented, the power of the effect and the statistical power of the test are low. The differences may be accidental and, therefore, further research is necessary. Nevertheless, it is evident that the photographers

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9 Out of 109 photos, in which the horizon is not identifiable, there are 59 horizontally and fifty vertically oriented images.
10 The standard notion of what is visually appealing also explains why most of the selected pictures are taken at eye level (364 pictures) and without any particular compositional perspective (382 pictures). They have a linear perspective accentuated by a narrowing element (e.g. a corridor or road) or a diagonal perspective (delineated, for example, by a staircase inclining from one corner to another).
of the images taken in the research project’s rural settlements in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, were professionals or amateur photographers schooled in the city. In the urban environment, authorship was much more diverse from the 1950s onwards. Both rural and urban backgrounds have produced uniform images from the 1980s towards the 2000s: the compilation of photographs from those decades reveals a preference for horizontally oriented images, in which the horizon divides the scenery into halves.

The data seem to support my initial assumption that Siberian home photography is regarded as pleasing, and thus evokes positive emotions when it follows the standard aesthetic rule of the golden section. It is possible to conclude that practices of photographing and practices of selecting photographs for display to others (in this case, researchers) follow acquired aesthetic conventions that seem to eclipse any differences in individual perceptual style. In other words, it is not possible to detect spatial or temporal dynamics in the height of the horizon; what emerges instead, is a certain uniformity in the way photographs are designed and selected by the beholder. This standard appearance of the Siberian photographs assures common visual experience that is taken as pleasing. Consequently, it is only the content of the pictures and the accompanying individual stories which can prove the diversification and differentiation of the understanding of what happiness might be.

Biographical narratives: consistencies and ruptures

After this description of the social settings and the aesthetic and technological contexts in which the visual emerges, it is now time to turn our attention to the stories of and along the photographs.

The biographical moment which allows the photos and the narratives to intermingle also reveals contradictions. Firstly, the photos might seem to portray happiness and can be described as such by their owners, even if the reality at the time of photographing was perceived as gloomy. In other words, unhappy reality can nevertheless produce happy pictures: for example, an image of the tundra landscape or a portrait of the informant sitting on a hill and contemplating the landscape, both photographed during an escape from the humdrum of the quotidian. Secondly, although the photograph usually stimulates a rich narrative
which goes well beyond the content of the picture, occasionally there are images which result in silence. Most of these recall some absent person and thus represent absence itself: for instance, the father who presents the only remaining portrait of a deceased son (Fig. 6.3), or the son who shows a newspaper image of his working-hero mother (Fig. 6.1) and feels guilty for not being able to pursue her legacy. Thirdly, there are stories along images that do not exist; such absence of images may be caused by their loss, ruin (through fire), or deliberate destruction and deletion (images in which “I do not look well”, images of “the people with whom I broke up”, “the whole school album because it looked awful”, and similar cases) or by the fact that these images were never made (the camera broke, the moment occurred so unexpectedly) but are “well remembered”.

It is worth mentioning that a whole series of images might be missing in home archives: for instance, photos of everyday life before the 2000s are rare, as the devices would not allow easy and quick handling. This means that working days were portrayed only through official images, while home cameras recorded the days or hours off work. It stands in contrast to the abundance of today’s mobile phone snapshots of virtually any moment of one’s life. Although present in the home archives, in the photo selection made for the photo elicitation interview, there are
no images of toddlers, portraits of oneself as a bride, or pictures of nightlife. There is but one portrait from a Christmas celebration and two from a birthday celebration. Even though the home archives are surely full of these, the informants did not find them relevant for the given purpose. Interestingly, there is one portrait of a man while he is photographing — a sort of a reflection of the subject in the mirror.

These possible absences of photographs exemplify potential ruptures of the biographical narratives. They urge us to ask ourselves about the universe of people, things, and places that the interviewees draw upon for self-presentation, and their particular preference for one image over another. What part of life do they try to keep hidden and what part of life are they open to talking about? What does the interviewee try to tell the interviewer when they shift in their narration from the selected images to the non-existent ones? In the appreciation of the absent or fragmentary, anthropologists come to resemble archaeologists. The truly missing images or words keep reminding us of the fact that all the photographs and memories point to moments which are already gone. The patterns hidden in such data may yet reveal transitions in time.

“Collective and individual”

Socialism was a social experiment which arguably took on even more experimental traits in Siberia than in any other region of the country (cf. Kotkin 1995; Ssorin-Chaikov 2003). In Soviet times, “experiments with happiness” (Baiburin & Piir 2009: 221) were part of the grand social project; they depended on, and were products of, the personal, societal, and ideological design (Balina & Dobrenko 2009: xvii). Although we encountered a variety of personal trajectories, the common, ideologically approved standards of happiness that structure the lives of our informants can be observed across the data. The institutional criteria of “having a happy life” were reduced to the assigned, collective good. If the state-promoted ideology imposed the standard of happiness at the same time as the state machinery severely punished the disloyal, then to be happy (the standard way) was obligatory (Baiburin & Piir 2009: 226). The transition to the post-Soviet period was marked by the absence of the controlling gaze of the state, while responsibility was delegated to the individual; now it is the individual who is responsible for being happy.
My aim in this section is to show how biographical and institutional aspects intersect in the collective and individual concepts of happiness and how they are manifested by the images in the informants’ selections. Higher levels of individualism or self-independence in a given community are linked with the tendency towards analytism in the visual representation (Kitayama et al. 2003; Markus & Kitayama 2003). In other words, object-focused images prevail; in photography, these may be singular portraits, selfies, or images of things in the foreground. On the other hand, collectivism or self-interdependence correlate with perceptual holism, which is manifested by the field-focused representation; in the images, the background tends to be equally important as the foreground (e.g. tourist group portraits at a tourist site and landscape images). In fact, if a group of persons and things is present, it is well distributed over the composition, so it creates the field itself. I shall look at the individualistic and collectivist traits in the collected Siberian photos. It will be possible to see whether the social experiments in Siberia, together with the adoption of the Russian (Soviet) photographic visual standards in photography, led to the object-focused representation of happiness. Let me first focus on a descriptive analysis of the photos and then turn to the interpretation of the images along with the narratives.

Firstly, the photo selection can be sorted by the simple characteristics of the pictures into group portraits and portraits of a single person. In both categories, we have images in which the informants are depicted and those pictures in which the informants are absent. The presence of the informant in the image prevails. In the given sample, the ratio of images in which the informants themselves are depicted to those in which another subject is chosen is 381 to 103. It is true that the phrase of the given task included the words “your life” and “yourself”, which the informants could have taken literally, despite the fact that they were specifically instructed to choose any image with any subject in it. There can be a simple logic behind the informants’ choice: “when I am asked to tell ‘my’ story about ‘my’ life, why shall I restrict myself to being in the image ‘myself’?” Or: “it is ‘I’ who is experiencing the happy moments and it is ‘I’ who shall, therefore, be present in the visual evidence”.

In most of the regions, independent of sex and age, informants chose predominantly images with themselves (with or without other subjects).
Out of seventy informants, 37 individuals selected images that all show themselves in the picture, with or without someone else. The remaining 33 informants included more than sixty per cent of the images in their individual photo sets which depict themselves (again with or without someone else). In Novosibirsk and Chavan’ga, each photo set has a roughly equal number of images that include the interviewee versus those that do not include the interviewee (half and half). In the Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Okrug and in Buryatia, the share of photographs showing the interviewee is roughly one third. The Republic of Sakha and Chukotka are remarkable in this respect: in Sakha, one female informant did not choose a single picture with herself; in Chukotka, there are three such cases, two men and one woman. One individual selection in Sakha (an urban resident) and another four in Chukotka (all villagers) contain significantly less than forty per cent of pictures with the owner (16.7 per cent in Sakha and 23.5, 14.3, 38.5, and 18.18 per cent in Chukotka). Most informants in Chukotka are older than forty and the limited range of photographs they could choose from may be the reason for such particularity; and yet, a 34-year-old woman (urban resident) and a 28-year-old man in Sakha (who had recently become an urban resident) as well as a thirty-year-old man in Chukotka (a villager) acted similarly. In all these selections, each informant decided to show their life through another subject or object. Within the total selection of 484 images, there are eighteen cases of identification through an object, 29 through one significant person and 56 through a group of persons.

When it came to individual versus collective depictions, almost half the images (45.5 per cent) depicted a single person of object: 174 single portraits of the informants themselves (Table 6.1 on p. 254), eighteen images of objects, and 28 single portraits of other persons (a “significant other”, Table 6.2 on p. 255). The remainder is constituted by images of a couple or a group, with or without the informant, who are enjoying life collectively. The presence of the informant accentuates his or her relationship with the collective. No matter to what degree and in which way the informant dominates the group portrait — be it by gesture, size (standing closer to the lens), or posing — it is a collective wherein everyone shares a portion of happiness with the informant.\footnote{The Russian word *dolia* translates as both “share” and “fortune” (Baiburin & Piir 2009: 218).} Although
the individual and the collective may seem to oppose each other semantically and divide the selection quantitatively into two halves, the data, in fact, support the idea that an underlying trope in the self-presentation of our interviewees from Siberia is neither just self, nor a collective, but self-in-a-collective.

Even in portrait photographs in the strict sense, we are made aware of the fact that someone was standing behind the camera; the sharing of the moment was then happening as a dialogue while photographing rather than as a session of being photographed together. Some home photos taken by analogue cameras occasionally show a blurry thumb on the margin — the evidence of an (unskilful) photographer.

There is also an effect of the observer’s view meeting with the view of the portrayed individual; it happens especially in those images that represent a subject who is looking directly at the camera. It is one of the most powerful visual sources of dialogue: namely, the encounter of a portrayed subject with someone who is looking at her or him in physical reality — the photographer (in the process of photographing) or the spectator (in the process of sharing and discussing the photos). Such gaze, as David MacDougall writes, “evokes one of the primal experiences of daily life — a look returned by a look — through which we signal mutual recognition and affirm the shared experience of the moment. [...] In a Lacanian sense, the self is reaffirmed and mirrored in these comparatively rare direct glances from the screen” (MacDougall 1998: 100). In other words, although the portraits may manifest very intimate spheres of the informant, their hidden feelings and desires, they also depict the experience of a dialogue with someone else in the physical (who is photographing me?) or mental space (who will be watching me in the picture?).

“Reading” the narratives along the photographs

Now let us look more closely at these images along with the narratives. Semantically the happiness of self-in-a-collective is expressed through images of two key social institutions: family and work. This can often be traced in the narratives of indigenous informants regarding their sense of home. On the contrary, happiness understood as a personal pursuit braided with a series of transformations and restatements of self-integrity is most fervently manifested by the portraits of self
and significant others as well as by travel photos of non-indigenous informants.

![Photo of a young girl](image)

**Fig. 6.4.** Portrait from kindergarten times, Tegi (Berezovskii Raion), 1992. Photo: Ina Schröder’s interviewee (with permission), CC-BY-ND.

**Work and education**

In Soviet ideology, the paradigm of happiness was twofold: on the one hand, it was universal, the transcendent happiness of the Soviet citizen, characterised, besides anything else, by honesty, work ethic and appreciation of the Soviet Union; on the other hand, it was happiness in personal life (*schastie v lichnoi zhizni*), to use the term that became popular under Leonid Brezhnev (Baiburin & Piir 2009: 223). Immediate material well-being was to be deferred to a rather distant future and, therefore, happiness was linked with sacrifice and struggle. The self-realisation of the Soviet citizen took place through work understood as a moral deed; work was considered a personal commitment to the benefit of the community. Moral satisfaction is a criterion mentioned by the informants whose careers were launched during Soviet times.
Be it a teacher, scientist, bus driver, accountant at the kolkhoz, or reindeer herder — nearly all of our older informants defined work with enthusiasm. The retrospective narratives allow us to identify some categories that were eclipsed, or at least were not pronounced, during Soviet times: the informants imply that the capacity to perform a certain profession does not depend solely on the institutional context or personal effort but includes an irrational category of destiny, fortune or talent. The images that evoke narratives about work are restricted to several types: the collective portrait with co-workers (emphasising collectivity), portraits in uniform or work outfits at the workplace, e.g. school, forest, kolkhoz (indicating status and affiliation), and depictions of award ceremonies (documenting symbolic reward).

In addition, women tend to talk about their professional career along and in line with the images of their family or children. The ideal of a woman who manages to combine the roles of excellent worker and true citizen, loving wife and caring mother is regarded with respect; it stands for achievement reached through sacrifice. Some women think of themselves as having performed poorly or having “failed”; but their personal criteria are so intermingled with the institutional framing that they do not realise that “their” concept of happiness was, in fact, institutionally given. Self-reflection, however, happens in the description of the social changes in the 1990s. Here the informants contrast the personal responsibility of the true Soviet citizen to the paternalism of the state broadly understood as a false understanding of collective responsibility for other individuals.

Those of our younger informants, who reached adulthood in the 2000s, understand responsibility as self-reliance, self-sufficiency, or even self-containment; in their narratives they accentuate self-perfection, self-fulfilment, and self-improvement. All of these expressions evoke intensive self-centredness. Work has to be meaningful for the person, only then can it bring a true reward (see Chapter 3 of this volume). The photographs related to these narratives of young informants represent the workplace, e.g. office (status and affiliation), graduation and similar ceremonies of award conferment (symbolic reward), as well as goods that were bought from the money earned, usually clothes, hobbies, or tours (material reward). The main difference between Soviet and post-Soviet careers is the shift from socialisation towards the acquisition of
material well-being, from work for dignity to work for consumption, from toil to hedonism. This pronounced self-centredness does not necessarily mean that people look only inward and have fewer social contacts; in fact, our data show that the sphere of socialisation might have moved from work to leisure time, during which the enjoyment of things (clothes, food) or places (travelling) in good company is of prime importance.

No matter what their age, all our informants tended to display themselves through social institutions interwoven in their individual biographies. Such images show conventionalised initiations, which are inherent to Soviet and post-Soviet times alike. The particular institutions mark turning points in the chronology of people’s lives:

- registration of a newborn at the registry office;
- kindergarten (standardised, official individual or group portrait, see Fig. 6.4);
- school (annual group portraits; images of the initiation ceremony called the “First Bell” (Pervyi zvonok), see Fig. 6.5; photos of the last day of school and closing ceremony (Poslednii zvonok); images of the graduation ceremony (Vypusknoi);
- university graduation;
Lifestyle in Siberia and the Russian North

Fig. 6.6. Army pledge, near Rubtsovsk (Altai Krai), 2006. Photo: Ina Schröder’s interviewee (with permission), CC-BY-ND.

- military service (portrait of a recruit giving the pledge, see Fig. 6.6);
- work collectives (including Soviet kolkhoz work teams, groups of teachers, reindeer herders, contemporary office life, and corporate meetings).

While most of these images are standardised and taken by a professional photographer, the school and university images include some spontaneous snapshots. However, everyday life in such institutions is very rarely portrayed. The number of such images may increase in the upcoming years with the technological development of built-in cameras in mobile phones.
Sense of place

The sense of place is perpetually (re)confirmed by movement, which produces personal “topographies”, and by the images and narratives that accumulate in the stock of “spatial imaginaries” (see Chapter 5 in this volume). As the photo selection proves, the informants convey their biographies as interwoven not only with essential encounters and “decisive moments” (Cartier-Bresson 1952) which are not to be forgotten, but certainly with meaningful places as well. The images documenting people’s movement (or dwellings), including such a pervasive genre as tourist photography, would deserve a separate chapter. Here I restrict myself to the aspects I find most important in relation to happiness.

There are 208 images that clearly depict a place or movement in the exterior. Most of the images manifest a dialogue between the person(s) and place, except for sixteen images12 which do not contain any person at all: eleven of these photographs feature a landscape; three of them, a building or an urban object; and two of them, a still life. Together with the chosen photos, the informants produce elaborate narratives of the sense of home on the one hand, and “distant hereness” (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998) on the other.

Overall, the number of home sceneries is lower than expected, taking into account the fact that a majority of the urban residents offer rich narratives of their hometowns and most of the rural residents claim an intensive emotional link with the land. The home geographies imply quotidian connectedness with the places. The latter ensure people’s well-being by nurturing them; we repeatedly encountered informants’ stories about their getting reconnected with nature by embracing a tree or lying on the ground (see Fig. 6.7). The notion of the “power/energy of the place” (energetika mesta) is articulated. The significance of a specific place is explained through its distinct features: it may be the cluster of the “right” trees (e.g. birch), a hub for communication with the spirits, or the home of ancestors; it may provide memories of the past as well as one’s own subjective experience, rest, and peace for the soul, and an assemblage of senses (mostly visual, haptic, and olfactory). For these informants, place is considered a meta-term for a happy life.

12 There are two more images in the photo selection which lack a person in them. They represent objects related to people’s hobbies but have no connection with the topic of place or movement.
Representations of homeland

In the narratives of the indigenous informants, it is the homeland where the dialogue with self is possible. The reason for this is the understanding that personhood is not attainable without taking into account the system of kinship, communal ties, environment, and a cosmology that transcends every person. All of these elements are highly charged with emotional energy. In fact, humans, animals, and spirits exist as endless mimetic doubles of one another (Willerslev 2007) and many of our indigenous interviewees share such a view at least in some situations. In most Siberian cosmologies, human beings have their individual selves, but at the same time they are also their ancestors who have returned to this world through the process of name-sharing (Nuttall 1992; Willerslev 2007).

In visual terms, indigenous informants abide by the visual standards of presenting themselves through place, while being depicted in the place themselves. The image of place itself is not sufficient to refer to
the informants’ relationship with it. Thus, people record the places as part of events involving themselves and other people. In the prevailing number of images, the place is visually associated with the self-in-a-collective mode of experiencing happiness.

“Distant hereness” as a device of self-expression

By contrast, the non-indigenous informants present contemplative moments about their vision of who they are and who they aspire to become at places that are distant from home (Fig. 6.8). This nature of the photos is at first overshadowed by the otherness of the sites where they were taken. They evoke a sense of “distant hereness” (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998) — a special relationship with the exotic landscape, which despite its otherness is expected to be accessible for “touring” (Cartier & Lew 2005; Bagdasarova 2012). As opposed to geographies at home, which are “used” and to which a person is affiliated, tourist destinations are to be explored, consumed, gazed at, and documented. Whereas home landscapes are associated with people who enroot their sense of home through their sense of being in a collectivity, in the imagery of travel individual portraits at the tourist site prevail.

There are no images of any encounter of a tourist and the hosts; in other words, the type of relationship which is constitutive of tourism (cf. Chapter 4 in this volume) is remarkably absent. There are portraits of other tourists as well as the self and other tourist companions together, but their total number is still less than that of the portraits of the travelling self. The informants present themselves through photos as if they were in a unique position: “It was me who was there”. The appropriation of a place through visual imagery is individualised as it is limited to the depiction of self at the site without any other person. At the same time, it is aesthetically standardised: in the series of photos from one and the same person, we observe a change of background, whereas the individual posture seems the same; in the series of photos of different owners from one site, what changes is the face but the background and the posture remain the same (e.g. the images of the person’s profile looking at the sea). The backgrounds and foregrounds are in the end interchangeable and lose their representational efficiency.
In addition to the first impression given by the sense of “distant hereness”, there is another characteristic trait, more important in terms of the sense of happiness. In fact, informants do not focus much in their narratives on exoticism or otherness. There is no sign of “ethnotopia” — a shorthand for the visual and epistemological conquest inspired by the fascination of other (Nichols 1991: 218). Rather, these images are often poor evidence of the trip, lacking sufficient details, diversity of events, and contrastive views. What these images manifest is an initiation into another understanding of what one should be, wants to be, or can afford to be through displacement. In most narratives, people define the precise moments during travel in which they could recognise the sensory force, which has, as they feel, changed them; whether it was confirmation of family unity, conviction of “true love”, change of work, or moving out from their parents’ home, all of these informants regard their trips as meaningful due to its transformational nature. The primary significance ascribed to the travel photographs does not result from the fact that they are evidence of exoticism, leisure, or economic status; rather, they are memorabilia of self-transformation and the regaining of self-integrity.
For the sake of the family

A major part of home photography is dedicated to family. It is the main purpose of the home media to portray family and provide evidence of a “happy collective”. In our informants’ selection there are family gatherings, leisure time (travel, hobbies), and studio family portraits (Fig. 6.9). The purpose of this section is to show some particularities inherent for the studied region and to find out how a family in Siberia experiences their happiness.

The photographs seem to be an important part of people’s relationships with some but not necessarily all of their relatives. Women, unprompted to do so, quickly talk about their children. Some select portraits of themselves with their child(ren) (Fig. 6.10). Most mothers, however, choose pictures of their children, including either a single child, several children or children in a group with other persons (Fig. 6.11). They document the moments of their children’s coming of age. The difference between the images of the mother and child together as opposed to the images of children alone may be substantial. In the former choice, it is as if the informant was saying: “These are my children and me together”. She emphasises well-being as a collective enterprise. In the latter choice, another phrase resonates: “Look, this is my child”; the happiness seems
to be externalised. The informant prefers to be giving rather than sharing: “I am happy for my daughters to be together on the beach” or “I am happy for my son to have fun with his friends”. In each case, it is a parental comfort when children are well taken care of. In social terms, the woman is credited the most when she succeeds in the role of a mother and protector of the heart of the family (*khranitel’ nitsa semeinogo ochaga*). Our female interlocutors seem very much aware of this image. It can also be interpreted as: “first them, then me”.

![Fig. 6.10. Self as mother with son, Sochi, 1983. Photo: Ina Schröder’s interviewee (with permission), CC-BY-ND.](image)

This position — of treating one’s own demands as less urgent than those of other family members — is not rare in Siberia. However, it does not necessarily imply a “complete” nuclear family. Many women give birth to a child “for themselves” (*rodit’ dlia sebia*) without planning to establish a full family or without expecting the father to support the woman and child. Some of the divorced or abandoned women among our interlocutors just fleetingly mentioned the break-up with their partner and never returned to it in their narrative. Even if they enjoy being together with the husband/father in a full family, many women will implicitly restrict their happiness to the children’s or grandchildren’s self-fulfilment; they interpret the category of “family happiness” in terms of children and tend to overlook the category of “personal happiness” in a strict sense of self.
The photo selections of male interviewees also relate to family; but they differ from the women’s images in one essential way: men like to see the family together. We came across several cases when the informant made the image himself: he preferred to portray his family including himself and since there was no one around to take the picture, the self-timer was used. The majority of the selected images portray the family around a festive table. Prosperity and completeness are the basic characteristics of the happy family according to men. They prefer the image of a full family even if the actual family has ceased to exist (because of separation, divorce, etc.). Whereas women choose not to hold on to the “broken” relationship and instead focus on children, men tend to perpetuate the notion of integrity. At the same time, however, they cultivate an image of another significant group — their male friends and peers (whom they know from the army, the workplace, or some leisure activity).

Celebrating collectivity at home: the wall carpet

Many of the family photos are dedicated to gatherings at a festive table (zastol’e) or picnics. Solemn passport photos or photos of official gatherings (manifestations, award ceremonies) contrast with these
photos of the celebrations and leisure as if “the happy” moments (or rather moments of individual, private happiness) occur during days off. In fact, in the Soviet times each official holiday had its continuation in the private space, amongst family, colleagues or friends. This is also the case today. For example, in Novoe Chaplino, Chukotka, the Day of Indigenous Peoples is celebrated in two parts: the official programme takes place in the House of Culture or on an open-air stage and is supported by the district administration; the ceremony is then followed by family gatherings at home. Photos taken during such festive days exhibit two features of happiness significant for our informants: the comfort of the home as well as collectivity in the particular, extraordinary moment.

The object that most tellingly unites these two is the wall carpet, tangible proof of how the individual understanding of aesthetics can submit to the collective concept. Industrially made hanging carpets spread massively under Khrushchev’s rule. Although they are widely associated with Soviet quotidian design, including home design (sovok, sovkovskii byt), they are still found in many provincial Siberian homes. Khrushchev denied Stalin’s synthesis of the beautiful and useful, denigrating high ceilings and stucco mouldings as “extravagant”. Functional five-storey buildings, mostly with either two-room apartments (forty square metres) or one-room apartments (18 square metres), known by everyone in Russia as khrushchevka (wooden houses) were introduced in 1948, and from 1959 onwards were constructed on a massive scale (cf. Reid, in Balina & Dobrenko 2009: 133–60). In Siberia, the urban population could enjoy a built-in winter refrigerator, separate toilet and bathroom, running water, and central heating. To the Siberian province, this type of housing arrived much later, and often without urban amenities. Notwithstanding the government’s policy of making nomadic households sedentary (which started around 1935 and lasted well into the 1970s), it was not until the 2000s that rural indigenous inhabitants had the occasion to make use of running water or sewage systems. In either case, the poor thermal and sound insulation of the khrushchevka led to the massive use of wall carpets as a functional yet

13 From 1959 to 1965 more than 300 million square metres of accommodation were built. The construction of this type of house stopped only in 1985 (Crowley & Reid 2010).
decorative element (Panáková 2014). As a result, the carpet is widely used as a background in the family photographs. Thus, group portraits in front of the carpet combine two key elements of the collective happiness framed by the private space: the material comfort of the functional Soviet home and the special occasion of the holiday.

The basic composition of a “happy family” has the following features: family members gathered around a table, and/or sitting or otherwise posing on a couch covered with a quilt (decorated as much as the carpet) in front of an ornamental carpet (Fig. 6.12). The scenery may be completed by the ubiquitous television set covered with a tablecloth, a cupboard decorated with photos and diplomas, and photos on the walls (such photos are present in the collected home archives but not in the informants’ selection). The seasonal house of a nomadic reindeer herder does not contain these elements, although the act of gathering around a table is still an important genre of a family portrait (Fig. 6.13). The contemporary population in large urban centres tends to implement “modern” designs in their flats and houses, which implies the rejection of the carpet as an outdated sovok element (Fig. 6.14). Moreover, some of our urban informants preferred to demonstrate their abundant
life through a different setting, namely in a restaurant. These photos, however, lack the sense of collective enjoyment: the individuals appear to be slightly lost in the frame (Fig. 6.15) or the photos resemble a still life of the objects of individual hedonism (Fig. 6.16).

Fig. 6.13. Family picture in a reindeer herder’s cabin, Numto, 2006. Photo: Ina Schröder’s interviewee (with permission), CC-BY-ND.

Fig. 6.14. Group portrait taken by auto-timer in auntie’s flat, Barnaul 2010. Photo: Joachim Otto Habeck’s interviewee (with permission), CC-BY-ND.
In other words, the high moments are not necessarily enjoyed inside the family circle. Moreover, the significance of the moment goes beyond the phenomenon of the festive holiday. The diversity of leisure activities during days off has increased: in addition to old (Soviet) and new (Russian) holidays, days at the dacha and picnics, recent images document travelling,
hobbies (playing games, creative projects, horse-riding, dancing etc.) (Fig. 6.17; cf. Chapters 9 and 10 in this volume). In addition, voluntary work in cultural organisations (festivals, costume making, debating) continues to be fairly popular and has attained new forms (cf. Chapter 8). There is one more tendency worth mentioning. Due to technological innovations it has become much easier to take spontaneous pictures rather than having people pose. This change has not only led to a diversification of images in terms of themes but also to a different understanding of what a “decisive moment” actually is. Significance is equally ascribed to instances of being quotidian. “Being there”, no matter where and in what role, has become a major subject of recent images.

![Fig. 6.17. Scene from a live-action role play near Miass, Cheliabinsk Oblast, 2011. Photo: Tatiana Barchunova’s interviewee (with permission), CC-BY-ND.](image)

“Significant other”

Some of our informants, when prompted to choose photos which best describe their lives and themselves, included portraits of people with whom they identify or to whom they relate. Such sense of attachment was a suitable way for the informants to describe themselves.

Both women and men showed their affiliation with their partners to the same extent (women selected two images of men, men selected three images of women, one man chose an image of his gay partner).
The informants also chose images of themselves with their siblings (both sexes selected three such images). The number of such images is low in comparison to other family pictures. In the case of the images depicting couples who are dating, at their own wedding, or married, the number is even lower. Although the strategies of finding a partner are articulated in the informants’ stories, visually this issue seems to be insignificant. It is fair to assume that both women and men prefer to choose a family photo of the couple with children rather than without children. The child-centred sentiment seems to be overwhelmingly strong for both women and men. In other words, the visual representation of a family implies the presence of offspring, presumably as a marker of continuity.

Having mentioned above the frequent cases of the self-presentation of women as mothers, here is the other side of the coin — informants choose pictures of their own mother to point to motherhood as a significant source of their own well-being. If the informants desire to emphasise their ties with ethnic traditions, they usually select an image of their grandmother rather than their mother. The narrative then has a double plot: the first is to show how Granny ensured the integrity of the family in times of crisis, i.e. during the 1990s. The happy time of the informant’s childhood is contrasted with a description of terrible decline in the village, town, or the whole country. Granny, however, is depicted as someone who has the capacity to surpass these unpleasant memories; her significance lies far beyond the place. Thus, while the female interviewees focus their narrative on the traditional skills (splicing, fur treatment, sewing, embroidering) and the legacy (moral values, healing capabilities) which Granny passed on to them, i.e. on continuity, the male interviewees accentuate that Granny taught them orderliness and reliance; this is partially because of gender differentiation (the boys learn their duties and skills from the men). The second plot in the story develops around Granny’s death. The denouement of the story, illustrated by supplementary images, shows the informants ensuring the continuity of the family: they are posing in ethnic costumes and with their family, organising a cultural festival, practising traditional handicrafts, and being in close contact with the Siberian landscape. Here well-being is understood as the awareness and fulfilment of the ancestors’ legacy.
Some of these photos are actually portraits of a significant person alone; many are regular passport photos (seven passport photos come from Chukotka, one from Novosibirsk, all made in the 1980s). In a rural province, such as Novoe Chaplino, a passport photo is oftentimes the only available photographic depiction of a person from the past; such genre then represents the only visual memory at hand. Some of the informants who selected passport photos also possessed other pictures of themselves, e.g. a group photo in front of the kolkhoz headquarters; but still, these informants decided to choose passport photos. It may be assumed that this preference follows the Soviet (and European) standard, according to which a single portrait expresses the nuances of the personality in the most plausible manner.

Portraits of self

More than one third of all selected images (36 per cent) represent single portraits of our informants. Despite the different representation of age groups, the distribution shows that people aged between 21 and thirty chose the largest number of portraits (49.8 per cent of the total number of images, out of which only two images were made in the 1990s; the remaining 101 images were taken in or after 2000). The data show that whenever the informants (no matter what age) decided to choose a portrait of self, they would look for it among the most recent photos of the 2000s (133 images or 27.5 per cent). In order to understand the nature of these photographs, I attempt to reveal major visual traits and, thus, conceive the visual paradigm that dominates the sample. I will link this dimension with the narratives in which the reading of the term self carries an emic nature. I shall also show instances of individual happiness.

In our study, what, how, and why a photo was selected (or, on the contrary, omitted) was part of the process; it was not necessarily an easy

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14 There is also a possibility that some indigenous peoples of Siberia reject completely the faculty of photography to preserve “the past” in some specific contexts; in particular, when the image is related to a deceased person and used in the funeral ritual, it must be destroyed. In a discussion with Jean-Luc Lambert (CNRS), I learned of such cases both in West Siberia and among the Nanai people. This practice may give new insight into memory and permissible forms of its preservation. Such instances did not occur in this project.
process. The presence of the researcher stimulated the informant’s engagement in the course of ascribing significance to a particular portrait over another. What is the informant who is looking at his or her picture like? How does she or he wish to be seen? Mikhail Bakhtin’s concept of a mirror ([1929] 1994) resembles this process of reflection and selection. It is not the self who can be viewed in the picture; it is the person (appearance of the person, mask) who is to be shown to others. The choice is inevitably accompanied by the anticipated reactions of others to this face as well as one’s own reaction to the reaction of others (Bakhtin [1929] 1994). Taking into account the fact that a photographic image is made as the selection of an infinite number of possible shots, the choosing of the representative portrait, i.e. the selection of the selection, is not an easy exercise. People’s choices as well as arguments for these choices tend to vary.

Within the selection of 174 single portraits of the self (Table 6.1 on p. 254), thirty photos were taken by a professional photographer. Except for four pictures that were shot by recording the protagonist in action, all of these photos show the depicted person in a deliberately arranged setting (as in Fig. 6.18): the face occupies most of the picture (except for one full-length studio portrait), while additional props are arbitrary.

The remaining portraits of self are true home snapshots. They include a specific mode — the self-portrait. There are six selfies, all made by men, of which three were shot with the use of a self-timer (in 1971, 1974 and 2009) and another three that were taken with a long arm (two in 2010, one in 2011). Although our sample consists of 43 young informants (in their 20s and 30s) who are the most likely to choose such genre of photography, only two such photos were shot with a “long arm” in this category. According to my observations, however, this visual canon is well established in the youth culture in Siberia and also

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15 These include a) four arranged photos taken in a certain institution, out of which two were taken during the informants’ military service in the 1970s, one in military service in 1985, and one in kindergarten in 1994. (Other images are taken in institutions but in a rather informal style: one in military service in 1969, one in the 1990s and two portraits at graduation ceremonies in the 2000s); b) four passport photos, one of which was taken in the 1970s and three in the 1980s; c) nine studio portraits, of which two were made in the 1970s, three in the 1980s, and four after 2010; d) ten arranged portraits in the exterior (all were taken after 2010; they also represent a current trend as opposed to the old-time studio portraits with decorations and hanging draperies); and e) three photos for reportage purposes (all taken in the 2000s).
in communication on social networking sites. The recent popularity of a “selfie stick” and lens enhancement (close focusing mode, better light-gathering ability and higher sharpness) in light hand cameras and built-in cameras (mobile phones, tablets) allows the production of selfies in which the “long arm” is not even seen; such images are, however, absent in our data collection.\footnote{This trend might have appeared in the studied locations after the year 2012 when our data collection was ended.}

Some portraits of self may have been made in post-production. This is mostly done by cropping out the other persons from the group portrait. In our data, there is a curious case of such omitting of the collective: one informant wished to present his life just through the pictures of himself but did not have enough portraits of himself which would satisfy him; thus, he simply took group images and cut out the other depicted persons from the pictures and presented them as portraits of himself (e.g., Fig. 6.19). His selection is generally self-centred: there are four portraits of self, two portraits are self-cropped out of a group portrait.
and one picture captures himself with another person. The informant justified his choice of the latter image as follows: “Because we look alike, everybody thinks that we are brother and sister. This photograph symbolises to me that we are very close friends still […] and therefore I did not crop her out. She looks fine here. Every image is a certain part of life, which doesn’t exist anymore” (Fig. 6.20).

This story is interesting for another reason: it shows a particular relationship towards the photo object. I mentioned above another example from my field site when a woman cropped a man’s face out of the photo. While the woman disrupted the integrity of the analogue photo by literally cutting out the person who betrayed her, the young man transformed digital images in order to present his life as a series of self-contained events (in Russian, there is an expression dlia sebia liubimogo — “for himself beloved”). The different treatment and lifetimes of analogue and digital photos are evident in other cases. At least two
informants admitted that they deliberately destroyed analogue images. In contrast, two informants refused to spoil the “true photograph” (the analogue, printed-out image) but had no problem with deleting the digital images. Another two informants talked about an unexpected loss of their photographs: one man lost his home archive of analogue photos in a fire, while a young woman suffered the loss of digital images due to a computer virus. Thus, the technological underpinning of the photo production has an impact on the life of each photograph.

Even when taken by non-professionals, the portraits of self often lack the spontaneity of home snapshots. They reflect the studio-like behaviour of getting ready for the image. Although the act of photographing occurred in a real-life situation, the informants pose for the camera: in front of an exotic place or a monument (portraits at the seashore or a lakeside are common), at home (on a sofa, in front of a hanging carpet or at the stoibishche), with their favourite object (car, food, pet, computer) and in the midst of some kind of action (working on a project, engaged in a hobby or sport, celebrating, travelling, hunting, or hiking). These are all staged snaps for memories (na pamiat’). A few informants also mentioned the practice of getting together with friends, dressing up and photographing each other. This kind of self-fashioning seems to be an
experimentation with a cover-girl look; it imitates analogical practices in the business of fashion and media, in particular in glossy magazines.\footnote{Some of the informants aged 51 to 60 also chose to present themselves through portraits. Among these are men who are active on dating sites, on which the genre of a portrait is perceived by many as a must. Nevertheless, along with recent photos, the informants chose almost a third of portraits in which they are young.}

As mentioned above, in the 21–30 age cohort, almost half of the selected images (49.76 per cent) are single portraits of self. In contrast to older informants, these young people talk about photographing consciously for themselves. Photography enables the reflexive process of self-realisation, both by recording the moments of one’s life and by offering the terrain for structuring, and the control and demarcation of oneself from others. There is also a certain appeal to observing oneself. Even if the photos are from one period, the informants can clearly point to what they have achieved. The meaning of life, which they consider to be the key element of self-fulfilment, is “to do things for themselves”. Self-progress seems to be significant to them: “My achievements are who I am”. Education, the ability to travel, and the satisfied desire for material goods are common indicators of improvement.

In the 1970s and 1980s, because of the visual canon as well as the absence of a camera at home, most of the portraits were done in a studio, with individuals stiffly posing in front of a painted decoration or draped fabric. The photographer gave specific instructions on how to pose and did not encourage people to smile, but rather to look serious. The convention of a sombre look in the representational photograph was widespread in the Soviet Union and survived until the mid-2000s. The off-day or everyday life photos, in contrast, could show emotions. The act of going to the studio was a significant life event in its own right (birthday, anniversary, etc.). The moment of taking the photo was thus as important as the result. This is also true for some home photos, e.g. an image of a birthday person, and yet, there is not the same solemnity in the preparation, arrangement, organisation, and payment as in the old-time studio portraits. Considering the whole set of photos of the informants aged 51 to 60, it is clear that a temporal order is used to present the self as a person changing in the course of time.

The informants in the 31–40 age cohort assume the possibility to present their lives through their own portraits in a fourth of the cases (24.6 per cent). Others, in the 41–50 and 51–60 age cohorts, do so in a
third of the cases (33.3 and 29.8 per cent respectively). Whereas most informants up to the age of forty prefer recent pictures, the others distribute the “significant moments” within different time periods as if life was a series of events. The strategy to present themselves as diverse personalities (pokazat’ sebi raznym) is perceived by the two age groups of informants differently. The informants in their twenties and thirties chose different events and places squeezed into a few years; they used a “here-and-now” mode or a continuous present tense. The older informants have naturally a broader timeframe within which they can select the photos. What is significant, however, is that they selected the type of images which were equally present in their personal archives, but not in the selections of the young informants; namely images of “the person I was but I am not anymore”. Some of these informants preferred to line up the photos in chronological order; they literally made historical albums with the aim to preserve their memories, to remember “how it was”. Nevertheless, it is also a kind of ongoing self-making based on references to the past.

Our informants in their twenties and thirties preferred to present their life through significant moments experienced individually, as opposed to the informants in their forties and above who contextualised their happiness in a collective (a couple or a group). We are not suggesting that the experience of happiness itself is becoming individualised throughout the generations, but what seems to be true is that the forms of self-presentation have become increasingly self-centred. The size of the portrayed face in relation to the overall size of the picture is one piece of evidence for a more subject-focused visual representation. In the data set, there are several cases of an extremely large face (occupying more than eighteen per cent of the surface). This is most common among recent portrait photography. The seven such images made in the 2000s are portraits of the informants, out of which three were made by a professional photographer (two arranged portraits, one passport photo), three were taken deliberately at an amateur photo shoot (of these, one is a selfie and two were used for an online dating site) and one represents an informant in a significant moment (graduation ceremony). The largest face in the portrait made in the 2000s takes half of the surface of the image. There is but one portrait of an informant with an extremely large face made in another time period, namely the 1970s.
The face in this case takes up about one sixth of the size of the image. A large face also appears in three photos from the 2000s that fall under the category “the informant depicted in the company of someone else”. There is also one photo from the 2000s and one from the 1980s depicting the large face of another person — a portrait of the informant’s own child. The other extreme cases come from the 1980s. The largest face in these images occupies approximately 24 per cent of the surface of the image. These are mostly passport photos of the informants themselves and a “significant other” (seven passport photos come from Chukotka, one from Novosibirsk). The genre of the passport portrait explains the extremely large size of the face in these images.

Despite these several extreme cases, however, the face of the informant in most portraits from the 2000s actually does not occupy more than nine per cent of the surface, while the face of another person does not take up more than six per cent of the surface. In fact, the largest relative size of the face is observable in photos from the 1970s (approximately thirteen per cent of the surface) and 1980s (approximately twenty per cent of the surface). This is due to the fact that the prevailing genre of this period was a studio portrait focusing solely on the person (the drapery only suggests a complementary atmosphere) whereas the recent photo set includes numerous everyday-life, snapshot-like portraits in which the person is placed in context (place, activity, background, etc.).

So while it may be assumed that the more recent the photo, the larger the face, this is not supported by the data. Nevertheless, there are several facts that support the assumption of a pronounced self-centred representation in recent photography regardless of the age of the informant: 36 per cent of the images reflect the way people prefer to see themselves. Their personhood is also expressed through objects which matter to them (3.7 per cent of the images); in group portraits which include the informant, the largest face (mostly the face of the informant her or himself) is on average larger than any face in any portrait photograph which does not include the informant; the face of the portrayed informant is on average larger than the face of any other person in the group portraits; and the position of the informant in the group portraits is mostly dominant and central. These aesthetic traits of the photos complement the narratives of recent times which are based on the personal pursuit of happiness. The concept that happiness is a portion
of the collective fortune limited in stock seems to be overwhelmed by the hedonistic drive. Similarly, the Soviet idea of deferred well-being is challenged by the “here-and-now” approach. Personal happiness seems to flourish along with the collective; it does not have to be necessarily nurtured from the collective and for its own good.

Conclusion

In anthropological theory, there is a common notion that images themselves do not tell any stories. Supposedly, they are silent. They might even be uninteresting in themselves. What is important, are the memories and stories people tell around them. I disagree with this position. The image is “a sight which has been recreated and reproduced” (Berger 1972: 9); it is a serious thing to be taken seriously. As MacDougall writes (1997: 292), it is a means of communicating understandings that are barely accessible verbally. The notion of happiness is such a phenomenon.

This study represents an attempt to analyse those elements of photographic representations and narratives which point to the evidence of happiness in Siberian lives. Because of their temporal specificity, photographs tend to imply the transient nature of the depicted moments. Thus, in regard to happiness, they may be easily mistaken for an instantaneous agitation preceded and followed by oblivion. Careful analysis of the images along with the narratives, however, has enabled me to reveal the patterns which reoccur within certain time periods, regions, and social conditions. At the same time, a diachronic perspective (including over half of a century) helped me to convey how happiness defines, constructs, and stimulates people’s lifestyle projects. What interested me the most was the question of how happiness as a sensory force can stimulate change in human lives.

In order to reveal how changing visual technology and social conditions relate to happiness — which is one of the constitutive elements of the individual lifestyle project — I considered institutional, biographical, and visual characteristics relevant to the Siberian context. The biographical or personal is linked to modalities of what one wants to be, should be, would be, or could be. The social settings imply the modalities in which the personal values arise and choices can be made;
thus, the possibilities, impossibilities, contingencies, and necessities of social institutions have a direct impact on what is understood as happiness, which visual and narrative imaginaries nourish the *emic* concepts of happiness, how (if at all) happiness can be pursued, and how it refines people’s lives.

The photo selection of 484 images is structured around those “decisive moments” which are perceived by our seventy informants as meaningful in terms of their self-formation. The prevailing themes include family, education, and work, and sense of place. The collective condition of happiness expressed by the group portraits on one hand, and the personal pursuit of happiness manifested by single portraits on the other hand, are acknowledged to an equal extent. And yet, self-centred photographs are accompanied by elaborate narratives of sharing decisive moments with others while the group portraits mostly include the informants themselves. Thus, although the photo selection is divided quantitatively into two halves, both visual and narrative representations manifest a syncretic trope of happiness in Siberia: happiness is pursued neither just by the self, nor by the collective, but within a *self-in-a-collective*.

People’s connectedness, affiliations, and ties are not contrasted to personal aspirations. Self-making is enabled by the collective: family, friends, an employee’s collective, or interest group. The collective’s inability to accommodate the potential of the individual, however, is the subject of the verbal accounts of the 1990s. In this regard, only the family ties remain a strong reference in the self-making project. The affective and meaningful dimensions of the quality of life comprise achievements in work and education (promotion, graduation, and award), bonding with the family or another collective, and leisure activities (hobbies, travel). Meaning is commonly preferred over meaninglessness; the latter is a notion which arises in the stories of social change (e.g. the 1990s) or in personal tragedies (the death of a relative, loss of a herd, etc.).

At the same time, there are observable differences in the understanding of happiness in the context of Soviet and post-Soviet middle-brow ideologies of taste. In the photographs and narratives of the Soviet times, the individuals were well aware of themselves, of their personal aspirations, motivations, and wishes. However, they interpreted their self-realisation as the capacity to contribute to the
collective good. The immediate well-being of each individual should be sacrificed for moral deeds beneficial for the collective, whether it is a family, community or the “Motherland”. By contrast, the recent concept of happiness is more focused on self-realisation as well as a hedonistic experience of the world. This distinction is clear in the self-presentation of women as mothers. Motherhood is perceived to be significant by all women in the relevant age range. In Soviet times, motherhood — when achieved — implied that a woman could “do it all”, i.e. could reconcile career and family. However, today mothers often accentuate their ability to “provide it all”, including material goods such as travel and leisure activities. There is a gender difference in how family is perceived: while women associate family happiness with images of/with children, men like to see the family in unity and abundance, symbolised by gatherings at a festive table. While the cosy home has been a popular representation of material well-being throughout the decades, in recent photos, prosperity is equally defined by the leisure time spent outside the home (picnics, hobbies, travel).

There is a distinction in the self-presentation of the informants in their twenties and thirties as opposed to the older informants. While the young informants present the “here-and-now” concept of life, the informants older than forty convey their life as a series of events starting from childhood to the present. Although there is a tendency to convey life as a chronological, linear trajectory, some informants of these age cohorts emphasise the meandering and and unpredictable nature of life events. By providing images of different periods of their lives, these informants wish to present themselves as changing beings. By contrast, young informants show their diverse personalities by changing the context: events, places, and activities.

The research was based on the assumption that home photography preserves double happiness; people do not just portray well-being, they also document it by the means that provide for a satisfying appearance. Therefore, part of the study aimed to find out the aesthetic standards that are conveyed as visually pleasing and how they have been changing under the influence of evolving technology. It was revealed that the dominant approach in Siberia is *bricolage*, implying a recombination of the aesthetic standards, prevailing themes, and technological capacities imported from the centres (Moscow, St Petersburg) and then adapting...
them to the local urban or rural environment. Because of the geographical and infrastructural specificities, there has been a disproportionate availability of different (visual) technologies, specialists, and supplies. This means that some aesthetic conventions — those which rely on technology — were adopted only partially.

This is not the case of the golden section rule that is well-established in Siberian home photography; it is considered especially pleasing in the vertically oriented images. In most of the horizontally oriented images, the horizon line breaks the portrayed reality into equal halves. Until the 1980s, there was an aesthetic divide between Siberian urban and rural home photography; since then, both backgrounds have adopted a preference for horizontally oriented images with a horizon line in the middle.

Another parameter, the size of the portrayed face in relation to the overall size of the picture was measured in order to determine whether the increasing self-containment present in the narratives was mirrored in the increasing tendency of the self-centred depiction in recent photography. Our data failed to confirm this suggestion. Nevertheless, there are other visual elements that support it: a high percentage of portraits of the self within the photo set (these are made by different methods, such as by a timer, as a selfie snapshot, or by cropping out the group); conscious self-fashioning in the photos; the dominant, central posture of the owner of the photo; and the comparatively large size of the informant’s face in the group portraits. There is no evidence that the experience of happiness itself is becoming individualised through the change of the generations, social regimes, or time periods. Yet it is clear that people (regardless of their age) tend to contextualise their happiness more strongly in a self-centred manner and less strongly as being “dissolved” in a collective. Recent technological changes have also led to a shift in understanding of what a “decisive moment” actually is; images of self in the everyday context have gradually become equally significant as images of the unusual, unique, or exoticised.

Methodologically, this study shows a specific dynamic between visual and narrative representations, between photo stimulation and biographical narratives. The photo elicitation technique is acknowledged for lengthy narratives evoked by a single visual record. However, the relationship between the images and words is more complicated. The
images described as “happy” may well be accompanied by narratives of hard times, personal unease, and social decline. A vast number of narratives were stimulated by the images which were presumably taken but are now missing. In fact, loss plays a significant role. There are images which do not stimulate any narrative whatsoever. The portraits of people who are missed and mourned for evoke silence; all-telling silence — the black strip which makes the “happy” images stand out.

In Russia, Lev Tolstoi’s words are often quoted: “Happy families are all alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way” (Tolstoy 2001: 1). Our account of the Siberian experience elucidates that not only the representations of happiness vary but also how exactly these variations emerge from the particular institutional setting. The commonalities we discovered draw our attention to the forms that challenge the usual patterns, emerge unexpectedly, and surprise us by their novelty. Although the images are held to make a series, the happy images may not always link together. The immediate experience behind the images varies profoundly. Put together, the photographs cannot make up a happy life; they are only fragments, intermingled with ruptures and incongruities. And yet, the photographs have the ability to indicate the ways in which people are able to, or even dare to see their life. It takes courage to recognise happiness; whoever fails to do it, may at least see its absence.

Summarising the findings, our study shows that even though the stories around the images may be diverse in terms of emotional load mingling the positive and negative sides, the images tend to show the better (nicer, more pleasing, and more harmonious) parts of people’s lives. The photographic framing removes the historical setting from its own context and transforms it into a transient moment of individual (hi)stories. The perception of “good times” varies, however. So do the strategies of how to attain happiness and how to recapture it. As Gordon Mathews and Carolina Izquierdo write: “There is no unambiguously single pursuit of happiness, rather there are multiple pursuits of happiness” (2009: 1).

In this study, I also wished to show how happiness can be a stimulating force in people’s lives. Despite the diverse understandings of happiness in Siberia, our informants manifested awareness of their choice-making, self-reflection, and the ability to pursue well-being. They could recognise
the ways in which particular events, actions, and relationships are significant to them. There was a common understanding that happiness, even if taken as a personal category, is part of a larger social context. Thus, happiness does not affect individuals alone: the changing self is mirrored in changing others, whether it is in the family, work collective, or village. The ability of people to relate to each other proves to be crucial whenever happiness is to become a transformational force.

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Films

### Table 6.1. Single portraits of self — distribution according to age, year of production, and overall photo selection

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<tr>
<th>Age group and sex distribution</th>
<th>Total number of interviewees</th>
<th>Number of interviewees with at least one portrait of self</th>
<th>Year of the production of portraits of self</th>
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Table 6.2. Single portraits of the “significant other” — distribution according to age and year of production

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