To look at the history of late socialism beyond the limitations of totalitarian and neo-totalitarian approaches, one has to transcend and reconceptualize the simplistic model of “Homo Sovieticus” and the accompanying dichotomous modes of social space organization (private vs official, kitchen vs public places), Soviet politics (leadership/regime vs people/masses, high vs low classes, “them” vs “us”), and ideological participation (cynicism vs sincerity, official vs unofficial language/song/text). Despite substantial criticism (Yurchak), those dichotomies are still powerful. However, the complexity of late Soviet experience with its volatile, contingent, situational ideological commitment can’t be reduced to doublethink and doublespeak.

The aim of the workshop is to take a more complex approach to late Soviet rural and urban transformations by focussing on the constitutive functions of things and objects in the fabric of late Soviet society: the ways people attach specific symbolic meanings to objects in a process of “singularization of objects” (Kopytoff), the modes of rearrangement and replacement of objects in the course of changing “regimes of value” (Appadurai), and the configurations by which vibrant and dynamic materiality (Bennett) shapes relations and communities while reorganizing spaces and narratives (Butler/Athanasiou).

Contributions to the workshop will reflect on Soviet citizens’ experiences and practices and their entanglement with expert visions and discourses on object affordances and their structural, psychological, and social effects.

Financial Support
Swiss National Science Foundation

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Conference assistance
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Research project “Late Soviet Village”

Venue
University of Zurich, Room SOE-E-8
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Friday, December 14, 2018

10.15-10.30
Introduction
Ekaterina Emeliantseva Koller (U of Zurich)

10.30–12.30
Panel I: Materialism(s)
Chair: Anna Sokolova (U of Zurich)
- Serguei A. Oushakine (Princeton U)
  Veshchism: What did we know about New Materialism before it became fashionable?
- Alexey Golubev (U of Houston)
  Elemental Materialism in Soviet Culture and Society
Comment: Craig Campbell (U of Texas at Austin)

12.30-14.00 Lunch break

14.00-16.00
Panel II: Things and Objects
Chair: Tatiana Voronina (U of Zurich)
- Yulia Karpova (U of Aarhus/Budapest)
  "Stabilizing objects": developing product design guidelines for Soviet North-Western countryside, 1973-1975
- Alyona Sokolnikova (Moscow Design Museum/Stuttgart)
  A Secret Life of Things: experimental concepts&objects of the late Soviet design.
Comment: Ekaterina Emeliantseva Koller (U of Zurich)

16.00-16:30 Coffee break

16:30-18:30
Panel III: Nature and Landscapes
Chair: Ekaterina Emeliantseva Koller (U of Zurich)
- Anna Sokolova (U of Zurich)
  Urbanizing the woods: timber industry settlements in late Soviet Karelia
- Tyler Adkins (Princeton University)
- Craig Campbell (U of Texas at Austin):
  Communist Cement: Theses on late Soviet Industrialism and the Siberian Pastoral
Comment: Alexey Golubev (U of Houston)
Concluding discussion

19:30 Dinner