One of the central issues of Soviet history, and especially of late Soviet society – the main focus of this workshop – is the quality of societal fabric, that is, of social cohesion and disintegration. The conference will address this central issue by focusing on integrative and segregative functions of secret knowledge (Georg Simmel). By introducing significant limits on information circulation, Soviet authorities structured and governed society from the very beginning, balancing loyalty and privilege in ideal and material terms. The governmental and party practice of “total secrecy” (Alain Blum) became one of the main levers not only of Soviet political life, but touched upon nearly all aspects of everyday life. Regimes, rituals, and practices of secrecy that evolved from these politics became an integral part of social interaction that can be conceptualised as a Soviet “cult of secrecy”: a set of practices, discursive frames and institutional structures that could develop its own dynamics.

It is not only state politics, propaganda, and censorship that have constituted Soviet society but the ways of appropriation and re-definition of those structural and discursive frames by individuals and groups that have contributed to a unique fabric of simultaneous cohesion and segregation by reproducing loyalty to the state, to the local community or friends and family via access, possession, imagination, and communication of sensitive information. In a broader sense, it is an issue of balancing agency and submission and the ways of performing the “Soviet way of life”. Important questions will be raised with a debate on Soviet secrecy about continuities of Soviet practices and stability of the post-Soviet society.

Financial Support
Swiss National Science Foundation
Hochschulstiftung/University of Zurich,
University of Bern
Zürcher Universitätsverein

Organizers
Ekaterina Emeliantseva (Zurich)
Nada Boškovska (Zurich)
Julia Richers (Bern)

Department of History
University of Zurich/
Department of History/
University of Bern

Venue
University of Zurich, Room KOL-G-212
Rämistrasse 71, 8006 Zurich
(Entrance also from Künstlergasse 12)

Further Information
Regina Klaus
Phone: +41 (0) 44 634 38 76
E-Mail: oeg@hist.uzh.ch

Guest auditors are kindly requested to register in advance with Regina Klaus: oeg@hist.uzh.ch.
Wednesday, January 25

9:00-9:45 Workshop registration and welcome address
Nada Boskovska (Zurich U)

9:45-10:30 Introduction
Ekaterina Emeliantseva (Zurich U) and Julia Richers (Bern U)

11:00-13:00 Panel I: Secrecy regimes and experts’ cultures
Chair: Jeronim Perovic (Zurich U)

- Mark Harrison (University of Warwick): What price Soviet secrecy? The benefits and costs of conspiratorial government

Discussant: Kate Brown (University of Maryland)
13:00-15:00 Lunch Break
15:00-16:30 Panel II: Secrecy regimes, environment, and knowledge production
Chair: Carmen Scheide (U of Bern)

- Kate Brown (University of Maryland): The World’s Worst-Kempt Secret: Chernobyl and the Failure of Truth even when True
- Paul Josephson (Colby College): Heroism and Secrecy Across the Arctic: Building Industry in the Dark and Cold

Discussant: Klaus Gestwa (U of Tübingen)
16:30-17:00 Coffee Break
17:30-18:30 Evening lecture: Survival Cell - Territory - Dreamland. The Bunker in Cold War Switzerland and beyond
Silvia Berger (Zurich U)
19:30 Dinner

Thursday, January 26

8:30-10:30 Panel III: Secrecy practice, censorship, and cultural production
Chair: Ulrich Schmid (U of St. Gallen)

- Isabel Lane (Yale U): “Genre and the Missile Gap: Western Realisms and Soviet Science Fictions”
- Tarik Cyril Amar (Colombia U): Cold War narratives and representations of spying, secrecy, and multiple identities
- Alexander Markin (Zurich U): The Cult of Intelligence in late Soviet Film Production

Discussant: Asif Siddiqi (Fordham U)
10:30-11:00 Coffee Break
11:00-13:00 Panel IV: Secrecy, space, and community in closed cities
Chair: Nada Boskovska (Zurich U, CH)

- Laura Sembritzki, (Heidelberg U): White Spots on the Soviet Map: Perceptions of Closed Areas around the Secret City Chelyabinsk-40 in the Southern Urals
- Ekaterina Emeliantseva (Zurich U): Urban planning, secrecy, and community cohesion in a closed city: The case of Severodvinsk

Discussant: Stefan Guth (Bern U)
13:00-15:00 Lunch Break
15:00-17:30 Panel V: Secrecy rituals and Cold War encounters
Chair: Ekaterina Emeliantseva (Zurich U)

- Julia Richers (Bern U): Censored Cosmos. Visualisation Strategies in the Early Soviet Space Program
- Andrew Jenks (California State U): The Apollo-Soyuz Test Project and Regimes of Secrecy and Openness
- Stefan Guth (Bern U): “Did you hear about the nuclear aircraft?” Secrecy, bluff and the dosage of facts about Soviet nuclear propulsion projects (1957–1977)

Discussant: Sergei I. Zhuk (Ball State U, USA)
19:00 Dinner

Friday, January 27

9:00-10:30 Panel VI: Secrecy regimes, rumours, and everyday
Chair: Mark Harrison (University of Warwick)

- Steven Harris (National Air and Space Museum, U of Maryland Washington, USA): Not Knowing Before Going: The Culture of Secrecy and the Passenger Experience in Soviet Civil Aviation
- Fabian Lüscher (Bern U): “Did you hear about the nuclear aircraft?” Secrecy, bluff and the dosage of facts about Soviet nuclear propulsion projects (1957–1977)

Discussant: Slava Gerovitch (MIT)
10:30-11:00 Coffee Break
11:00-13:00 Panel VII: Secrecy and Memory in Soviet and post-Soviet personal Narratives
Chair: Paul Josephson (Colby College, USA)

- Galina Orlova (Restov-on-Don U/RANEPA, Moscow): Romance with Secrecy: How to Perform and to Exotize Up the Soviet Nuclear Science During and After Research Interview (the case of the Obninsk project)
- Slava Gerovitch (MIT): That-Which-Must-Not-Be-Named: Remembering Secrecy in the Soviet Space Program

Discussant: Ekaterina Emeliantseva (Zurich U)
13:00-13:30 General discussion and future cooperation
14:00 Lunch and end of workshop