Etymologically, the word ‘nostalgia’ comes from the Greek νόστος, ‘a return home,’ and ἄλγος, ‘pain.’ Introduced as a medical term for homesickness in the 17th century, nostalgia first acquired a broader spectrum of signification in 19th century France, when authors like Balzac and Baudelaire used it to designate a diffuse type of longing that could not simply be resolved by going home. Dislodged from its medical origins, nostalgia came to refer to a longing aimed not only at physical places, but also bygone eras, deceased loved ones, and more ill-defined objects considered to be lost.

Gradual extension from a physical condition to a psychological state of mind charged with symbolic value allowed nostalgia to become virulent in a variety of both literary and theoretical discourses. Svetlana Boym (2001) argues that the nostalgic desire for origins is at “the very core of the modern condition.”

Within academia, the last fifty years have witnessed an unprecedented suspicion of origins and an attack on such simple notions as ‘the authentic.’ When anti-essentialism is the norm, nostalgia becomes suspicious, leading many to supplement it with irony so as to establish a manner of critical distance.

If nostalgic feelings constitute the image of their cherished object, it is all too easy to denounce these objects as idealizations; but still one could ask whether not only nostalgic longing but also ironic appropriation and hybridization are driven by comparable desires to reconcile with the lost. While, generally, nostalgia may be seen as normatively conservative, perhaps it is analytically inevitable.
Friday, April 17th, 2015

13.00–13.15 Welcome & Introduction
Chair: Anja Ketterl

Tabea Meurer (Münster)
Longing for Power? Reflections on Nostalgia, Past Presencing, and the Construction of Élites

Rana R. Siblini (Münster)
Reading Pre-modern Arabic Poetry through Nostalgia

Tobias Becker (London)
Nostalgia and the Historians; The Resurgence of the Past and the ‘Nostalgia Wave’ in the 1970s

Sylwia D. Chrostowska (Toronto)
On the Trail of Nostalgia: A History in Critique

13.15–15.45 Panel 1: Framing Nostalgia
Chair: Anja Ketterl

Mariella C. Scheer (Berlin)
Memory is Truth, Nostalgia is Forgery?
The Creative Potential of Nostalgic Memory in Literature

18.15–19.00 Wine-Reception

19.00 Keynote-Lecture
Nicholas Dames (New York)
Rethinking Nostalgia and Pleasure:
The Example of the 1970s

Saturday, April 18th, 2015

10.00–12.30 Panel 3: Media of/and Nostalgia
Chair: Alesya Raskuratova

Mirjam Kappes (Cologne)
Mediated Nostalgia(s):
Memory and Mass Media in the Digital Age

Wolfgang Hottner (New Haven)
Winter Gardens. Space, Memoria and Images in Barthes and Proust

Katharina Greven (Bayreuth)
Longing for a New Home: The ‘Fantasy Africa’ of the German Art Patron Ulli Beier and his Wife Georgina Beier in their Archive

Nout Van Den Neste (Lisbon)
Remembering Portugal: Discourses of Portuguese Nostalgia in Saudade and Fado Music

Antoni Michnik (Warsaw)
‘Borrowed Nostalgia for the Unremembered 80’s’ - James Murphy, Memory and Retromania

12.30–13.30 Lunch-Break

13.30–15.00 Panel 4: (Post-)Transformation and Nostalgia
Chair: Thomas Hardtke

Erica Lombard (Oxford)
An Awkward Ache: Nostalgic White Writing in Post-Apartheid South Africa

Ksenia Robbe (Leiden)
Decolonizing Transformation: Nostalgia and Complicity in Ludmila Ulitskaya’s The Big Green Tent and Antjie Krog’s A Change of Tongue

Caspar Battegay (Lausanne)
Nostalgia for the Storyteller. Joseph Roth’s Narratology

15.00–16.00 Coffee-Break

16.00–18.00 Panel 5: Poetic Longing – Performing Nostalgia in Literature (2)
Chair: Clemens Dirmhirn

Qin Wang (New York)
How not to be Nostalgic of the Future: Lu Xun’s Homeland and the Politics of Modernity of the May Fourth Movement in China

Jeffrey Champlin (New York)
“Old-fashioned procreation”: Homunculus and Nostalgia for the Body in Faust II

Oliver Völker (Frankfurt)
“Dead and gone.” Aesthetics of Loss in T.C. Boyles A Friend of the Earth

Federico Dal Bo (Berlin)
Going Home When “That Agony Returns”; Primo Levi’s Ad Ora Incerta and His Tragic Nóstos from the Camps

19.00 Conference-Dinner