At the end of Woody Allen’s film *Another Woman* (1988), the question is asked: ‘Is a memory something you have or something you’ve lost?’ This is a pleasing formulation because of the resonance with the idea that a memory may be treasured – a mental keepsake – but also a placemaker for something departed. A memory is perhaps what the mind has left of something the individual has lost; sometimes it is all we have left.

Fiction is often exercised by how to represent memory. Underlying this is the question of the nature of memories: what do they seem or feel like. A memory is not a fragment, not a reflection, not an unmediated re-collection of sensory perception, but it might be understood in terms of the play on experience or thought of imagination, which itself moulds information and experience to compose something unique in the individual’s mind.

The play of the mind is perhaps clearest to us in dreaming, which Jeanette Baxter discusses in Chapter 4. Though dreams do not lay down strong memories, they do contribute to our mental stockpile and can be confused or combined with memories of waking experience. Memories themselves are also multifaceted, made up of parts that will themselves be remakings of perceptions, abstract thoughts, more memories and so forth. One theory of the purpose of dreaming is that it serves to reconcile new sensations with pre-existing ideas: the dreamer’s mind assimilating new experience or affect, creating a medley of vivid speculations as the mind re-processes both the recent and the familiar. It is arguably the

freewheeling activation of associations, as new memories and old concepts intermingle and mix, that gives rise to the bizarre kaleidoscope of images and ideas that constitute dreams. The dream puns that Freudian psychoanalysts make so much of are often merely the hooks by which a newly created memory brings an old one to consciousness.¹

Neither dreams nor memories are composed of an agreed language, but it would be impossible to convey a dream without some system of signs, of symbols and
their meanings, and words are the most common means used when trying to convey the content or operation of the mind. So, note here the metaphor of the kaleidoscope used in relation to dreams, the suggestion of the mind’s use of play in Freudian dream puns, and also the metaphor of the ‘hooks’ of memory.

But what are resonant metaphors for memory? The history of ideas provides numerous examples, and these have varied over centuries of thought from sealing wax, through books and theatres, to labyrinths and photographic plates, an enchanted loom and the homunculus to the computer (See Draaisma 2000 for a detailed history). Many of these metaphoric sources are recording devices, but all aim at parallelism: they have a literalism in their nonetheless provocative comparisons. They are the kinds of metaphor we live by, including the notion of the ‘global brain’ and ‘world memory’ discussed by Stephan Besser (Chapter 8). As Nicholas Carr also observes in his piece, ‘Misled by Metaphor’, we can be tempted by technology into a debilitating understanding of human memory if we equate it with a computer database or the internet, underplaying the role of biology and chemistry in human life. Often our metaphors of memory are constrained by an attention to storage and retrieval, when play, emotion, imagination and other aspects are equally important.

A different kind of metaphor appears in one of J.K. Rowling’s extremely popular children’s novels, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*. In this final Harry Potter novel, Harry is asked to collect a dying man’s memory and play it back later. The memory is in the form of teardrops, and reveals to Harry among other ‘facts’ unknown to him that the dying wizard was in love with Harry’s mother. The premise that memories give access to unalloyed truth is hugely misleading, but the metaphor of teardrops is intriguing. Perhaps we can think of memories in some ways as similar to these salt-and-water secretions from our tear ducts: chemical mixtures, created by some impact on our emotions, that seep or pour from us, possibly joyfully, often unhappily, sometimes unexpectedly. Something we lose from ourselves but which leave traces while they pass away, which is reminiscent of the earlier Woody Allen quotation.

From the perspective of the play of memory, perhaps a rich metaphor for memories is the figure of metaphor itself. Like we might say of metaphors, we can observe that there are dead memories, extended memories, mixed memories, and so forth. And, reiterating the theme again of addition and subtraction, metaphors both add and take away from the target for which they stand; sometimes they cannot be explained or recognized, certainly they can be culturally or experientially specific, sometimes they seem clearly to involve imagination.

Brain-imaging studies appear to show that imagination involves both conceptual and sensory processing. Imagination, the ability to form mental images, sensations and concepts when they are not being perceived by the senses, is not just abstract thought and obviously not just sensation (and there may be debate over which one it resembles more); but clearly imagination plays a role in the creation of memories for most people. By contrast, in Jorge Luis Borges’s story ‘Funes, the Memorious’ a young boy reveals to the fictionalized Borges that following a riding accident he has near-perfect memory of everything he has experienced. The boy now seems incapable of abstract thought, of imagination; and he is even unable to sleep because of his mind’s constant replay of detail.² For most people, memory