Unlike Avicenna, Aquinas, and many other medieval philosophers who conceive of memory as a kind of a storehouse where the intentions (intentiones) are preserved, Olivi does not appeal to the concept of ‘intention’ in his discussion concerning memory.\(^1\) In this respect he diverges from the Avicennian framework. The functions that he analyses under the heading of memory are:

1. Retaining memory species.
2. Remembering absent objects from the past.
3. Recognising a present object as being previously apprehended.

Olivi explicitly distinguishes functions (1) and (2),\(^2\) and although he does not treat (3) as an independent function—it is a special case of (2)—it is useful to consider them separately.

As one might expect, Olivi argues that these functions should not be considered as belonging to a distinct power. They can be attributed to the common sense if they are understood correctly. Functions (2) and (3) are brought about by acts of the common sense that pertain to past things and events, and the difference between them is that in the latter case the memory is connected to an object that is perceived, whereas the former does not presuppose simultaneous perception of an external object. Remembering takes place when we turn our attention to the memory species which are stored in the memory (although the memory as a storehouse is not actually distinct from the common sense). Sections one to three are devoted to each of the three memorative functions, and I shall deal with Olivi’s argumentation for the unity between the memory and the common sense while I analyse them.

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\(^{1}\) It should be noted that Olivi accepts that human beings also have an intellectual memory. See Summa II q. 44, 734–41; ibid., q. 54, 281; q. 58, 485–86; q. 59, 522–23 & 561; q. 74, 114–17. Cf. ibid., q. 66, 612–13. I shall not discuss his conception of it here.

\(^{2}\) “Quod autem memorativa ab ipso non differat probant, et primo, prout memoria dicitur illa quae elicit actionem recordandi. […] Secundo probant hoc specialiter de memoria specierum retentiva. De qua quidem planum est quod ad eam non spectat nisi solum speciem memorialem recipere et retinere; unde nulla actio sentiendi vel intelligendi est ab ea, in quantum tali, nisi solum pro quanto fuit de obiecto, id est, de specie quae tenet locum obiecti.” (Summa II q. 66, 609–11.)
As remembering is an intentional act of cognition which is about memories and not external objects, it is structurally similar to the imaginative acts of the common sense. I shall discuss the differences between the memory and imaginative functions of the common sense in section four.

1. Retention of Memory Species

As we have already seen, the function of retaining the memory species (species memoriales) is central for Olivi’s interpretation of the imaginative function of the common sense. Memory species should not be understood as being similar to the sensible species which figure in many medieval theories of perception. The Olivian memory species are images, similitudes, or representations of external objects. They are not formal or efficient causes of cognitive acts. Rather, they serve as the objects of intentional cognitive acts: “Memory species, by contrast, serve only as objects in which the act and aspectus of the power terminate and which represent the absent object to them.” Their role in the cognitive process of imagining and remembering is similar to the role of external objects in perceptual acts. Cognitive acts which are produced by the common sense can pertain either to external objects or to memory species.

In discussing memory species, Olivi employs the familiar imagery of a piece of wax and a signet ring. His idea is that a cognitive act leaves traces in the memory in a similar way as a signet ring leaves its image on

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3 Occasionally Olivi seems to accept that memory can serve as a storehouse of intentions. He says, for instance, that: “Nullaque est ratio quare intentio præteriti non possit occurrere somnianti sicut et ceterae intentiones quae in memoria continentur.” (Summa ii q. 59, 556.) However, this text and others of the same kind must be understood as imprecise formulations because his conception of intentions is such that they cannot be stored anywhere, as we shall see. The citation comes from Olivi’s argument that memory functions also while the subject is asleep. He is not analysing the details of the memorative acts of the common sense, and therefore he simply dismisses the details of his developed view. Moreover, according to Piron’s dating, question 59 of Summa was written before questions 65 & 66, which means that Olivi may have developed his views in the meantime.

4 “Species vero memoriales servient tantum de objecto terminante actum et aspectum potentiae et repraesentante eis objectum absens […]” (Summa ii q. 74, 119; see also ibid., q. 58, 469–70.) Memory species are similitudes, images, or representations (ibid., q. 36, 653; q. 59, 534–36; q. 72, 26; q. 74, 122–23; q. 75, 142). Even though the imagery Olivi uses pertains mostly to vision and visible qualities, memory species can represent all aspects of perceptual cognition (see, e.g., Super Isaiam, Prima pars, 214, 20–35.) See also Putallaz, La connaissance de soi, 121.

5 The imagery of a seal and wax was employed already in antiquity. See Mem. 1, 450a30–35; Plato, Theaetetus 191c–92a. To be sure, Plato’s work was not available to medievals.