I participated in the 25th Gatherings in Biosemiotics, held at the Erasmus University Rotterdam, where I presented my paper “Meaning of Smells: Towards an Evolutionary-Cognitive Semiotics of Olfaction.” The conference brought together scholars from biology, semiotics, cognitive science, philosophy, and related disciplines, creating a genuinely interdisciplinary forum.

My presentation addressed the role of olfaction in the formation of meaning, drawing on both evolutionary constraints and cognitive-neuroscientific models. I argued that while visual and auditory modalities dominate semiotic theory, smell provides a crucial case for understanding how biological signals become integrated into systems of communication and culture. The talk developed three main threads: first, the phylogenetic continuity of olfactory signalling across species; second, the computational and interoceptive aspects of human smell perception; and third, the extension of olfactory cues into symbolic and cultural contexts. I proposed that olfaction illustrates a spectrum from bio- to socio-semiotics, thereby offering a test case for evolutionary-cognitive models of meaning.

The presentation was well received, and the discussion afterwards centred on how olfaction complicates classical sign categories (icon, index, symbol), as well as its implications for theories of embodiment. Several participants expressed interest in pursuing collaborations, particularly on comparative work with non-human animals and on modelling olfactory meaning in computational terms. These conversations not only enriched my understanding of biosemiotic theory but also connected directly to my ongoing MSc research in Computational and Cognitive Neuroscience at ELTE. The integration of neuroscience with semiotics was highlighted by other participants as a promising direction, and my work helped to foreground ELTE’s contribution to this dialogue.

Beyond my own presentation, I attended a wide range of sessions, including panels on plant semiotics, the evolution of communication systems, and semiotics of ecological relations. These provided valuable context for situating my project within broader biosemiotic research. The keynote lectures, in particular, clarified ongoing debates about the future of biosemiotics as a discipline, from its methodological foundations to its potential role in bridging natural and cultural sciences. I also took part in informal discussions and networking events, where I was able to exchange ideas with researchers from across Europe, North America, and Asia.

Overall, the conference significantly advanced both my own research and my professional development. I gained critical feedback that will allow me to refine my project into a publishable article, and I established contacts that may support future collaborations and exchange opportunities. More broadly, my participation contributed to raising the profile of ELTE in this field, as my affiliation was prominently associated with interdisciplinary, forward-looking research that bridges neuroscience and semiotics.