



Language Machines in Times of Crisis



**An online meeting with
Max Saunders**

**Interdisciplinary Professor of Modern Literature and Culture
University of Birmingham**

**introduced by
Laura Colombino
Professor of English literature
University of Genoa**

Wednesday, 4 March, 5:15 pm

**LITERATURE AND CRISIS
A Seminar Series Hosted by
Laura Colombino and Roberto Francavilla**

**Seminario permanente di Letteratura e Cultura Dipartimento di Lingue e Culture
Moderne**

**TEAMS: Seminari Permanenti
Codice 9ygxk2k**

The work of Cambridge-based thinkers about language and literature after the First World War — C.K. Ogden, I.A. Richards, and William Empson — prefigures the current crisis of Generative and Agential AI. Much leading thought about consciousness in the inter-war period was associated with the British intellectual C. K. Ogden. His International Library of Psychology, Philosophy and Scientific Method included landmark textbooks by major psychologists including Adler, Jung, Koffka, and Piaget. His journal *Psyche*, included work about Behaviourism, brain chemistry, and essays such as ‘Are we becoming more conscious?’ by literary critic I. A. Richards. Some of the more provocative new thinking about consciousness is to be found among their speculations on the future. Such ideas mesh with new thinking about language and criticism; fields in which Ogden and Richards were also pioneers. These writers poised before the threshold of computing thus raise questions which anticipate work in subsequent neuroscience, as well as our moment at the dawn of Artificial Intelligence, and the questions that raises about whether consciousness can be extended, synthesized, or indeed detected.



Max Saunders became Interdisciplinary Professor of Modern Literature and Culture at the University of Birmingham in 2019. He studied at the universities of Cambridge and Harvard, and was a Fellow of Selwyn College, Cambridge. He is the author of *Ford Madox Ford: A Dual Life*, 2 vols. (Oxford University Press, 1996); and *Self Impression: Life-Writing, Autobiografiction, and the Forms of Modern Literature* (Oxford University Press 2010). He has edited five volumes of Ford’s writing, including an annotated critical edition of *Some Do Not . . .* (Carcanet, 2010), and has published essays on Life-writing, on Impressionism, and on a number of modern writers. As Professor of English and Co-Director of the Centre for Life-Writing Research at King’s College London, he directed the College’s Arts and Humanities Research Institute from 2012-18. In 2013 he was awarded an Advanced Grant from the European Research Council for a 5-year collaborative project on digital life writing called ‘Ego-Media’. He was awarded a Leverhulme Major Research Fellowship to research his latest book, *Imagined Futures* (Oxford University Press, 2019), the first study of the landmark To-Day and To-Morrow book series. At Birmingham he is developing an interdisciplinary project on future thinking.