



# A multitude of possibilities with Sue MacLaine

*(automated transcript)*

## **SPEAKERS**

Sue MacLaine, Audience

*(Introduction: Renée Bellamy speaking in 2021 over spare guitar chords)*

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*(2016 audio file begins)*

## **Frank Bock**

I'd just like to welcome Sue MacLaine, who's here to talk to us this evening. And engage us in conversation. Sue is a theatre maker writer performer. Predominantly works with language and text, but is very interested in the choreographic and the body and how symbolisation how the body deals with the problem of symbolisation, and communication.

## **Sue MacLaine**

So, um, thank you, Frank, for inviting me to come here. As as Frank said, I, the thing that has influenced a lot of my practice as a creator of live performance, which has predominantly fallen into theatre, is the fact that I've also been a sign language interpreter. I've been a qualified and registered sign language interpreter for 20 years. So British Sign Language. In case you don't know, all countries have their own sign languages. So I'm fluent in British Sign Language and a little bit of international sign language. And really, I've become very interested in whether there is any correlation between linguistic rules and choreographic composition, and whether or not some of the ideas around language, how we create language, how we retain and understand language, how we make sense of the world, what relationship or influence or conversation that might have with choreographic composition. Now, I'm very early in my thinking about this. And I know a lot about linguistics, and I know a lot about language. I know very little about choreography and choreographic composition. But I do work with dancers. So I have directed two dance performances, one, both of which are solos, one with a woman called Janine Fletcher, and another with a woman called Antonia Grove. And the thing that's been fascinating for me as their dramaturg, and also, as their director, has been around how how dancers and choreographers talk about meaning making within their work. And whether or not there is a relationship between the subject matter of a dance work, and how that influences the choreographic choices that dancers make. So I might be working with Antonia I called her Toni. And I help her think about what she wants to make her piece about. And I talked to her about her ideas. And I help her structure that into some form of what you might describe as a narrative arc or a piece of work that holds together for an hour. And we can talk we'll hopefully talk a bit about that about how we understand what we're seeing. And then she will work separately in terms of creating the choreography. So I don't really have anything to do with that, although I do then look at it, and see how it fits within the whole piece. And one of the things that endlessly fascinates me and we is that she will be creating a piece of choreography for a particular section of the piece. And I'm will have said we would have talked about what that choreography needs to represent at that point in the work or in terms of the narrative arc. And I think we're speaking the same language. And then she will say something like, I think I need to be on the floor more here. Or I need to be upstage more or I need to be working more on the diagonal. And I were sort of, I'm like okay, but I don't know how why she thinks that. I don't know how that relates to the overall piece of work that we're making. I mean, I can see that it does, but I can't see those, the links between her and I's conversation. And her choreographic choices. And, and then wait, that's interesting. And there we are. So, I do quite a lot of work in talking with people who are choreographers and dancers, about how to my thoughts about how you can think about a piece of work and

how you conceptualise it, and how you then make it manifest. And I think probably there's people here who are already operating, how many people here are operating? In not their first language? Yeah, look, see, all of you are doing this. And how many people here have more than two languages? In their heads?

**Sue MacLaine**

Yeah, loads. Anyone more than four? What languages?

**Audience**

French, English, Spanish and Islamic

**Sue MacLaine**

And so which one do you have? Do you find that certain in certain languages, you can talk about certain things in a different way? Or in a more articulate way? Or do you find that there's one language where you think I can talk about that in that language? But I can't talk about that in that language? It depends.

**Audience**

I mean, like four out of five are fluent. Once one is speaking less, because blogger is very hard to speak. Just speak in a family context. However, it's definitely true that I feel like I can, I don't know, develop some kind of topics, more languages rather than the other way, besides from the experience. And talking about in one of the languages of writing or the academic level as well, but now in the collection, English is my last two kind of academic language language use. So is the one that had to split between the other. Yes, but yeah, I'm on my way. To everyday it's covered up by association. Yeah, I just asked to see it. Yeah.

**Sue MacLaine**

Is that the same for other people who are operating? Not in their first language? Do you feel? What's your sense of being able to represent yourself? If you're not operating in your first language? That might be to wider question?

**Audience**

I have an interesting experience when I've had to, I'm from Cyprus, so I speak Greek, and, and I had to work with some dancers in Cyprus, and I just find it impossible to direct them in Greek. And I felt really embarrassed trying to tell them, I would have to talk to me. And that's what I did. Yes. Impossible.

**Sue MacLaine**

Yes. That is brilliant. I mean, I understand. I don't mean, it wasn't a challenge for you, but that I think That's marvellous, I find that marvellous. What was your thought?

**Audience**

I think different things. On the show session, when I think in another way, when I want you to find my opinion, must be in Greek first.

**Sue MacLaine**

Yeah. And then back out into English.

**Audience**

Yes it might be in English, but in order to ask what I really believe I think Greek, Greek, Greek first and then translate.

**Sue MacLaine**

So one of the things that, that that both of those examples are representing is this idea of schema. And for schemata. And schema is really how we hold knowledge or how we group knowledge in our brains, I can give you a better and more fluent thing of that. So. So you could say it's how we possess chunks of organised knowledge, a mental representation that consists of a coherent collection of knowledge concerning a type of event, situation, or object. So an example would be that everybody in this room would have a schema about going to eat in a restaurant. So you don't have to think about how to behave in a restaurant. You might if you go to a completely different country, and you don't yet have the schema to be able to do that. But in the main, that's one example you would have a schema for. Getting up in the morning, you would have a schema for how to lift up your toothbrush, you would have a schema for how you put it The toothpaste on your toothbrush, you have a schema for pretty much everything that you have tried to make sense of, if there's anyone else in the room who knows things about schema and wants to add to it feel free, because this is sort of interesting. So I think in terms of when

you're making performance work, then your schema and the audience's schema are not necessarily going to be the same. And that we have within that, a cultural bias, to our own schemas. And I think this is the particularly interesting thing, going back to the conversation that I had with Tony, that when she as a dancer, and as a choreographer says, I need to go more on the diagonal. That makes sense. She's got a schemer about that, that she maybe has learned through class or through going to class or through working with other and I don't, yet, I might get there, but I don't. So at that point, we have to navigate Round of, you know, an in sign language, you would think about schema, you would represent schema, potentially like this. So this is the brain. And you might say, somebody else's brain? And you might say, so it's this idea of, can you show what's in your little filing cabinets that you've got in your head? So I'm gonna read you something. If you want to ask any questions, or say you making no sense, or any such thing with kindness, I'm very happy for you to do that. Ready, Fleur, Willie and Juliet went to MacArthur's restaurant in Wimbledon, they enjoyed their chat together, they left some money on the table, they no longer felt hungry or tired. What do you when I read the sentence? They left some money on the table? What do people what what schema do you draw on to make sense of that? What do you think has happened when when within that context? There is the sentence they left some money on the table?

**Audience** 12:30

They gave a tip

**Sue MacLaine**

Exactly, yeah. So you have done, you have relied on your you've pulled out this fine filing cabinet of like I said, going to a restaurant. And you've worked out what your behaviours are. And even though it doesn't say they left a tip, you have put these things together. So you have this capacity through your schema to fill in gaps. And we do it all the time with people. And we do it in different ways. Depending on whether we are already in agreement or we fail, we trust that person's schema, or we try and do it to try and navigate to being inside their heads. Or we do it because we feel threatened or we just have absolutely no idea about what but we're doing it all the time. And I find it very interesting in thinking about my audience, about how to be in control of when I want them to be confused when I want them to understand when I want the language that I'm using be that choreographic language or text to be obfuscated for them. And I wonder if anyone has any thoughts on that, about how you when you're in a class being taught and like Sorry, I didn't use the lady here who you were saying Constantina that you were describing, in effect that you don't have any schema in your Greek, in Greek language to talk about what you're learning here. I wonder whether whether you think that's something you'd want to challenge or extend or, or whether or not it's sort of vine is never just fine like that.

**Audience**

That's okay. We are wanting to be able to do that in language. So I think it's a matter of experiencing. I never had the experience of doing that there. I'm sure you've had more time to work there. And then go back to London. Hard to go back to the hospital beds. Everyone's angry in the end. Yeah. Yeah.

**Sue MacLaine**

Does anyone else have any examples of when they feel they have been without schema? As a nodding man, I love the nodding man.

**Audience**

A lot of examples. And that's my first time was in German, when I left seven years ago, I learned a lot here. But I didn't know there. So a lot around gender, sexuality, I can't describe in German as I don't know what is politically correct to say in German when it comes to refer, for example, to people of colour, I don't know how to do that in German. And even other things like expressing or receiving affection, and the lack of romantic way, I don't know how to do that in German either.

**Sue MacLaine**

Do you think that that has an impact for you in terms of your sense of emerging self or your emerging self as a performer or potential choreographer? Or?

**Audience**

I don't know, I would, I would have to, I would have to be back in that context to find out about that, because someone asked here now.

**Sue MacLaine**

So you'd feel confident in terms of functioning within English is your second language, all that those nuances? I just think always, I was watching somebody posted something on Facebook last night, which was some old footage that has been

revealed from the early days of The Place, actually with a woman called Anna Sokolow. Thank you. Have you seen it? Oh, did you see the food? Did you was that you? Are you Vivian? Oh, like really? I'd really like if you were Vivian? Because I've never met Vivian, but you saw it. And that? It was do you want? Could you say a little about it? Just because you would know more than

#### **Audience**

I think it's in 1971, it's a kind of documentary at The Place then. Extraordinary. They have awesome rag and bone shop or cart. Yeah. So there used to be cart that went around and collected rubbish, and then sold it on that leave to go through the streets. We've got one of those. [Unintelligible] But then it's it's a nice book I can put it on Moodle. But different classes. And there's an extraordinary choreographer to come out of it [unintelligible].

#### **Sue MacLaine**

And that's I was thinking that around this idea of how the changing nature of dance education or dancers education around that, it seemed to me watching that, that the dancers within that footage, and if you can look at it, just Can your, you know, lots younger than I am, so it will seem like, so strange. But they were all those dancers in that class, were just trying to work out what she wanted them to do. They would just, and there was a point where, again, I didn't understand that she's counting. And, and I thought, okay, she's gonna count 1234. And all sudden, she just goes to 548. They all seem to know exactly what to do. And it made no sense to me at all. And that's quite a bit. Has it? Yeah, yeah. And that one of the things that I find now when I'm working with dancers, who are maybe moving from being dancers to being choreographers to being making their own work, that trying to find a way to be responsive to their own schemas, rather than waiting to be told what to do is often a challenge. And I could see in that clip, why that why that might be the case. So

#### **Audience**

Would you say that there's something about language, languages always pointing at meaning? And some of the gaps are filled in by the schema, whether you know them or not, like there's also a sense of knowing the schema you don't know about. Like, like, like, like, like They're kind of left field. Meaning kind of pointing to

#### **Sue MacLaine 20:06**

Yes. And that the that I think that the human, you know, the language instinct or whatever you want to call it in this sort of Gestalt idea of constantly trying to make things hold, is there in all of us that if we don't understand something, we don't and this is the same I think for audiences that we, if we don't understand something, we don't necessarily just reject it out of hand, we stay, we try and find ways to, to understand it.

#### **Audience**

But what happened, I think, to nearly all of us which English is their second language, because if I read a very difficult book, or any article, is not that I'm going to stop every single one of them understand that otherwise, I wouldn't carry on through. Because it's obvious that there's not there's a limited vocabulary here. We know, it's fine. For instance, I speak in English since one year and a half, two years. Maybe

#### **Sue MacLaine**

You're a marvel. You're a genius.

#### **Audience**

That's because it depends from the experiences you leave with a language I think so now going on, I think slowly, I will build my mind colours that happens. In this case, otherwise, I mean, it's the same for audiences. I'm, if you stop a long carry on, you understand? Yeah, yeah, don't get anywhere.

#### **Sue MacLaine**

Yes. And that's called, there's a term which is called parsing, which is how if I say, the time is seven, in the evening, you will parse that sentence and add in the o clock, or add in. And people were doing that all the time. And that's what you're doing is that you're reading a sentence. And you're and I find when I'm interpreting, that sometimes, people who are speaking in the source language in English waiting for me to go into sign language will talk very slowly. And that actually, that is much more difficult, because even if I don't always understand what they're going to, I might not understand some of the vocabulary or jargon, if it's in a particular field, which isn't, you know, haven't had enough preparation, or I don't know it that while but if I can wait until the end of the sentence, then I can sort of work backwards and go, Oh, well, I think it probably meant that. And, you know, I can just say that those things fascinate me, and they fascinate me in performance, about that interaction with an audience and for me, particularly with dance work about how, how meaning is made. And I know it when I

see it, you know, when I see some dance, work, I feel something and maybe that's what the meaning is, but, you know, I don't have an answer to any of this. It's just it really interests me and thinking about in language production, you have these beautiful things called morphemes and morphemes are our units of meaning. So, say for example, dog is one unit of meaning, and if you add an S to dog, the X is a unit of meaning. And when those two units of meaning come together, you get dogs and we understand what that means. And you can have morphemes of meaning that are what they call bound or unbound. So, you can have more things that can move around like the morpheme in inside inhabit, it can attach to lots of different things and make new meaning and then you have these other morphemes which are bound, they can only exist by themselves. And you have morphemes of meaning through intonation, through the use of tones. So suffixes and prefix look looked look is one morpheme of meaning. E D looked is another morpheme of meaning. Does this does that go into semiotics? Yes. Yes, exactly. That so a bit more about what you stand

#### **Audience**

I studied a bit of semiotics here for a project. And yeah, it essentially is how you think it worth to a meaning. Yeah. So like, for instance, if you say oh, yeah, I didn't know her. And then I just say E D. That gives another meaning because it means that it's in the past. Yes, exactly. But it's just an E D. It doesn't mean having anything but itself. And it creates a meaning.

#### **Sue MacLaine**

Yeah, exactly. So it's when those two morphemes come together, they create a new world a new word. And we all have the capacity as long as we follow the grammatical rules of any language to be creative with language. So in sign language, for example, the the way that you have morphemes of meaning is through hands, and shapes. And there are very definitely handshakes that you can use, you would never see this, in certainly in British Sign Language, you'd never see that handshake. You'd never see that handshake. In the same way as in English, you'd never have a J and A T next to each other. You just don't in English, you never have to wait, I don't think. And so in sign language, you would never have that handshake.

#### **Audience**

Does the language exist without the head.

#### **Sue MacLaine**

It doesn't. So meaning is rendered in sign language from facial expression from head tilting. So pronouns are, wait, wait, go back, go back, jump too far ahead. So the head tilt, eye gaze, movement, and placement. So in English, you would have the cat sat on the mat. British Sign Language grammar has to put the mat first, because if you just have a cat, it's got nowhere to go. So you have to have, there's a mat, there's a cat. And then the cat sat on the mat. Because otherwise, the cat would just fall through space. I know it's brilliant, catch the cat. So you have this beautiful thing, sign language can do beautiful things. And if you ever want to add another language, I would highly recommend sign language in be it British or German or Greek or whatever. So it has this because it uses space. This is one of the reasons I'm so interested in it in terms of how it might link to choreographic composition. Because it uses role shift this thing called role shift. So you use this and eye gaze to so if I wanted to say, Frank and spelling his name, Frank, then I can put Frank there. And I can say me, Sue, and I can put me there, I need to never say the names Frank and Sue, ever again, because they're there. So if I want to then say, if I do that, then then Frank's there. He exists, because I put in there. I put it there. And I'm there. So. So you can then either point, and it's Frank, or you can become you can look and then embody Frank, does that make sense? Making sense. You know, it's always that thing, when you know something really well, and you're trying to explain it, you never know whether you're explaining it. So I can be Frank Frank said this. So. So it does this extraordinary. It has this extraordinary capacity to operate in either syntactic space, which means that if I'm talking about political parties, I can say that the Conservative Party is there, the Labour Party is there. And the Lib Dem party is there. Okay. And then I can refer to them and they said this and they said that, so that's syntactic space so you can carve anything can syntactic space, you put anything in. You can also have a thing called topographical space, which is a re \$retelling of what is true to a topographical space is the world that we live in. So you would say there were three students sat there, there are some benches and you'd set those up. So it's, it's a re representation of something real. And once you put those things there, you can just sort of 3D and hang around them. So, yes, so this sort of idea of meaning making and these grammatical rules so I can. So this sign this idea of schema as filing cabinets coming out of my head is not everyday vernacular in sign language, you're not going to see that every day. But I can create it, I can use it poetically. Because it still follows the correct grammatical rules of that language. Am I making sense? Yes, do

#### **Audience 30:30**

Sign language is a is different in every language, right?

**Sue MacLaine**

Yes.

**Audience**

So we know whether these spaces are different in every language?

**Sue MacLaine**

The grammatical rules of space. And in the main, the idea that the past is here, and that the future is in front of us are the same in all sign languages. It's the vocabulary and the concepts, and the cultural beliefs that are embedded within language that are completely different. I mean, I don't know of any languages, where the concept of the past isn't behind us, but there might be.

**Audience**

So when I'm having a conversation with you, and you're setting up all these people in the space, you're setting up a scene. And I have to like, visualise that. Remember that?

**Sue MacLaine**

Yes. Yes. Yes,

**Audience**

That's literally before you set the space you have to set the time there's no modification to the science to suggest when it happens. So it's not like

**Sue MacLaine**

Yeah there's no E D, there's no morphing

**Audience**

Say yesterday or 10 years ago you situate the space before you inhabit the space. So it's quite difficult to travel through time.

**Sue MacLaine**

Well, you can, so you have room, you can bring the time forwards. So you have timelines, which would be the most obvious ones is this timeline, throwing up this timeline of the past now that you could say, so if I wanted to talk about from, you know, B, C naught BC to now I might set it up as being here, but then I might move it to here and chop it down in front of me here? Because it's, it's easier to manipulate it here than it is there?

**Audience**

You ever turn around?

**Sue MacLaine**

No, no, no, no, that would be a cultural rule that it would be considered. So for people who use sign language as their first language, eye gaze is really important. And if you break eye gaze, then you're basically saying, I'm not interested in you anymore. So yeah, so you wouldn't, I mean, you can break the gaze as part of the story. But if I was conversing in sign language, and it's something I've had to sort of train myself to do, and then a noise happens. I can't do that. What's that? Because they, I have to say, I mean, this is my politeness, I have to say, not this, but a bomb has gone off over there, and then look at it, or there's a phone ringing. And that's why I'm looking. Because otherwise, they're thinking, what, why is she looking over there? So those are some of the

**Sue MacLaine**

So I wanted to Yeah, I wanted to show you these couple of films. And I wanted you to look at them. So one is three minutes. And the other one is about two minutes. And as I said, we just couldn't get them up on the doodah. Because I wanted you to look at them with this. And just and then we could just have a little chat afterwards about what you think you'll see. So if everybody could just press play

**Sue MacLaine**

So for you as, thank you. We'll look at the other one in a minute. But can you do you would you call yourself dancers or choreographers or would be choreographers, dancers would become I don't know how you self define. How do you self

define depends on the person. Okay. You could just be an artist. Okay. I'm going to play out what things did you observe or what what in terms of relating to choreographic form this idea? Was didn't think Come out from the

**Audience**

It is amazing how she actually has so much musicality. So she didn't just excuse because she wasn't. If she was just saying lyrics and she wouldn't have heard, she said it right. So when the singer was saying it, so I guess the person couldn't hear it, could actually sense the musicality?

**Sue MacLaine**

Yeah. Yeah. Beautiful note, lovely, thank you.

**Audience**

Um, something I noticed is about Elena still a few times. So I don't know if it is a thing. But when she was talking, she was motioning subject, she would look at the subject. So you know, you see flowers, so it makes you look at the subject. Whereas if she was showing emotion, like an emotion, you would, she would have her gaze right at you so that you can kind of see it. And that was really beautiful. Interesting how the gaze made you look?

**Sue MacLaine**

Yes. Yes. Lovely. It is. It is. Yeah, it's um, so it's about the Yes, about the change in communication about this is, this is me being me feeling the thing, or this is me being the rose, emerging. And so she is that idea of role shift that you can in sign language role shift to be people or inanimate objects or other? So, yeah, that was lovely. Yeah. Really nice. Somebody else had? Yes.

**Audience**

I thought it was interesting how much of a performance and interpretation that was. Because obviously, that's that's the case every time an artist is like before, but if that was just listening to the song recorded, it would have a different colouring for me, because I would interpret the words in a certain way, and she interpreted the words in this sort of way and sort of context, so I didn't have any chance to relate differently. Because she was colouring it for me.

**Sue MacLaine**

Yeah. Very nice. And I think that's, we're going to do something in a bit that just help you think about that a bit more. But, you know, some of the interesting choices that she did make was that she didn't say, some say, she said, so she was people assigning. So she made that cultural. She made that cultural mediation. And she used this idea of role shift where love is not for me, and she all sudden became somebody who we've never seen before in the song, but conceptually, it made sense. So, I and that thing about the musicality is the thing that really is one of the things that really interests me about because within Sign Language going back to these morphemes of meaning, that the length of time that she keeps a sign going is a morpheme of meaning and the pace of it and the shape of whether it starts here and comes all the way you know so this snow comes not here but it comes almost out of signing frame. So it becomes something quite elusive and magical rather than snowing. Do you know what I mean? Like everyday snow would be Oh snows No, but this comes from out so you have a signing space which is sort of this really and if you go outside of it, it sort of takes you into the realm of not of the real world. And so it comes in like this yes, so I'm pleased

**Audience**

I mean, I perceive that songs like really cheesy would it be the same in sign language like could you tell from the way someone was moving that something was like a cheesy song.

**Sue MacLaine**

Yeah, yes. I mean, she very definitely is not interpreting it as a cheesy song. But you could you would be able to show mainly through facial expression and you would possibly with what this young woman was saying about eye gaze you could decipher she is in it. She is happy to be the person who doesn't want to be loved the person who wants to be loved that everything you could within sign language be a bit more off the body, which would show your relate that you're

**Audience**

But would you only but as the person who is reading it. Would you be able to interpret it in that way?

**Sue MacLaine** 39:56

Yeah. Unless you saw other. Not necessarily. I mean, this is part of the thing about what about cultural mediation about? How do you take something that has meaning in one culture and make it have the equivalents of meaning within another culture. And for all of you who are bilingual, trilingual, then you're sort of doing that all the time. And so within this, she is choosing to place that song as a as a song that has cultural value. And so therefore, a deaf audience watching, it will understand that that song has cultural value. Someone else might interpret it in a different way, which would make it seem as if it's cheesy and doesn't have any cultural value. But that's part of the, for me in my work as an interpreter within performance is part of the challenge about what's the difference between being an interpreter and being a curator of people's experience, and that's unanswerable is

**Audience**

When you're getting with irony.

**Sue MacLaine**

Yeah, yeah. Give me an example of what you

**Audience**

There's a kind of a kind of knowing, sense of removal. Which is what you're putting out and where you are?

**Sue MacLaine**

Yes, yes. So you might, so you can show that some somebody is being ironic. And by that, and I would might do that by. So if I've, if I've set something out here, I might sort of turn away from it and, you know, have a sort of slightly less committed relationship to it. But what might be ironic in one, culture isn't the same in another one, what do you have? You can do speech marks, you can do speech marks? I think that they, I mean, there's all different gradations. Isn't there in any interpreting or translating about? What is the literacy of the person? You're? What is the cultural literacy? What is the for me with audiences who come and see me interpreting what, what is their theatrical literacy? already? So just having a sign language interpreter on the side of the stage doesn't necessarily mean that what is being interpreted is, is it is that they're having the same experience as the hearing people in the audience. They're having access? Yes,

**Audience**

That means with those cultural differences? I mean, is there over probably, like synonyms and

**Sue MacLaine**

metaphors?

**Audience**

Yeah. Like, do you have like different this? Because I found very interesting, for instance, for me, I don't know, in Italy, for instance, we have so many different dialects and the barriers and literally, between 10 kilometres in towns of for instance, if I speak to a French person, I can understand that person, it's more from an area of France or from Switzerland, because they speak about the county a certain way, or they call that Yes. So do you have these like that, that kind of culturally involves?

**Sue MacLaine**

Yes. So there are within sign language, there is regional dialects, as well. And there are what are called sign variations. So there is a whole gay sign variation. There's a whole black sign variation, as well. Are you ready? Yes. Protestant, Catholic, so in size somewhere like Scotland. in Glasgow, there are as fit as there's been a strong divide Ireland. So there is there is that but they're not, they wouldn't make it impossible. But if I turned up to work for somebody who, within a predominantly Catholic area, and I used what would be deemed as more Protestant signs, they just would never book me ever again. You know what I mean? They just wouldn't want to work with me. But that I don't know how this will whether this will make sense because so many people are. It's not English isn't your first language already, but if you could bear with me, so an example of cultural mediation, would be I've done work in courts. I've sort of worked in almost all domains, but and I've done quite a lot of court work where a deaf person has been the defendant has been accused of different things. We have a way the barristers in In English courts have a very adversarial, confrontational way of interviewing witnesses. And there's an expression in English law where a barrister might say to a witness, I put it to you have people heard that expression? Could somebody? Could somebody say, what context? I put it to you would be used in? No, well this is the thing. So I put it to you. I, my interpretation of I put it to you, we all know it, is that right most people whose English is their first language, for me, if I'm interpreting I put it to you in a court. What I think it means is, is that the barrister is challenging that witness, and is basically saying, I think you're lying. I disagree with what you have just said. And I put it to you, that actually on the night of the seventh of September, you were standing by the phone box. So in some way, they are challenging the veracity of that



witness's statement, culturally, what the other members are the other people who are in the court at the point where they hear I put it to you, the jury, the defence, the judge, what they're expecting to see, when somebody says I put it to you, is that the witness would actively defend themselves in some way. They will say, No, I, I really was not I wasn't at the phone box at that time. That would that would be the bodily presentation that people would expect. So when I interpret in court, a barrister saying I put it to you, I sign he's saying you're lying. Right, which is nothing is. But I think it's the equivalent, because what I want that witness to do is go, No, I was, I didn't do that. And if I don't make that cultural mediation, then that witness doesn't get a chance to respond appropriately. And therefore, the jury would be saying, well, they don't see they're not really standing up for themselves, or they're not defending their position in in any way at all. And that could lead to a potential perspective that that jury might have. So this unpicking of intention within communication, this intention within language is yes.

**Audience**

In terms of cultural mediation in Germany [unintelligible] and I didn't realise until coming here, how much of a difference it made. A lot of erasure happens. Like it doesn't have any dialects that are getting erased and all the meanings attached to that. All kinds of jokes don't work in the same way where they can save. All kinds of decisions are being made subtleties that make a really big difference.

**Sue MacLaine**

It really does. It really does. So just for just like 30 seconds, just on your own. Do you all know the song? Somewhere over the rainbow, The Judy Garland song? Write down for me? What in? What do you think somewhere over the rainbow means if you had to? Do you know it? Just imagine then because that's interesting without context. So what do you think somewhere over the rainbow means? No, just that sentence, but within the context of the song or not? It will be interesting to see what you think it means.

**Audience**

Just somewhere in the world.

**Sue MacLaine**

Somewhere in the world.

**Audience**

Yep. In a place that I can't be.

**Sue MacLaine**

Great.

**Audience**

It has a bit of a sense of a utopia.

**Sue MacLaine**

Yes. Lovely. Heaven. Yeah.

**Audience**

I can dream and imagine a world

**Sue MacLaine**

Yeah. Yeah. Great. Great. So if you were making an interpretation, either from your English into your second language or for me if I'm working with that. Then the idea of just signing you could sign and I'm going to show you this other piece of video. Which I think, is less about interpreting, but maybe I've spoilt it now, but so I could say, some, some where over the rainbow. You know, and I'm following the English word order. But that doesn't communicate anything about the meaning. And if I take the things that you were saying I might, I can't, you know, but I might say

**Sue MacLaine** 50:28

I don't know, depending on how cheesy I wanted to be. But those, it's so fascinating. I find it so fascinating to spend. My I spend my nerdy hours just thinking, what did that mean? When that person said that to me? Or when I heard that? What does it what does it mean? And what do they want me to do with that language? What have they said? But what do they mean? What do they want me to do? What are they expecting? And I'm just gonna read you a little. I'm aware that time is

attacking. So um, so this is just a funny thing about that. So this is a story. This is a piece of text, which is from the play that I've just been touring called, Can I Start Again Please which is performed in English and British Sign languages, parallel languages, and, and it's all about interpretation and the capacities of language. Anyway, there is a story. I know this, really, but I don't want to perform it. So I'm gonna read it. There is a story. I am uncertain if it is apocryphal. President Reagan, everybody know President Reagan. Yeah, you might be too young president Reagan was the president of America in the 80s. President Reagan was visiting Russia for the first time after signing a treaty that eliminated a whole class of nuclear weapons from Europe. At the end of a summit meet, at the end of the summit meeting, Reagan gave a speech of thanks, finishing with a joke about farmers and cowboys. The Russian interpreter knew this joke to be untranslatable, and so decided to tell a Russian joke. Instead, he ignored completely what Reagan said and went ahead with a joke about vodka and long winter nights. The joke was very well received, Reagan got the big laugh that he wanted. And the Russian politicians were appreciative of his sense of humour. All was well. And that, you know, when I was training as an interpreter, that was a story. We don't know whether it's true or not. But that interpreter in that moment, the intention of Reagan telling a joke, was not the joke. It didn't matter. He wanted to show he was funny. And, and he wanted the Russian politicians to laugh. And so you know, so I think that's, you know, as we all go forward in our lives, I think thinking in depth about what it is that you're trying to say, what it is that other people are trying to say, how are you making meaning as you become artists or you are artists? It's just, I don't know, I find it. Yeah, sort of endlessly fascinating and grounding experience to to just rinse communication through different lenses. I'm just going to show you Pina Bausch, the man I love. So I think that this is quite different to the one that we saw before. And this that might be to do with who is a native sign language user and who isn't. And it's also for me about I, my view is that this use of sign language, for me is much more about sort of colonising of the language using it for your own purposes, rather than necessarily as a communicative tool for deaf people. Let's have a look.

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### **Renée Bellamy**

A video is played during this time.

### **Sue MacLaine**

So I mean, probably all of you have got much more to say about that in a way or would be an interesting perspective for me. I mean, she in a way, the choices she made for me, and that was it has made it devoid of all meaning, because there aren't any of the other grammatical features of sign language. So there isn't any eye gaze, there isn't any role shift. There isn't any non manual features. What was your perspectives on it?

### **Audience**

In that sense, it's not actually communicating. It's more of it's just like a gesture. It is yes. Because probably because they're so they seem stylized to someone who doesn't speak the language. They seem very, like specific. If he was actually communicating something, she would be probably used the sign language.

### **Sue MacLaine**

No, I mean, that for me that is much more choreographic than it is linguistic. And I think the two things that I've shown you are sort of both ends of that. Well, maybe they're not the end of that continuum. But yeah, much more.

### **Audience**

Interesting to me because we were asked to create a piece with sign language and Portuguese and English as part of Next Choreography they ran here last year. But it's quite interesting to hear what you're saying, because as my interpretations for [unintelligible] that I maybe didn't think of it from the communication way. It's more to do with the movements of the hands movements, the hands, space, which to me, as a choreographer was more was what I found really interesting because we linked it with voice as well, which I like you just said, devoid all meaning from it. Yeah, I'd never thought of it. What it was just, I always thought it was just the hands.

### **Sue MacLaine**

Yes, yes. But also, there's an interesting, yes, it does make sense. Absolutely. And I think there's a really interesting thing to contemplate, and we have to stop pretty soon, but about the difference between presentation and re presentation. And I would say that the first thing that we looked at was presentation. And the second clip is representation. And what are the what, you know, the discussions around the politics of that are huge. Another time.

### **Audience**

Maybe like the second version? If that's kind of not like disrespectful to it but.

**Sue MacLaine**

I don't think I don't think any. Well, I think it's really hard to say any creative, I think, yeah, I think it's hard to say that any creative choice is disrespectful. But I think there's an interesting contemplation as an artist about where do you borrow from? And do you want to just be somebody who basically, at its worst, ransacks a culture in a language, which already is disempowered, has a lower cultural capital than you and sort of borrow it and then chuck it away. And and that's not I don't mean that in a sort of critical way. But I think it's an interesting discussion. And for me, part of my sort of politics and ethics of making work and engaging with other, which is what I'm interested in doing is to try and find ways for that to have some reciprocity of benefit. But it's that's a huge thing. You know.

**Audience**

I think I'm just questioning him about Pina Bausch's choices. In terms of, because I've noticed that the guy does this at some point. This could mean bad, and she was like, this is

**Audience**

I think the choices that she made, yeah, cautious. Was she about if she meant to do this, I would like first person, or it was just because she liked the gesture.

**Sue MacLaine**

Yeah. Yeah. I mean, it might be that that in American Sign languages, does represent. I don't know it well enough, but that the point that you're making is a very interesting one about how do you, you know, that you can make those choices about the sorts of creative morphology, that you could move away and you could buy how you inflected your sign language, you could have a whole attitude projected forward within it. I mean, I don't know how that that clip sat in her bigger piece. I don't know what she was trying to achieve at that point, and obviously, I think she's super, you know, not that she's cares, dead anyway, what I think but, but, but this for me this sort of Yeah, a borrowing without somehow some reciprocity back to the source. I struggled with it that's

**Audience 1:00:26**

It felt for me what poetry does to language, when you see a poem is often visual and they play with words and movement as well. And you have lots of food for and, and choreography does that we do that she uses a language that she kind of create a polemic around I guess about making choice, making very obvious choices. You can see that he's just about to home. Yeah. And this is he's disappears.

**Sue MacLaine**

It does. It does. And you could unpick that over and over again, about what that does. What I know is is that for any native sign language user watching that, it would be like, what? That would be how they would receive that, which maybe was what she wants

**Audience**

was, was, because he didn't understand it was there. Was he making sense? Or was it out? Because it

**Sue MacLaine**

It followed? No, it was language, but it followed the grammatical word order of English or American English, as opposed to what the first woman did, which is just like saying some rather than saying some say she did some, like she did Somewhere over the rainbow with confidence. Exactly. Exactly. Exactly. So it does make sense. But it's not sign language. It's its vocabulary, its signs in the grammatical word order of English.

**Audience**

I might have quite a broad question. Because I've never researched about it. Even though how? How would someone, a group of people came out came up with signs that call the five timeline? Yeah. In different I mean, yeah. Each language is different. Yeah.

**Sue MacLaine**

I mean, there's there's huge debates about what gesture or spoken language, but it became a codified language. Probably the earliest is around 15/16 century. And different languages have developed with different vocabulary, depending on it was really to do with colonisation. So France, went to America, and France and American Sign Language is much more similar. I could go and work in Australia. I mean, there's some terrible things like the sign for Australia, in British Sign Language is this. Right? Which is basically chucking the convicts into that it used to be that Australia, and then we stopped being racist

and bought our votes this around. I mean, you know, it's been, it's an evolving language. So but the the codifying of it really happened in schools, but it was 2003 in this country, that it was acknowledged by the British government as a language. But there had been huge amounts of linguistic proof that it was a language really from the 60s onwards.

**Audience**

Just more interested in the facts. Why this is bad. Why does this mean? Yeah. Because from from the lessons that I've learned, because I never learned sign language. So the sign language was British. Really? So one way street. It's very straight forward. Yeah. But I know that in Portugal, I didn't learn Portuguese sign language. And I know that Portuguese is a much less practical like, compared to English. So I wonder that Portuguese sign language might be much less practical and straightforward.

**Sue MacLaine**

Yeah. I think concepts of good and evil, bad and good are represented within culture. I mean, in Britain, we do that all the time. And it's not I mean, this, you know, that idea. erase that. Most time if you see signs in British Sign Language with the little finger, you know, medicine, bitter, swear, ugly, it becomes associated with those groups of words that are negative rather than of itself. It means bad. We've got one more and then we're gonna have to stop. Two more minutes.

**Audience**

In American sign language this is I.

**Sue MacLaine**

Thank you. Good. Thank God.

**Audience**

I said a quick question in terms of mood making and about the first piece we saw. And whether whether the destined for roses things flower because roses, very specific invitations. Yes. Or the same as flower?

**Audience**

She it's just flower. Really? It's

**Sue MacLaine** 1:05:51

Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. But I would say that the intention of I don't think it matters. I don't, I'm not sure it matters because somebody wrote a song called the Rose. But in terms of the meaning of the song, I don't, my understanding of Rose sort of adds to it. But if you didn't know the cultural connotations of Rose, then I guess people would project whatever flower is the one of romance. But it's, it's like what you want to highlight that for you, it might be really important that people knew it was arose. Okay, we have to stop. It's been a pleasure. Thank you for your time.

*(Outro: Renée Bellamy speaking in 2021)*

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