

CALL & RESPONSE:
interpreting the written
teaching philosophy
through experimental theatre

BY RACHEL L. S. HARPER
rachel@rachelharper.com

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INTRODUCTION

I vividly recall the process of wrestling my teaching philosophy into language for the first time. I remember the hours spent in an exasperated search for the way to capture something as huge and dynamic as my own teaching practice into something as confining as language. I remember trying to negotiate the tension between my beliefs about education, held in my heart and carried out through my life, and the semiotic material of jargon that my representation was supposed to be built from. My emerging paragraphs looked very faint on the page, like a little caricature of teaching that could not tell the important truths about me or my work. And yet, as inadequate as the written teaching philosophy might have felt when held against the reality of what it was meant to create an image of, the time of being engaged in struggling to find language to theorize my own practice was an important time of coming to know about it. This play takes place during that time.

Deborah Britzman says that this time is disorderly because of the “belatedness” of learning: we experience lags in understanding because of a disruptive gap between what

we expect the world to hold and what we actually find in it.¹ So, to be a teacher with a lived knowledge of teaching, endeavoring to create a written philosophy of it, means unexpectedly finding (or not finding) the image of practice, and occupying a gap between embodied, practiced understanding on one side and the theoretical language to describe it on the other.² In this play, I am presenting a picture of the work of writing as a process of bridging the gap, and creating order in the disorderly time by weaving senseless little fragments of knowledge into a continuous image. But, because this play is about the process of writing, not its product, it is made up of those imagined fragments, still disorderly.

Why present this inquiry in the form of a play? There are a few reasons, related to what theatricality lends the

¹ Britzman follows D.W. Winnicott to discuss this in Britzman, D. P. (1998). *Lost Subjects, contested objects: Towards a psychoanalytic inquiry of learning*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press., and in Britzman, D. P. (2009). *The very thought of education: Psychoanalysis and the impossible professions*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

² See Schubert, W. H. (1992). Personal theorizing about teachers' personal theorizing. In E. Ross, J. Cornett, & G. McCutcheon (Eds), *Teacher personal theorizing: Connecting curriculum practice, theory, and research*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press (249-264).

subject. In the way that Madeleine Grumet³ describes, I understand the “chorus” of my identity to be built socially, through relationships with people in talk and text.⁴ This play, as collage of voices, features some dialogue that I consider myself to have invented, but most is adapted from correspondences, or quoted or adapted from the poetry, literature, and theory that inform my teaching philosophy. Gathering together voices foregrounds the collectivity of building a personal theory, while setting voices into a performed dialogue makes an important shift from expository or other sorts of prose by relating the interplay of ideas directly. William Schubert writes about using a theatrical form: “instead of writing discursively here *about* each, I will ask each to *speak*,”⁵ and likewise the speakers

³ On theatre of curriculum, teaching, and educative daily life, see Grumet, M. R. (1978). Curriculum as theatre: Merely players. *Curriculum Inquiry*, 8 (1), 37-64.; Grumet, M. (1976). Toward a poor curriculum. In W. Pinar & M. Grumet, *Toward a poor curriculum* (67-88). Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt.; Grumet, M. R. (1997). Restaging the civil ceremonies of schooling. *Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies*, 19 (1), 39-54; Grumet, M. (1991). Curriculum and the art of daily life. In G. Willis & W. Schubert (Eds.), *Reflections from the heart of educational inquiry: Understanding curriculum and teaching through the arts* (74-89). Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

⁴ See Grumet, M. R. (1990). Retrospective: Autobiography and the analysis of educational experience. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 20 (3), 321-326.

⁵ See Schubert, W. H. (1996). Perspectives on four curriculum traditions. *Educational Horizons*. 74 (4) 169-176. Also, Schubert, W. H. (2009). *Love, justice, and education: John Dewey and the utopians*. Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing.; and Schubert, W. H. (1986) *Curriculum: Perspective, paradigm, and possibility*. New York: MacMillan.

here say their parts without my interpretive interventions into what it all comes together to mean. And so, an arts-based inquiry⁶ like this sets out to create an evocative object among its performers, and it invites participants to make a personal understanding through the provision of space for interpretation and discussion.

* * *

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RLSH

⁶ See Barone, T. & Eisner, E. (2012) *Arts based research*. Los Angeles: Sage Publications.

CALL & RESPONSE

WRITTEN BY RACHEL L. S. HARPER
DIRECTED BY DOMINIQUE ENRIQUEZ

CHORUS 1

read by audience seated in
the house left side and
these characters:

SUSAN

JEAN

JEAN AS THE
LITTLE PRINCE

LIZ

MIGUEL

MARY (* bell)

KRIS

CHORUS 2

read by audience seated in
the house right side and
these characters:

MEGHAN

THERESA

MITCHELL

EAMES

MARY CLAIRE

ME

THERESA: Come back home, my little chicks.

CHORUS 1 & 2: We won't come.

THERESA: Why not?ⁱ

MARY: *

MEGHAN: Today I was out walking—

KRIS: You don't walk.

MEGHAN: I walk!

KRIS: No, you don't.

MEGHAN: Uh, I walk *all* the time.

CHORUS 1: *All* the time.

CHORUS 2: Uh, we walk *all* the time.

KRIS: Please... when was last time you walked?

MEGHAN: Okay, I was just starting to tell you that I walked *today*.

KRIS: Okay, I'm very sorry. Please, go ahead.

MEGHAN: Um, what were we—?
Okay, so I was out walking in the prairie—

KRIS: Mmm-hmm...

MEGHAN: And I saw a headstone for a dog... from, like, 1898.

CHORUS 1: Mmm-hmm...

MEGHAN: It was evidently a fox terrier. "Here Lies the Fine and Loyal Fox Terrier named Tuppence-Hapenny," it said.

KRIS: That's nice...

MEGHAN: Well, it wasn't exactly *nice*. In fact, at the time, I found it pretty sad. But I only bring it up to prove my point.

KRIS: That you walked in the river.

MEGHAN: I didn't get in it. I just looked.

MARY: *



THERESA: Come back home, my little chicks.

CHORUS 1 & 2: We won't come.

THERESA: Why not?

MARY: *

LIZ: Better go down on your marrow-bones,
and scrub a kitchen pavement

CHORUS 2: Or break stones.

LIZ: Like an old pauper, in all kinds of weather;
For to articulate sweet sounds together

Is to work harder than all these, and yet
Be thought an idler...ⁱⁱ

MARY: *

THERESA: Come back home, my little chicks.

CHORUS 1 & 2: We won't come.

THERESA: Why not?

CHORUS 1 & 2: We're afraid.

THERESA: Of what?

MARY: *



JEAN: Once there was a little bunny who wanted to run away. So he said to his mother,

MARY CLAIRE: I am running away.

SUSAN: If you run away, I will run after you. For you are my little bunny.

MARY CLAIRE: I will be a fish in a trout stream.

SUSAN: Then I will be a fisherman.

CHORUS 1: She will fish for you.

MARY CLAIRE: I will be a rock on the mountain.

CHORUS 1: She will be a mountain climber.

SUSAN: And I will climb to where you are.

MARY CLAIRE: I will be a crocus in a hidden garden.

CHORUS 1: She will be a gardener.

MARY CLAIRE: A bird?

CHORUS 1: She will be a tree.

MARY CLAIRE: A sailboat?

CHORUS 1: The wind.

MARY CLAIRE: An acrobat?

CHORUS 1: A tight-rope walker.

SUSAN: And I will walk across the air to you.

MARY CLAIRE: I will be a bunny.

SUSAN: Have a carrot.ⁱⁱⁱ

MARY: *

THERESA: Come back home, my little chicks.

CHORUS 1 & 2: We won't come.

THERESA: Why not?

CHORUS 1 & 2: We're afraid.

THERESA: Of what?

CHORUS 1 & 2: Of the wolf.

THERESA: Where's he hiding?

MARY: *



LIZ: Better go down on your marrow-bones,
and scrub a kitchen pavement

CHORUS 2: Or break stones.

LIZ: Like an old pauper, in all kinds of weather;
For to articulate sweet sounds together

Is to work harder than all these, and yet
Be thought an idler...

MARY: *

JEAN: The child has a hundred languages

CHORUS 2: A hundred languages

JEAN: And a hundred, hundred, hundred more

**CHORUS 2: A hundred, hundred, hundred, hundred,
hundred, hundred, hundred, hundred, hundred,
hundred, hundred, hundred, hundred, hundred,
hundred, hundred, hundred, hundred, hundred,
hundred, hundred, hundred, hundred, hundred,
hundred, hundred, hundred, hundred, hundred,
hundred, hundred, hundred, hundred, hundred,
hundred, hundred, hundred, hundred, hundred,
hundred, hundred, hundred, hundred, hundred,
hundred, hundred, hundred, hundred, hundred,
hundred, hundred, hundred, hundred, hundred,
hundred, hundred, hundred more.**

JEAN: But they *steal* ninety-nine^{iv}

MARY: *

THERESA: Come back home, my little chicks.

CHORUS 1 & 2: We won't come.

THERESA: Why not?

CHORUS 1 & 2: We're afraid.

THERESA: Of what?

CHORUS 1 & 2: Of the wolf.

THERESA: Where's he hiding?

MARY: *

LIZ: I thought of your beauty,

MARY: Made out of a wild thought

CHORUS 2: A word

LIZ: I thought of your beauty, and this arrow,
Made out of a wild thought, is in my marrow.

CHORUS 2: A word, a line will take us hours

LIZ: I thought of your beauty
A line will take us hours, maybe;
Yet if it does not seem a moment's thought,

MARY: Our stitching and unstitching has been naught.

LIZ: Better go down on your marrow-bones,
and scrub a kitchen pavement

CHORUS 2: Or break stones.

LIZ: God guard me from those thoughts men think in the
mind alone

MARY: He that sings a lasting song, thinks in a marrow-
bone.^{vi}

LIZ: I thought of your beauty, and this arrow,
Like an old pauper, in all kinds of weather;
For to articulate sweet sounds together

Is to work harder than all these, and yet
Be thought an idler...

MARY: *

MIGUEL: Idler.

RACHEL: Right? Can't put that down...

MIGUEL: No. Um... differentiated instruction?

RACHEL: Yeah.

MIGUEL: Constructivist...

RACHEL: Naturally. Wait, goes without saying?

MIGUEL: Probably.

RACHEL: Arts integration?

MIGUEL: Critical...

RACHEL: Meaningful, transformative?

MIGUEL: If you want to give it away.

RACHEL: Critical, meaningful, transformative.

MIGUEL: Lived experience.

RACHEL: Like all the way to Freire?

MIGUEL: If you're going to. Piaget, probably have to. Vygotsky, for you. Malaguzzi, Dewey, Froebel for you. Montessori.

RACHEL: Invite? Like, "I invite the students"?

MIGUEL: Empty vessels...

RACHEL: Wait, what it's *not*?

MIGUEL: No, true—maybe only what it is. Democratic access.

RACHEL: Yeah. Emergent curriculum?

MIGUEL: In a school?

RACHEL: Okay.

MIGUEL: Did you say "social justice"?

RACHEL: I said "critical pedagogy."

MIGUEL: Occurs.

RACHEL: Can I just say, "happens"?

MIGUEL: Empower?

RACHEL: Collaborate.

MIGUEL: Approach.

RACHEL: Encounter.

MIGUEL: Construct.

RACHEL: Patience.

MIGUEL: Gently.

RACHEL: Whole.

MIGUEL: Feel.

RACHEL: Loving.

MIGUEL: Intentions.

RACHEL: Researchers, dancers, experimenters, scientists, painters, singers, builders, analysts, feelers, mathematicians, listeners, speculators, speakers.

MIGUEL: Does that mean "makers"?

RACHEL: Not only. And I hope to be...

MIGUEL: You hope?

RACHEL: Could be? I am?

MIGUEL: the mirror that reflects to my students a vision of themselves as capable of finding and carrying out their own work, ready with the strengths to encounter new ideas and make new meaning that enriches their lives

RACHEL: and helps them grow.

MARY: *

MITCHELL: I'll use your article about teachers' personal theorizing.

EAMES: Mmm, okay.

MITCHELL: For my play...

EAMES: Mmm.

MITCHELL: Do you...?

EAMES: No, remind me.

MITCHELL: Well, I'm writing a play. About how writing feels. I mean, specifically teaching philosophies—that they can be a complicated thing to pin down. Like, you have to leave a lot out because the whole huge thing of what teaching really means can't be put in letters and spaces and dots.

EAMES: I like letters and spaces and dots.

MITCHELL: Me too.

EAMES: I mean, I think that's a nice way of describing language.

MITCHELL: Oh. Well, thanks. Well, you must have had to write teaching philosophies for jobs and things. Do you remember the feeling? It's like watching something die, but I'm not going to say that.

EAMES: It's a kind of thinking. Or being.

MITCHELL: I think so. Wait, *being*...

EAMES: "Writing up" research studies and that kind of thing, I agree—seems close to dying of extreme boredom.

MITCHELL: Well, but I—

EAMES: Imaginative writing is like a fuller dimension, though...

MITCHELL: Yeah, and when I was talking about the dying part, I guess that I didn't mean it like draining away really, like boredom. Maybe... writing that feels *deadly* is very active, teetering on the edge of what you think you can imagine? You might fall off the edge of your own thoughts? And the other deadly part is the worry that the orderliness of writing will cure the subject of its totally insane beauty. Picking a flower makes it start to die—makes it die, and start to disappear. Writing isn't enough for some things.

EAMES: Insane or inane?

MITCHELL: Insane. And, you know what, no, little philosophies maybe aren't just "writing up"—or "writing down"—because, if they are only that, then maybe we're missing something. Like, how the writing has changed the

subject, the teacher's own teaching. Especially for beginners. Or for classroom teachers who aren't really invited to write things down. Or up. You know? And make a representation.

EAMES: Hmm.

MITCHELL: Yeah?

EAMES: I am pondering.

MITCHELL: Oh.

ME: Little fellow...

JEAN AS THE LITTLE PRINCE: Yes?

ME: Once when I was six I saw a magnificent picture in a book about the jungle, called "True Stories." Here is a copy of the picture.



JEAN AS THE LITTLE PRINCE: Okay.

ME: In the book it said: "Boa constrictors swallow their prey whole, without chewing. Afterward they are no longer able to move, and they sleep during the six months of their digestion."

In those days I thought a lot about jungle adventures, and eventually managed to make my first drawing, using colored pencil. My drawing Number One looked like this:



I showed the grown-ups my masterpiece, and I asked them if my drawing scared them. They answered,

MITCHELL: Why be scared of a hat?

ME: Why be scared of a hat. My drawing was not a picture of a hat. It was a picture of a boa constrictor digesting an elephant. Then I drew the inside of the boa constrictor, so the grown-ups could understand. My drawing Number Two looked like this:



The grown-ups advised me to put away my drawings of boa constrictors, outside or inside, and apply myself instead to geography, history, arithmetic, and grammar. That is why I abandoned, at the age of six, a magnificent career as an artist. I had been discouraged by the failure of my drawing

Number One and of my drawing Number Two. So then I had to choose another career, and I learned to pilot airplanes. I have flown almost everywhere in the world. And, as a matter of fact, geography has been a big help to me. I could tell China from Arizona at first glance, which is very useful if you get lost during the night. So, I have had, in the course of my life, lots of encounters with lots of serious people. Whenever I encountered a grown-up who seemed to me at all enlightened, I would experiment on him with my drawing Number One, which I have always kept. I wanted to see if he really understood anything. But he would always answer,

KRIS: That's a hat.

ME: Then I wouldn't talk about boa constrictors or stars

JEAN AS THE LITTLE PRINCE: For other people, they're nothing but tiny lights.

ME: I would put myself on his level and talk about bridge and golf and politics and neckties. And my grown-up was glad to know such a reasonable person.^{vii}

MITCHELL: Well, have you concluded?

EAMES: I hope not.

MITCHELL: I think I'm going to say that writing is like being in a gap between experience and knowledge. Because writing a philosophy is really just experiential, it's not even really logical.

EAMES: I wonder what happens between. Is there a between? Can't it be at the same time?

MITCHELL: Yeah, playing.

EAMES: ... see where it goes?

MITCHELL: Remember Dewey's whole thing about the kitten playing?

EAMES: Mmm.

MITCHELL: *Art as Experience?* Well, he was talking about the way kids change things they're playing with by putting meaning in the actual objects. But kittens don't. Like, kittens and people might have the same experience with the *physicality* of play, but what separates a ball of yarn in the paws of playful kitten from a ball of yarn in the hands of playful person is that the person will *change* the yarn. With their imagination. Right? And yeah, writing changes the subject for the writer in that way. That's what I'm saying.

EAMES: Don't too quickly think that kittens imaginatively change the yarn they "tell." But, yes, I agree that it is not only learning, but much more.

MITCHELL: Wait, talking animals?

MARY: *

MEGHAN: Well, I'm really like a deer in many ways

KRIS: You're not really even like a deer.

MEGHAN: I am.

KRIS: No...

MEGHAN: I'm quiet

KRIS: You're...?

MEGHAN: I'm graceful.

CHORUS 2: Mmm-hmm

MEGHAN: And my legs are very strong. And, you know, toned.

KRIS: Okay, those things don't make you a deer.

MEGHAN: Well, sure they do.

KRIS: No.

MEGHAN: Plus, I have a brown coat and I leap about in the meadow.

KRIS: Meghan, there's no meadow here. Deer don't live here.

MEGHAN: You're wrong, because I live here.

MARY: *

THERESA: Come back home, my little chicks.

CHORUS 1 & 2: We won't come.

THERESA: Why not?

CHORUS 1 & 2: We're afraid.

THERESA: Of what?

CHORUS 1 & 2: Of the wolf.

THERESA: Where's he hiding?

MARY: *

EAMES: You should paint that.

MITCHELL: Okay, I will. But I don't know where he's hiding.

EAMES: The wolf?

MITCHELL: Yeah.

EAMES: In the woods.

MITCHELL: No, don't tell me! Anyway, there are other timings, too, I think... and there are timings within timings, too...

EAMES: Of course...

MITCHELL: There is the process of coming to understand

CHORUS 1: Of course...

MITCHELL: But I'm trying to think about senseless times.

EAMES: Hmm.

MITCHELL: Like gaps in the mind's ability to create a continuous image....

CHORUS 1: Like at the grocery store,

MITCHELL: For instance,

EAMES: Minding your own business,

MITCHELL: Well, when suddenly the tricky part of some thing you've been pondering clicks into place, and a thousand other connections line up, and a gap you didn't even really feel gets bridged.

THERESA: Come back home, my little chicks.

MICHELL: I once read something curious about shipwrecks in World War II...

CHORUS 1 & 2: We won't come.

THERESA: Why not?

MITCHELL: The young sailors usually drowned first, even though they were stronger swimmers for sure.

CHORUS 1 & 2: We're afraid.

THERESA: Of what?

MITCHELL: Because they panicked and because they gave up. They couldn't imagine a way to save themselves.

EAMES: Meanwhile

MITCHELL: You know, meanwhile, the older sailors drew on each other for courage, and on their... experiences of having survived—maybe survived other shipwrecks or hardships of life.

EAMES: What...?

MITCHELL: Continuity?
in their minds...
between the difficult moment and the possibility of it ending well. The young men died in the senseless gap. Right? Curiosity is a gap, too. Seeks love.

LIZ: I thought of your beauty

MARY: *

THERESA: Come back home, my little chicks.

CHORUS 1 & 2: We won't come.

THERESA: Why not?

CHORUS 1 & 2: We're afraid.

THERESA: Of what?

CHORUS 1 & 2: Of the wolf.

THERESA: Where's he hiding?

CHORUS 1 & 2: In the woods.

THERESA: What's he doing?

MARY: *

JEAN: [improvised: 3 lines]

CHORUS 1 & 2 (laughter)

JEAN AS THE LITTLE PRINCE: [improvised: 4 lines]

ME: Little fellow, you were frightened...

JEAN AS THE LITTLE PRINCE: I'll be much more frightened later...

ME: Little fellow, I want to hear you laugh again...

JEAN AS THE LITTLE PRINCE: [improvised: 2 lines]
Tonight, it'll be a year. My star will be just above the place where I fell last year...

ME: Little fellow, it's a bad dream, isn't it? All this conversation with the snake and the meeting place and the star...

JEAN AS THE LITTLE PRINCE: The important thing is what can't be seen.

EAMES: Of course...

JEAN AS THE LITTLE PRINCE: It's the same for the flower. If you love a flower that lives on a star, then it's good, at night, to look up at the sky. All the stars are blossoming.

CHORUS 1 & 2: Of course...

JEAN AS THE LITTLE PRINCE: It's the same for the water. The water you gave me to drink was like music, on account of the pulley and the rope... You remember...

CHORUS 1 & 2: Of course...

JEAN AS THE LITTLE PRINCE: And at night, you'll look up at the stars. It's too small, where I live, for me to show you where my star is. It's better that way. My star will be one of the stars for you. That'll be my present. It'll be the same as for the water.

EAMES: Water, lights, dots.

MITCHELL: Me too. Drawings. A word, a line will take us hours.

LIZ: I thought of your beauty
A line will take us hours, maybe.

ME: What do you mean?

JEAN AS THE LITTLE PRINCE: People have stars, but they aren't the same. For travelers, the stars are guides. For other people, they're nothing but tiny lights. And for still others, for scholars, they're problems.^{viii}

MARY: *

THERESA: Come back home, my little chicks.

CHORUS 1 & 2: We won't come.

THERESA: Why not?

CHORUS 1 & 2: We're afraid.

THERESA: Of what?

CHORUS 1 & 2: Of the wolf.

THERESA: Where's he hiding?

CHORUS 1 & 2: In the woods.

THERESA: What's he doing?

CHORUS 1 & 2: Washing

THERESA: What's he drying his face on?

MARY: *

LIZ: I thought of this arrow.

JEAN: They tell the child
to discover the world already there.

CHORUS 2: And of the hundred

JEAN: Hundred, hundred,
they *steal* ninety-nine.

THERESA: Come back home, my little chicks.

CHORUS 1 & 2: We won't come.

THERESA: Why not?

CHORUS 1 & 2: We're afraid.

THERESA: Of what?

CHORUS 1 & 2: Of the wolf.

THERESA: Where's he hiding?

CHORUS 1 & 2: In the woods.

THERESA: What's he doing?

CHORUS 1 & 2: Washing

THERESA: What's he drying his face on?

MEGHAN: The kitty-cat's tail.

MARY CLAIRE: A bird?

SUSAN: A tree.

MARY CLAIRE: A sailboat?

SUSAN: The wind.

MARY CLAIRE: An acrobat?

SUSAN: A tight-rope walker. And I will walk across the air to you.

MARY CLAIRE: I will be a bunny.

CHORUS 1 & 2: hundred, hundred.

JEAN: They tell the child:

CHORUS 2: That work

CHORUS 1: and play

CHORUS 2: Reality

CHORUS 1: and fantasy

JEAN: Are things that do not belong together.
They tell the child:

CHORUS 2: That work

CHORUS 1: and play

CHORUS 2: Reality

CHORUS 1: and fantasy

CHORUS 2: Science

CHORUS 1: and imagination

CHORUS 2: Sky

CHORUS 1: and earth

CHORUS 2: Reason

CHORUS 1: and dream

JEAN: Are things that do not belong together.

And thus they tell the child
that the hundred
is not there.

(pause)

The child says

CHORUS 2: The child says

CHORUS 1 & 2: hundred, hundred, hundred, hundred.

JEAN: The child says:

No way.

The hundred *is* there.^{ix}

MARY * * *

----- THE END -----

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- i from untitled American folk song, original author unrecorded
ii from *Adam's Curse* by W.B. Yeats
iii adapted from *Runaway Bunny* by Margaret Wise Brown
iv adapted from *The Hundred Languages of Children* by Loris Malaguzzi
v from *The Arrow* by W.B. Yeats
vi from *A Prayer for Old Age* by W.B. Yeats
vii from *The Little Prince* by Antoine de Saint-Exupery
viii adapted from *The Little Prince* by Antoine de Saint-Exupery
ix adapted from *The Hundred Languages of Children* by Loris Malaguzzi

RACHEL HARPER is an artist, an educator at The Art Institute of Chicago and the Museum of Contemporary Art (Chicago), and a graduate student in Curriculum Studies at the University of Illinois at Chicago.

www.rachelharper.com

