



## Conversation between Houston-based writer Garry Reece and artist and poet Jacqueline Dee Parker

**GR:** *Lets talk a little about the house you grew up in. In your artist's statement on your website, you talked about Gaston Bachelard's notion that the house of one's youth remains throughout an artist life, a dynamic, magical locus for exploring and confronting the cosmos. Does this concept still hold sway in your work, and if so, how has it changed over the years as your work has changed?*

**JdP:** Yes, I still find emotional truth in Bachelard's theories. I was raised in a Victorian house in New Haven, CT. When I was young, my father, a residential architect, used the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor as his office; my mother, a violinist, taught music lessons in the dining room every afternoon. It was an environment where creative expression was valued and encouraged. My dollhouses were foam core models of homes my father was designing. As he oversaw construction of his work, I often accompanied him to building sites on the weekends. I climbed on scaffolds, walking through rooms coming in to being--I know now that it was a great privilege to witness the evolution of his ideas, from sketches on napkins at the dinner table to elevations on the drafting table, to actual walls and windows at the building site. In The Poetics of Space Bachelard explains how a house that has been *experienced* is not an inert box because "inhabited space transcends geometrical space." The house is a container in which past, present and future reside--symbolically, it integrates one's thoughts, memories, dreams/daydreams: "Come what may the house helps us to say: I will be an inhabitant of the world in spite of the world."

What's changed over the years? Well, some potent losses—deaths of people I've dearly loved. I think this has some bearing on the character of nostalgia that exists in my work, and I try to mark what I'm making with a sense of the here and now. I'm more aware of the fact that I may honor the memory of those I've loved and love with the work that I make. This brings me profound pleasure. Culturally, of course, so much has changed—foremost, perhaps, the ubiquitous insistence of technology in our lives. Every second is pregnant with information, noteworthy and otherwise... One is continually bombarded with frequently discordant stimuli. I find it imperative to create space for reflection.

**GR:** *We talked a little about the notion of what collage is, the art of reassembling fragments, or as you put it so poetically, "the repurposing of material". We both agreed that the conjuring that happens when found objects, ready -mades, and ephemera are mixed with chance, rubs away the separation between art and life. The commonplace, if seen just right, becomes magical. Share with us the process by which you select your materials and how you balance the weight attached to each from your philosophical, visual, literary, musical and familial histories?*

Wow, that's a meaty question! As access to information and ideas grow increasingly digitized, I'm drawn to the materiality of relics of human life and culture. My collage materials include papers from antique and vintage books—literature and music, sheet music of parlor songs from the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> c., player piano rolls, etc. I'm a junk store junkie! I love the look and feel of these papers, and the fragments encourage sense memories and fuel my process. Music has



always been a fact of my life so it feels natural to have musical materials present in my work; as a poet, an image often feels more alive to me when there is some element of language present. Symbols like letters and numbers suggest the potential for communication and trigger rich associative meaning. As I work, I can't help imagining the authors, lyricists, composers, copywriters, designers, illustrators, typesetters, and pupils, etc. who played a part in the creation, distribution, or use of my materials in another time. I'm constructing space as I work, thinking about the horizontal, vertical, and other directional forces that organize human life and that create boundaries, borders, and paths of movement. I think about the sensory thresholds that bridge the conscious and the unconscious mind—and I ask what they look like: what is the brink? the passage? the aftermath?

**GR:** *Lets talk about your titles, which if I was not such a student of 'signposts', would not bother me in the very least, but, as the frog learned from the scorpion, nature is a hard thing to get away from. Some of them act as very unreliable narrators and others along with the sliver of an image, a truncated phrase or musical bar, allow the viewer to squeeze through a rabbit hole into a different Wunderland. Talk about your titles and their importance.*

**JdP:** I understand the concern you express about the titles, though my intention is not to be hermetic. I search for language that suggests what I was thinking and feeling while I was working on the piece, language that contains this perceptual sense. I want the title to both anchor and recall my intentions. Even when the title is 'found' (culled from textual fragments in the piece), I am responding to the ways in which its sound and sense have stimulated my work process.

**GR:** *I Looked at your body of work from 2000 to the present. One of the things I find of interest is the way you've handled space over the years. The early work seemed to be this working out from this premise of 'the room' and its outward expansion. As you developed that idea, the size of the pieces changed. They were very much like conversations that an architect would have with a client, with themselves as he or she tries to work, dealing with the space of a room, a floor or even an entire house. Order of Operations has the ordered fairy tale machination of a Klee. They also work very well as layered story telling, especially the 2008-2009 series, which seems to spin on the axis of remembrance. Gameboard reminds me of Rilke's last stanza of the 1st of the Duino Elegy.. 'how it was music that broke the rigid silence that surrounded the god-like youth'; like stories told, thought about, transferred esoterically at a funeral '. Talk about how your work 'cradles vistas' of your memory.*

**JdP:** Love that Rilke quote! Oh, this is a challenging question to answer—I don't know where to begin.. Many years ago I began to use book covers as the support for my work, a practice to which I periodically return. In an elemental way, the use of the book covers symbolizes unity between my aesthetic concerns. Conceptually, their physical presence suggests a sense of intimacy and reflection, as the book is an object to be held in one's hands and absorbed in quietude. The advent of e-books has added a character of nostalgia to my compositions on the book covers. I enjoy the immediacy and intimacy of working at a small scale—and I love the physical presence of larger scale works. I go back and forth..and I've discovered that there is a macro-micro relationship between my organization of space. I imagine that smaller pieces suggest a sort of magnification of what might be found if a 'moment' in a larger piece were to be seen up close..



**GR:** *Talk for a minute about color, particularly your backgrounds, which along with the titles, can steer the viewer into one direction or the other.*

**JdP:** Color is emotion. For me, it's a signifier that recalls times of day, times of year, temperature—interior and exterior spaces—in specific places from different points in time. I love moving back and forth between pure color and a more restricted neutral palette.

**GR:** Have you ever thought about pairing some of your poems with some of your smaller pieces?

**JdP:** Yes! Years ago, my MFA thesis project was a book of poems with corresponding visual images. One of my life goals still is to publish a book of images with related poems.

**GR:** We've talked about the influences that architecture and music have had and continue to have on your work. Talk finally about literature and the influence it imparts on the work and how you balance this implacable triumvirate?

**JdP:** “The Implacable Triumvirate”—there's a grand title!! I'm super sensitive to sound effects in language, and often experience a sort of auditory synesthesia with my textual elements. While I was never an excellent sight reader of music, I did study the violin for over a decade in my youth and have the ability to sound out what I'm seeing on the page. These factors have some bearing on the ways in which my associations are triggered, and play a role in my process. A series I worked on several years ago, “What's Left Unsaid”, was inspired by the fact that a poem makes as much use of what is said as it does of what is unsaid. Its full expression is complemented by what is left off of the page. In this white—interstitial--space, metaphors linger, associations resonate, little epiphanies may occur. This dynamic between presence and absence is something I like to play with visually as well.