

LOCAL NOISE

Curse ov Dialect

23/9/2006, Chippendale, Sydney
Raceless, Atarungi, August the 2nd, Vulk Makedonski,
Tony Mitchell, Astrid Lorange.

Summary:

“Hip-hop is too powerful to be modern, that’s why I believe it’s more ancient. It’s an ancient culture, with a new name. And the new name is hip-hop, that’s the modern name, but the elements that come out of hip-hop goes back—way, way, back.”

Curse ov Dialect is an experimental hip-hop group from Melbourne. Its live show is a more like an avant-garde theatre performance than a gig, with each of its five members dressed in elaborate costumes and engaging in on-stage histrionics. Musically, Curse describe themselves as ‘sonically utopian’, borrowing samples of folk music from around the world to create a richly layered sound. They are signed to the US label Mush, and have toured Australia, Japan and the US, where they played with other Mush and Anticon artists. In this interview, conducted on the ground at the noisy intersection of Abercrombie Street and Broadway in Chippendale, the Curse boys talked to Local Noise about their multi-faceted, globalised, anarchic philosophy of hip-hop, and their eclectic influences: from John Cage to tropicalia, Surrealism to Macedonian folk tunes.

About:

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Local Noise is an ARC-funded research project from the University of Technology, Sydney. Its focus is on Australian hip-hop, and the localisation of hip-hop in different cultural, societal and educational contexts.

R: Raceless

V: Vulk Makedonski

A2: August the 2nd

A: Atarungi

TM: Tony Mitchell

AL: Astrid Lorange

TM: It's been three years since *Lost in the Real Sky*... What's been happening since then?

A2: We've been working on *Wooden Tongues*, the new album.

TM: For three years?

VM: No, I think for one and half years we didn't work on the album.

R: Because we were touring overseas – we did the US, Europe and Japan – and then so after that we were just doing the same stuff for ages. We were slowly building beats, little bits and pieces of tracks, throughout that time, and then it started.

VM: At the start of 2005 we had a concept for an album ready, but then we changed our mind, and started doing new tracks again, which became *Wooden Tongues*.

TM: And how was the US tour? How did you go down over there?

R: Some of the bigger cities were really awesome gigs, in LA and stuff – just playing with people like Radioinactive and those type of abstract, underground, experimental hip-hop artists – to relate to them was good. But performing Australian hip-hop to an American audience was interesting.

TM: What sort of responses did you get?

R: Pretty positive, some places, some places bewilderment, because of the costumes that we wear on stage. They were just a bit like, 'Whoa!'.

A2: I think they took to the costumes a bit better than in Australia. 'Cause I remember the first time we did that in Australia and people we really freaked out, whereas...

R: Japan liked it. And Europe liked it.

A2: ...whereas I suppose in the US they want something new. So they were kind of refreshed but kind of shocked at the same time.

R: We're doing something that's not like them, and it's not like what's happens in Australia, as well, so it's just luck of the draw, chance.

TM: Afrika Bambaataa used to dress up in costume, in the early days of hip-hop...

R: Correct!

TM: ...Grandmaster Flash, as well...

R: That's right.

VM: And they're some of the founders of it, so...

R: And then we wear it and they're like, 'You guys aren't hip-hop', or whatever, and it's just like, those guys that are doing the really ignorant gangsta rap: *that* isn't hip-hop, to me. That isn't hip-hop,

that's not what it's about. Hip-hop is about progression and open-mindedness and consciousness. And people don't see that anymore.

- AL:** It seems to be something that people talk about, or emphasise the most when they talk about you guys the most; it's always the first thing that they say, that you guys wear crazy costumes. I always think, 'Yeah, they do, but what else? There's so much more to say!'
- R:** When you hear the CD, it's different to seeing it live, that's why. You can see the lyrics, what we're talking about, and you can hear the samples that are from different cultures and different musical forms, mixed together that create symbolism in samples.
- TM:** On that point: you sample a lot of world music and music from different cultures and things like that... Is there a kind of ethical issue at any point? In terms of using things from other cultures?
- A2:** I think we try and not use too much. We use very, very minute amounts of sampling, and loop it, so we're not sampling a whole chunk at once.
- R:** But you're talking about sample clearance, you're talking about it in terms of cultural...
- TM:** Yeah, I'm thinking about Deep Forest, and groups like that.
- R:** To me that's academic people doing music and stealing from culture. Which is different to growing up in a multicultural society and taking from what is around you in your environment. And growing up in the western suburbs of Melbourne, myself, I was surrounded by culture, and these people are growing up around you, it's not like you're stealing, it's like your experience. Curse ov Dialect, sonically, is utopian. It can't be real, because people aren't that unified in reality, but it's a way of creating a utopia ... a world where homogeny isn't America – homogenising with a little bit of exotic spice to it – it's more of a utopian idea of an equal bit of everybody creating global culture.
- A2:** I also see it as a way of introducing ethnic minorities to the world. Not necessarily to give them a voice, but to introduce their culture to the western world.
- R:** And mention it! Don't rap about girls over a track which has an Uzbeki sample. If you're going to rap about girls, rap over a psychedelic rock sample. We've got a track on the album called 'Renegades', which started off being about getting married – different people from different cultures getting married, and what their weddings would be like, but then the lyrics completely got changed to something else, but the music's like: Amazonian flutes meet Brazilian Samba meet gamelans.
- TM:** Is it true that you find some of your samples in corner shops – ethnic corner shops – in Melbourne?
- R:** Some of them... And just anywhere that we can find...
- VM:** Yeah, it comes from anywhere.
- A2:** Literally. Anywhere and everywhere.
- TM:** One of your lyrics from *Lost in the Real Sky* said: "Alienation and xenophobia, the disease of the nation." It seems like that's even more relevant now than it was then, in terms of this whole 'Australian values test' that Howard wants to do. You're a bit sort of prescient, almost. And this is your aim, to attack xenophobia?
- R:** Well I think it's boring to be xenophobic; I mean, I can't see why people wouldn't want to be interested in things that are different. It doesn't make sense to me.
- TM:** Within hip-hop, do you think that this is particularly important to introduce hip-hop heads to musical cultures from other places?

- A2:** Well I think in Australia, you have a lot of people doing what they like to call ‘skip-hop’, and I suppose that promotes white Australian culture. And what we’re trying to do is promote multicultural Australia.
- R:** But that doesn’t necessarily mean just non-white though. ‘Cause we could talk about Welsh and Celtic culture as well.
- A2:** But that’s all part of multiculturalism.
- TM:** Absolutely.
- A2:** Multicultural is quite a broad ethnic spectrum, it encompasses everybody.
- AL:** I was reading before in *Cyclic Defrost* or something, an interview with you guys, and you corrected [the interviewer’s] use of the term hip-hop and said it’s more sample-based music, what you do. I was going to ask whether you thought that sample-based music which uses hip-hop was a broader definition than hip-hop itself? In terms of how you describe Curse, would you describe it as sample-based music, as opposed to hip-hop?
- R:** No, no. I call it hip-hop, one hundred percent. I think me and Vulk would call a lot of things hip-hop that other people wouldn’t. Would you say that Macedonian folk can be hip-hop, Vulk?
- VM:** Yeah, if you take it that far, look at fundamentals of sound and stuff, I can see similarities in folk music with hip-hop, I can see folk Macedonian songs that remind me of hip-hop, to me. It reminds me of hip-hop, it might not remind the average person who doesn’t maybe have a diverse range of music in his collection...
- R:** Hip-hop is folk music.
- VM:** ...To me, I can see hip-hop coming out from a lot of different music.
- A2:** It’s a very subjective question, isn’t it?
- VM:** Hip-hop’s not the music, anyway. I’m into hip-hop because hip-hop is the culture of people that were oppressed at one stage, and a lot of cultures have songs about oppression in their folk tales. To me, that’s hip-hop. They’re expressing themselves through song, through dance – which hip-hop is – through graffiti, you know the old way when people used to write on rocks or whatever. That’s hip-hop. If you read about any KRS-One or any well-known hip-hop figures from a long time ago, they’ll tell you that hip-hop for them – African-Americans – stems from way, way back. And that also connects other cultures too, not just African cultures, a lot of cultures, European cultures, South America, everywhere: you can find hip-hop in their culture. But that’s how I see hip-hop, you can see so many places.
- R:** The thing is with hip-hop, compared to a lot of other electronic techno music, if you’re sampling stuff that is folk, you’re using the raw, actual element sound, and the beats are also from real drums. So you’re creating a folk form, by using the actual sounds – maybe they’re not played in a traditional way, but it’s basically the same idea. It’s like, you’re using folk samples and you’re rapping over it. It’s an art form.
- VM:** Hip-hop is too powerful to be modern, that’s why I believe it’s more ancient. It’s an ancient culture, with a new name. And the new name is hip-hop, that’s the modern name, but the elements that come out of hip-hop goes back – way, way, back.
- TM:** We were talking to Wire MC a while back, and he said something similar to that about Aboriginal culture. He said, basically, ‘We’ve incorporated hip-hop into Aboriginal culture, and all the elements

were there, from thousands of years ago in Aboriginal culture?.

VM: Yeah, it just fits. You don't have to try. The thing is, some people try to be hip-hop, and get lost up in all the materialism because they're not looking at it with the elements of ancient times, and they're forgetting ancient times because we're caught up in this big crazy world. If you understand all the real elements, and not just 'Oh yeah, I'm going to break now', not those kind of elements, but really looking deep into the hip-hop culture, you will find the light, and it becomes powerful. Most artists that have become really influential...

R: Like Saul Williams.

VM: ...like Saul Williams, dig from the past to bring that out. It's not a modern form.

TM: Like going back to the African griots and things like that.

R: Or why not go back to the fifteenth century baroque from France? And rap over that? Who says that that's not associated, when it can be? Because it is bringing back old things, and reappropriating it, and then you've got the sonics that provide the atmosphere of what you're going to be rapping about, and it could be anything.

VM: It's like looking for new answers to the world, because the answers that we're getting pushed on us for this world, I don't believe are right, and I believe that things that have been wiped out in the past have the answers to make this world better, and that's why I dig so much into the past. And I know that a lot of good hip-hop artists do, they know that the past and elements from the past can make this world better. People are forgetting these things and want to move on into this new age, it's obvious what's happening.

TM: What about the work that you do with Beta Erko? Is that hip-hop?

VM: Yeah, well it's got its elements there, too. It's always hard to explain what's hip-hop and what's not hip-hop, like I've said, there's different perceptions, and my perception is that Beta Erko is straight-up hip-hop. If I said that to someone who makes so-called straight-up hip-hop, they'd just say, 'You're just making a joke'... Well I'm serious, I think that to me, that's hip-hop. I got in the studio, these guys made beats, there's a guy scratching... No matter how crazy they were doing that, we were doing what any hip-hop group would do. And I'd get up and freestyle and rap – we did it in a hip-hop way. So I guess it is, sonically it sounds much more extreme than some stuff.

R: American hip-hop shouldn't dictate the terms of hip-hop anymore. That's what I think.

A2: Nor should Australian hip-hop.

R: No, exactly. The terms need to come from an individual personality's point of view. And if you do it from exactly your – I would say your 'mad side' – you can bring that out.

VM: Hip-hop's got to keep progressing. Maybe things like Beta Erko and other projects is what it might lead to, I don't know. If you look into the future and try to do progressive stuff, usually, after time, people realise that it's something.

TM: Well that's what avant-garde is all about in a way, isn't it? Being ahead of the game? Because there is so much hip-hop out now from the States that's just so repetitive, so dull and so boring.

R: It's been done before. It's the same concepts, too.

TM: That's another thing, because you guys perform with more experimental sonic artists and avant-garde people. When I saw you at the Annandale you were on with people like Kid 606.

- A2:** I think those audiences appreciate us much more.
- R:** We didn't personally choose to be part of that audience, though. They just accepted us, or we just decided to do gigs wherever, but it wasn't like we chose to be part of that scene. But looking for samples has taken us everywhere. Taken us to sound art and experimental music stores to find musique concrète, or it's also taken us to postmodern classical stores to hang out with old men to get their samples.
- TM:** What, like, Pierre Boulez?
- R:** Yeah, loop up Pierre Boulez, but make sure it's hip-hop!
- TM:** DJ Spooky did that, didn't he? He worked with Pierre Boulez.
- R:** Yeah, and he's done that stuff with the ghost recordings too... Recordings of ghosts, which I've looped up in a track, which is scary. Real recordings of ghosts, over black metal samples.
- VM:** Black metal, there's something about black metal that's so hip-hop, I reckon. See, you can find hip-hop in anything, and there's something about it, if you really listen to it, it turns into this rhythm that's almost like hip-hop, you just can't hear the beats.
- A2:** Yet again, it's all subjective.
- R:** But this is hip-hop, just the sound of... [*points to the traffic on Abercrombie Street*]
- A2:** Well, sound of the street – hip-hop comes from the street. There you go!
- TM:** You did that track on *Sonic Allsorts*, which was actually a track from *Lost in the Real Sky*, wasn't it?
- VM:** The multilingual one?
- TM:** The compilation of music in languages other than English... Did you feel that that was an important thing to do?
- VM:** We got approached to put that on there from Brendan...
- R:** Brendan Palmer.
- VM:** And I though, yeah! He said, there's a lot tracks from different languages, rapping on it, and he said 'I'd like to put that track on it'. And I was like, cool, if there's going to be different cultures represented I definitely want Macedonian [culture] to be represented, because it's one of the biggest ethnic groups in Australia.
- TM:** And you still dress in traditional Macedonian costume?
- VM:** Yep.
- TM:** [*To Raceless*] And your still dressing as Captain Cook?
- R:** That wasn't Captain Cook! It was a Maltese fifteenth-century Duke. But now I'm getting a Maltese folk costume made up.
- A2:** A woman's one?
- R:** No, a male one.
- VM:** I used to have a woman's Macedonian folk costume. That's was when I first started; it was my sister's. It got stolen though.

- R:** It didn't really start off as an idea to plan national costumes, ethnic costumes, it was more 'Let's just fuck around'.
- VM:** You know how it started? I used to wear dresses, 'cause I used to work at a big fashion place where they had dresses – summer fashion, ladies' dresses – and I used to wear dresses, they were really comfortable, and it was a really wild show back then; it was just wear whatever, take props on stage, throw things at people – it was a mental show back then. And then from that it was like 'I need to wear another dress', and I saw my sister's Macedonian folk dress and I thought, I could probably wear that, that would look funny. And I sort of wore it because it was funny, at the start. But then I realised it was kind of representing, more than just being funny. And then when it got stolen I got one made up.
- TM:** And how does that go down with the Macedonian community? Do they think what you're doing is totally crazy?
- VM:** I think when I was wearing the girl's one; some people couldn't understand what I was trying to prove. But a lot of stuff came out of that – then I was trying to prove to people that are homophobic, in my own community, by wearing this, in a way, it's kind of saying: 'Look, I don't care. I'm going to wear this. You can call me gay if you want. I'm not gay, but whatever.' You just feel free when you can do stuff like that, and when you know that people judge that stuff, it's almost like, 'Here. I'm going to put it in your face. I don't care if it upsets you'. Not to shock people, but just to be 'Fuck you, man, and your ideas'. Those were funny days!
- TM:** [*To August the 2nd*] And if I remember, you used to wear a grass skirt at some stage?
- A2:** A grass skirt?
- TM:** Or, some kind of native costume...
- A2:** I've gone through so many transitions, I tell you, I can't even keep track of what I'm wearing! These days I usually get them made up, but I use to wear a skirt from Rajasthan—yet again a woman's skirt. It actually wasn't from Rajasthan, it was from an op-shop in Mt Waverley, but that's another story. And I wore a hat from the Moong tribe from northern Thailand. So I sort of combined the two. They had nothing in common, but the colours matched.
- TM:** So it's a kind of eclecticism, really?
- A2:** Yeah. But nowadays I have them tailored. I have a friend who makes costumes, so I design them. People always ask me what the origin of my costume is, and I have to let them down and say that I made it up.
- R:** But that's cool, because I guess Darryl [A2] you're the one that creates the sonic sound of Curse ov Dialect in terms of costume, by mixing sounds up, mixing costumes up.
- A2:** And I suppose they look at me and they see someone who might be from a foreign background, and they're kind of curious, and they think it's part of my culture. But it's not.
- R:** What about [when people say] 'What's your name?' and you go, 'Darryl', and they go, 'What's your real name?'
- A2:** I was actually offended by that. This woman asked me what my name was, and I said, 'My name is Darryl', and she said, 'No, come on, don't be ashamed, what's your real name'. And I said, 'That *is* my real name'.
- TM:** You guys did a tour with Buck 65. What did he think of you?

- A2:** [*To Raceless*] I think you got a hug out of it, didn't you? Someone got a hug and a kiss.
- R:** Yeah, I did, I got a hug and a kiss out of it, at the end of the gig. The whole time we were on tour with him, he didn't really hang out with us. But then he saw the gig in Brisbane from the top level, and he came and he goes [*makes kissing motion*] and he hugged me, and he goes, 'You guys are on your own level', and walked away.
- A2:** That's a nice way to put it.
- TM:** I think he's a very cool dude, I really like his stuff.
- R:** He's progressed. It's like, country-influenced hip-hop. And there's nothing wrong with that. A lot of people feel ostracised from hip-hop, and I feel that maybe the Anticon guys these days are not really doing hip-hop as much because, it's like they've been forcibly removed from being hip-hop: 'You're too white boy to be hip-hop'. It's silly, I don't understand.
- A2:** So I suppose they create their own genre, from that.
- R:** I don't think you should give up on hip-hop. People shouldn't dictate the rules of what the hell hip-hop is.
- VM:** There's people like Sol from Anticon – he doesn't give a shit about what people are saying, African-Americans are like 'You're not hip-hop, because you're such a white boy', and he doesn't give a shit, he's still going hard, I reckon he comes out the hardest, the most political, he just says straight-up what's bullshit: 'That's bullshit, and I'm going to say it's bullshit'. He just says it straight up. I respect him a lot. And people in hip-hop circles in America have tried to push him out of hip-hop, by dissing him so much, but it's just made him go stronger. I respect that a lot, for so many people to be 'You're not hip-hop'. That's sort of happened to us, in ways, in Melbourne: 'You're not hip-hop, you're not hip-hop'. And we've just gone harder. I could turn around and say the same to you: 'What are you rapping about?'
- R:** I believe they say it because they know that we were the first ones to get a deal in the US, and if we're not hip-hop, then we can't claim that crown. If you say, 'They're not hip-hop', that means, 'They didn't hook up a US deal'.
- VM:** I find that offensive! I find that I'm so hip-hop, what the fuck, I live that shit everyday, I can't stop beatboxing everyday, if that's not hip-hop I don't know what the hell it is.
- TM:** So are you still involved with Anticon? And with Mush?
- R:** With Mush. The album came out on Mush in the States.
- TM:** 'Cause you're also with Valve?
- R:** In Australia.
- TM:** It's a Brisbane label?
- R:** Yeah.
- TM:** So Mush still has the distribution?
- R:** For the rest of the world, yeah.
- TM:** I remember reading some of the reviews in the US, of *Lost in the Real Sky*, and some of them were pretty hostile. Just saying, 'This isn't hip-hop', basically, 'What are these guys doing?'

R: There's always some good ones, too.

VM: It challenges their comfort zone. Those people, they're just like, 'I'm doing hip-hop and they're doing it differently, they're going to take it away from me, they're trying to change it. And I'm too used to this, they're going to change it and then what do I have left? I'm have to either keep up with them, or I'm going to have to create something new. I'm too lazy and stupid to create something new, I'm want to keep doing what I do'. And the feel really threatened, I believe.

R: 'Let's rap over James Brown again, like a million other rappers!'

VM: 'I like the 90s sound, I'm going to stick to that. I don't want to move, I don't want to progress'.

A2: Whenever you listen to funk, you just hear so many samples, it's ridiculous.

R: Ethiopian funk, and Hungarian funk is where it's at lately. That's what I've been listening to. Turkish psychedelia, Brazilian tropicalia, this sort of music is where the good sample are.

VM: The thing is, America has got so much good hip-hop. I think Australia is the one that's following the wrong leads. It could learn from America a lot. Instead of saying, 'We don't need America, we're doing our Aussie hip-hop'... I'm sorry, but your Aussie hip-hop is not very progressive, and there's a lot of people in America that you can learn from. You could dig out a lot of people in America that are doing very good stuff, like some of the names you mentioned.

TM: I was curious about the way that you've been working with The Herd, and the remix with The Herd... You obviously have a long affinity with The Herd.

R: They respected us when we were doing gigs, and we've done gigs with them. And they're good friends with TZU and Pasobionic is in TZU, our DJ is in that band, and we all sort of know each other... At the same time, I think that stuff [The Herd] is more accessible than our stuff. I like what they do, but I wish we could get the same sort of exposure, and I know we never will.

TM: I think the same goes for the Hilltop Hoods.

VM: Well The Herd are pretty successful. I think they're just as successful as the Hilltop Hoods. It seems, anyway, in terms of what I've seen and heard.

AL: I think in terms of really supportive fans, and a crew surrounding them, but I think that the Hilltop Hoods have the mainstream success.

TM: They just got four ARIA nominations.

AL: The Herd seem to have a really committed group of people who see them every time, and who get every album. I think it's different with the Hilltop Hoods, they just sell thousands at once. And every one says the same thing about the Hilltop Hoods, 'They're just so catchy'.

A2: They are. They're very catchy, they're very accessible, they're very Aussie, they're very local. They've got that combination. That's why they're successful in Australia.

VM: I haven't read in any interviews anyone ever saying anything, no hip-hop group would ever say anything bad about the Hilltop Hoods. There's a kind of respect there for them, 'cause of how long they've been around.

R: When we first started doing stuff in 94, the first Curse ov Dialect CD, we were a lot more straight back then, and we had different members. They were around then, and I looked up to them and I looked up to Def Wish Cast, at the time.

VM: Because they contributed a lot to...

R: ...to natural accent in Aussie hip-hop.

VM: They have. Even if I don't really get into their sound that much, I could never say, 'They're shit'. I could never say that.

R: It seems that Def Wish Cast are getting their second chance, now.

TM: Well they've just got their new album out, at last.

A2: They've earned their place because of their dedication.

TM: And their commitment, they've paid their dues. And in those days there was no triple j, there was no triple j *Hip-hop Show*, so they weren't getting their stuff played on the radio, or anything like that.

R: They just did it.

VM: It's more upsetting when someone comes out of nowhere and suddenly gets successful. And you feel that they might sort of deserve it, but you're like, 'Shit, I've been slaving away for ten years, and my music's just as good, in another way, and these guys, where'd they come from?' But the Hilltop Hoods are a different story. Def Wish Cast, too, they've just got a new album out, they're still going, and they're the most respected group from 91 or whenever when they first came out, and they're still going at it. That's when you know someone really loves what they're doing.

R: But The Herd are good because at least they do political stuff, and socially conscious stuff. And they're doing it in a way that's Australian, and it appeals to the average person, and it pulls them in. It's like, 'I can relate to this dude'. But at the same time, you have Aussie hip-hop shows where people go and go 'Aussie hip-hop, yeah, that's what I like', and then when an Asian person or a black person gets up, who might be rapping in an Australian accent—I've seen this happen—'That's not Aussie hip-hop!', and I'm like, 'Excuse me? What's your definition of Aussie hip-hop?', 'Aussies! Doin' hip-hop!' That's fucked. And that's what we are definitely not about.

A2: I suppose that's how it got the term 'skip-hop'.

R: But Aussie hip-hop can be whatever it is...

[At this point, Atarungi arrives]

TM: *[To Atarungi]* What's your philosophy on hip-hop?

A: My philosophy on hip-hop? Enjoy it, if you do, and if you don't: don't pretend. Encompass the good points and the bad points: meaning, to me personally, you've got to learn the enormity of things by embracing both sides, instead of just the ideal one; don't be afraid to partake in something even if you know that, perhaps, it's not the best thing, just give it a go. Be daring, and be open.

TM: You're from a Maori background?

A: Yes.

TM: Have you heard much Maori hip-hop?

A: These days, what I've been hearing, I'm sorry to say, is phonetically very American. But the flipside of that, things like Upper Hutt Posse, and stuff like that—fantastic. Unfortunately there isn't really that much of it getting out there.

R: And you've got Dark Tower.

TM: Yeah, Dark Tower is good. I know Te Kupu, from Upper Hutt Posse, he has actually recorded a lot of stuff in Maori.

R: Is there a lot of Maori hip-hop out?

TM: There's a bit, I mean, mainly Upper Hutt Posse and Te Kupu, but there are a couple of other groups who rap in Maori as well.

R: In their own accents?

TM: In their own language.

R: That's fucking cool.

TM: And using Maori musical samples, pre-European Maori music. There is some, but I know what you mean though, a lot of it's in American accents, people like Deceptikonz and all those kinds of people, the Dawn Raid crew, they're all in American accents and I don't know why they do it.

VM: They like it, they like that sound, that accent. I've got friends that do that too, and I can't understand it – I mean I can, 'cause of their explanation – but they just like that, they think it sounds much better, with hip-hop music, they believe that that accent sounds better. I've heard them say, 'The Aussie accent doesn't sound right for hip-hop, and we're going to do this because it sounds better'. So, in a way, you can't really question that; it's like, if they feel that sounds better, for them, that sounds better, that's what they're going to do.

R: But even different parts of Melbourne, different parts of Sydney, there's different accents, even within cities. So you get different sonic textures.

TM: That's the interesting thing about using your own voice, your own accent, not trying to imitate somebody else.

VM: Maybe they feel that the words are theirs, so the accent is not such a big deal for them.

TM: I've heard a lot of people say, 'Well, hip-hop's American, we're just reflecting that'.

VM: That's what I was talking about, the perception of hip-hop is; to me it's a global thing. To them it's not, so that's where they get stuck.

TM: There's also been a big influence in Australian hip-hop from the UK, going back to Def Wish Cast, one of the reasons they started rapping in Australian accents was because they'd heard some of the UK rappers...

R: ...Gunshot and Hijack and Silver Beat. Yeah, that was probably what inspired them, those type of people.

A: London Posse.

TM: Yeah, London Posse, Rodney P.

R: Blade, as well.

A2: Silver Bullet.

R: Yeah, Silver Bullet's dope. And they were rapping over really fast beats, that was more Bomb Squad influenced hip-hop, PE [Public Enemy] stuff. And that's the same school that we come from. Layering of sampling, which isn't done that much any more. But that's the same school as I guess what we're doing, layering lots of samples and creating a wall of texture, instead of just minimal beats.

- TM:** Do you see an affinity with what you're doing and someone like Unkle Ho?
- R:** Yeah, I think in some sense, I'd say so. But I think his stuff is still a bit more minimal than us. But I like it heaps. I would probably put us more akin to Public Enemy, and then lyrically, to a lot of those West Coast abstract rappers as well. Somewhere in between there, somewhere else.
- TM:** [*To Atarungi*] I wanted to ask you about your costumes, they're pretty wild. Where do you get the idea for your costumes from?
- A:** Aesthetically, being 100% honest, it's a façade, for myself, being that I'm a very self-conscious person. Example: I'm wearing sunglasses right now, and there's no sun, but primarily it's because I think I've got really, really horrible eyes, that I'd rather let the world not deal with, so I'll put them back on. The same thing with the costume. Plastic and stuff...
- R:** What's your country? Garbogia?
- A2:** Because he wears garbage bags.
- A:** I don't know. I think it's time for a new hat. Begin a new day in something that breathes. If I could peel off that wall and stick it on me I would.
- A2:** I don't think concrete breathes too well!
- VM:** I see a lot of art going into his costumes. There's always new ideas, put a branch here, or twist these bits – it's very much like someone's drawings.
- R:** There's a track on our new album called 'Very Misleading', and it's about ancient religions, pre-Christianity religions...
- A2:** Paganism, primarily.
- R:** ...It's about paganism. It's a pagan hip-hop track, and we sampled psychedelic folk samples from the 60s, so it's got that real like, David Koresh, evil hippy vibe, with hip-hop.
- TM:** Where did the title *Wooden Tongues* come from?
- VM:** Sometimes they come from when we first start the beat, right from the beginning, the beat starts, and usually you have to name the track just to save it, before you work on it again, and sometimes that name either sticks, or you take that name and then you change it a bit. So I guess it's the original feel you get, from the first couple of samples. But then sometimes you just change the name completely.
- A2:** It [*Wooden Tongues*] was originally called *Laverton Creek*.
- R:** Our first record, *Hex ov Intellect*, this is from our first full length, from 98, there's a track called 'Gothic Tongues', and maybe you could say it's sort of like partly a nostalgic... A lot of us are talking about our past on this album, and things we used to do. Shehab, our DJ [*Pasobionic*], actually picked it, he said, 'What about *Wooden Tongues*, because we were talking about nature a lot, and Indigenous stuff, so instead of *Gothic Tongues*, *Wooden Tongues*.'
- AL:** I was going to ask, something that I read before about your first album, you were getting inspired by 20s Dada art?
- R:** From the experimental music stuff and John Cage, and the avant-garde, I just read a lot about that, what they were doing in the 20s, just standing there and speaking nonsense. I think that there's something that we do that's probably relatable to that. Surrealism, you know. It's a bit boring to

always be literal.

- AL:** Well that's the sense that I get when I listen to your music. I have studied Dada and early experimentalism, and the correlation between what I read and the contemporary stuff is what I'm interested in. It's stuff that doesn't have a specific or locatable historical context, there's no reason why you can't say that stuff that you're doing now is comparable in style to what was happening back then.
- R:** I respect that. What about Le Pétomane, the fart orchestra guy? What year was that, 1905, this guy was farting as part of an orchestra. That's hip-hop! I'm in to all that stuff, heaps, we've been sampling stuff that maybe only people from really upper classes would hear, 'cause that sort of music is really associated with university academic type people, but because of our quest for sampling, it took us there. Anywhere we could go with samples, we thought, we've got to find the weirdest shit we can, and we found it. And there's still more to come. And there's a lot of crazy shit on the new record, too. You might be able to pick stuff. We've got some Nam June Paik on there. At the very end of the album, the outro to the album, it's got that dude smashing a piano, that's that dude [Nam June Paik].
- AL:** There's an interview with John Cage that I always think of when talk about this kind of stuff, he says there's always something to hear, there's always sound. When he went into an anechoic chamber, he heard two beats; the low, dull beat of his blood pressure and the high sound of his nervous system.
- R:** Even if you're in a room of silence there's still music.
- AL:** When I read, I thought 'That's hip-hop, man!'
- R:** People might not think a homosexual man from 1955 listening to his heartbeat is hip-hop. To me it is. So I don't care. That's the whole point, hip-hop is more than music.
- VM:** I feel like we play in so many different places that we bring these samples and let people hear those sounds. Maybe through hip-hop, those sounds, they'll get used to, it will open them up to listen to these other artists.
- R:** It's like alien sounds, you know, like Harry Partch, people who created their own musical instruments; some of those sounds that they've been inventing have never been heard outside of experimental music circles. So you throw it into a hip-hop context and play it to hip-hop people, to them it sounds like alien shit. And I really like that, to be able to – this might sound like ego – but to be the first to do it, maybe. There's that, then there's the world music influence, too.
- A2:** Or folk, as we should call it.
- R:** It's not limited. It's not just James Brown; we'll put it that way!
- AL:** 'Funky Drummer', a hundred times over.
- R:** A million times!
- A2:** Too many times.
- VM:** It's still dope, though.
- A2:** Of course...
- R:** It was dope when Lord Finesse did it, it's not dope when fuckin' 50 Cent rips off the same shit, 15 years later, and young kids are like, 'This is fresh!' But if you've heard a lot of music, you know that it's been done.

TM: But isn't it also about introducing that stuff to younger generations, as well?

R: If they ask us, 'Where is that from?' I'll tell them, you know.

VM: We do workshops, we do mentor programs, and it's very difficult to introduce people to some of our ideas, but, slowly.

R: I was teaching these young Sudanese kids in Melbourne hip-hop, and some of them are rapping in their own language. A lot of them are influenced by American stuff, but some of the kids were open to that stuff.

VM: I was mentoring this kid the other day, MOB, he was at my house, and I was playing some samples from my Fruity Loops sample bank, and I was going through all of them, and he was just sitting there listening, it was good. I don't know if he was enjoying the sounds, but we went through the whole bank and just listened. He was stuck in my house.

R: There's monkey sounds, seal sounds. Animals are where it's at now, you know. You're hearing a monkey and a couple of animals on a sample, and there's this young kid who's only heard 50 Cent.

TM: Whereabouts are you doing these mentoring programs? Is this in schools?

VM: No, this is just one program which we started recently, me and Adam [Raceless], and we get one young person each to work with for six months, and just get a couple of tracks done with them, and I guess try to influence them, because we've got experience in doing gigs and stuff, help them out, set their gigs up.

TM: Who's funding it?

VM: The place is called Living Music, and they got a grant I think. They've been doing programs like that for a while, Living Music, in Melbourne.

TM: Do you do workshops with groups of kids at all? Hip-hop workshops, skills workshops?

R: We have done stuff like that, yeah. Similar to what Morganics does, you know. Elf Tranzporter also lives in our city, we're good friends, he's on the new album as well.

TM: You did something with the Melbourne Workers Theatre with Elf? Something called *Diatribes*?

VM: Yeah, we did a play, with Little G, a good friend, Koori rapper, and her brother is also on some of our albums.

R: He's on *Lost in the Real Sky*.

TM: Yeah, I met Little G when you were here three years ago, because I think she performed with you.

VM: And Shehab [Pasobionic] was in that play as well; he did the music for it. We did twelve shows around Melbourne, it actually went really well.

TM: And what was the purpose behind it, the show?

VM: Well it was actually Little G that came up with idea of doing a play, and she spoke to Melbourne Workers Theatre through the Indigenous section they've got there, and she started calling people up that she knew she wanted to do this.

TM: So it was kind of about street culture?

VM: No, not really, there wasn't really a concept from the beginning, it was just like, let's just bring hip-

hop guys into a theatre, we wanted to mix hip-hop and theatre, so the crowds would be theatre people who had probably never seen a live hip-hop act, and then getting hip-hop artists to work. So then we just came up with stories, we just brainstormed, and made it up. It was a little storyline of an evil guy, and Little G, and me being a little young Aussie ocker guy...

TM: So you were actually performing roles, in character.

VM: Yeah, we were acting. And now and then it would break into a song. It was the first time I had ever actually acted like that, so it was pretty full on, for me to act, but I had a good character, the stereotype of the young ocker character, which I play very well when I muck around. So it wasn't too hard to act like that. Just hard to remember the script, that's all.

TM: And what was the audience response?

VM: It was really good, really good reviews. It was part of the Fringe Festival too; we did 12 shows over two, maybe three weeks. And yeah, it was packed out crowds, people really liked it, it was cool, a good experience.

TM: Is there any possibility of following it up and doing more theatre work?

VM: Yeah, well I just saw Morganics in Melbourne doing his *Crouching B-Boy Hidden Dreadlocks* thing, and hung out with him, so I've got some ideas now through that. I want to probably get some people together and do something, a very abstract sort of hip-hop theatre play with acting and costumes and stuff.

R: Avant-garde hip-hop theatre play.

VM: Yeah, more avant-garde than what I've seen anyone do recently. It's very 'hip-hop, hip-hop', the hip-hop plays; I want to open up some minds to theatre, too.

R: Avant-garde, man, there hasn't been enough avant-garde influence in hip-hop, and there needs to be more because it hasn't been done yet, I believe, to a certain extent, you know. There's so many things that haven't been done. Everybody goes on about certain music; I think there's a lot of things that haven't been done. There's so many sounds out there, so in music, you can do anything, you know.

AL: I think things fall into habit so quickly as well.

VM: Even us!

R: Most people imitate their heroes.

TM: And there are too many people trying to dictate what they think hip-hop should be. People sticking to the four elements and that kind of thing.

R: I know! Why can't hip-hop be this? [*Points to a book about pirates*] You could rap over polka: pirate hop!

VM: I reckon the in thing right now for hip-hop is Turkish psychedelic...

R: For us, lately.

VM: ...and gypsy brass band. That's hip-hop at the moment.

R: That's what we've been listening to a lot of. Erkin Koray, and stuff like that, do you know that?

TM: Yeah, a little bit. There was a great film that was on at the Sydney Film Festival called *Crossing the Bridges*, which was about music in Istanbul. It had some hip-hop, and it had all sorts of different

kinds of old stuff too.

- R:** Stuff where they were using traditional instruments in rock, in the sixties... That's killer; it's my favourite stuff at the moment. And Mutantes, from Brazil? tropicalia? Samba psych: samba meets *Sergeant Pepper!* That stuff, I think because all of us are interested in new sounds, anything that stands out is fun to listen to us, because we get bored easy.
- VM:** A lot of it's old shit, too, that you discover. It's like, 'Shit, man, dudes were doing the dope shit back then. What happened?'
- R:** They went simpler. They got more minimal, instead of going further; a lot of people got more minimal. Like, psychedelic rock was associated with too much thinking, or something. I think that's what it was.
- TM:** Well, too much self-indulgence, too, I think. Too many guitar solos.
- R:** You get bored of that, though.
- TM:** But yeah, Os Mutantes is kind of combined with the whole tropicalia stuff as well, and they were quite political as well.
- R:** Yeah, they were political, they were amazing. A lot of folk music from around the world is great too. Ligeti, the bondage opera guy?
- TM:** The Hungarian guy? He died pretty recently.
- R:** Did he? Classical has gone pretty experimental, classical's progressed as an artform. People associate classical with being upper class, so no one will touch it. If you take it out of its context... It's like people say that Elvis stole black music; but why can't black music steal back white music?
- A2:** What's to steal? It's just music.
- R:** It's just music!
- A:** Why is it about ownership and thievery? Why can't people just listen to what they want?