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Superquadra-Sací

I am drawn here by whatever frightens me in myself. —I have never seen anything like it in the world. But I recognize this city in the furthest depths of my dream. The furthest depth of my dream is a lucidity. —Well as I was saying, Flash Gordon...—If they took my picture standing in Brasília, when they developed the photograph only the landscape would appear. —Where are Brasília's giraffes?
—Brasília by Clarice Lispector

In Brazil everyone is Indian except those that aren't.
—Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, anthropologist

In 1962 the iconic Brazilian author Clarice Lispector wrote an essay on Brazil's newly christened capital that very presciently revealed its failings. A “dream city” that was built from nothing in the middle of nowhere, with gleaming white modernist buildings designed by Oscar Niemeyer, expansive curving roads, and an abundance of green space, Brasília was to be an exemplar, a national model for the country of the future. Lúcio Costa, creator of the city's master plan, believed that Brazil could find both economic prosperity and social equality in rational urban design. But as Lispector points out in her characteristic stream-of-consciousness style, Brasília isn't a dream, it's a mirage. It was a failed experiment in nationalism as much as urban design: the city's very existence — created from scratch on undeveloped land in the middle of the country — necessitated a rewriting of history. And inevitably some histories, those of the least powerful, are suppressed in the process. The meticulously planned city of Brazil's future (and its symbolic primordial past) had no room for its actual history, its diversity, and its indigenous culture. In fact, Brasília didn't even have room for the construction workers that built it—the residential blocks (called *superquadras*) were only affordable to the senators and government employees. The workers were forced to move to the satellite cities (*favelas*).

But as Cristiano Lenhardt reveals in a fantastical and humorous fashion reminiscent of the films of George Kuchar and Jack Smith, nothing in a culture's history is ever truly lost. It has ways of creeping up and infiltrating everyday life. Lenhardt contrasts the rigid and ultimately exclusive idea behind Brasília's *superquadras* with Sací, a famous character from Brazilian folklore who is known for causing disruption and disorder. Originating in Brazil's indigenous Tupi culture and later appropriated by African slaves in Brazil, Sací is typically represented as a young brown boy with a red hat. A serious trouble maker who hides toys, spills salt, sours milk, and curses chicken eggs not to hatch, Sací also possesses magical powers—he can disappear and will grant wishes if captured. Lenhardt's Sací characters are bawdy and disruptive, sexually curious, and often distracted by their own (and each other's) exaggerated, turgid appendages. They dance around topiary gardens, hide in trees, and have strange interactions with humans. They persist in the landscape. They are all around us—within us, perhaps. Undeniable.