

Document Citation

Title	Critic's choice: Naked spaces -- living is round
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Source	<i>Reader (Chicago, Ill.)</i>
Date	1987 Sep 11
Type	review
Language	English
Pagination	Section 2, p.22
No. of Pages	1
Subjects	
Film Subjects	Naked spaces: living is round, Trinh T. Minh-ha,, 1985

Reader's Guide to the

22 READER — Section 2

Selected first run, neighborhood,

September 11, 1987



Critic's Choice: Naked Spaces —Living Is Round

Significantly, when Vietnamese filmmaker Trinh T. Minh-ha gives herself a director's credit in her remarkable meditation on West African life and architecture, she places an X over the word "directed." Why?

Because a central aspect of her project is the dislocation of the authority by which we generally presume to understand the alien, and redirection and indirection are equally descriptive of what she is up to. A composer and a poet, she pans and cuts in irregular rhythms, continually stopping and starting, and rather than "direct" our focus and interpretation like an anthropologist, she interweaves three distinctly accented female voices speaking English, each of which conveys a different kind of discourse, traversing the images at different angles. Like the separate typefaces in Mallarme's poem "A Throw of the Dice Will Never Abolish Chance," these voices and mesmerizing recordings of African music encircle and commingle with their subjects rather than attempt to capture them in linear/colonial/narrative fashion. (Sample: "The house is composed like the human body. The earth or clay is the flesh, the water the blood, the stones the bones, and the placid surface of the walls the skin.") The results are both beautiful and instructive, a duet between filmmaker and subject, disclosures and enclosures, which remains perpetually fresh and unpredictable over the film's 134 minutes.

(Film Center, Art Institute, Columbus Drive at Jackson, Sunday, September 13, 2:00, 443-3737)

—Jonathan Rosenbaum