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## *Body Geographic* by Barrie Jean Borich

Rachel S. Wexelbaum

St. Cloud State University, [rswexelbaum@stcloudstate.edu](mailto:rswexelbaum@stcloudstate.edu)

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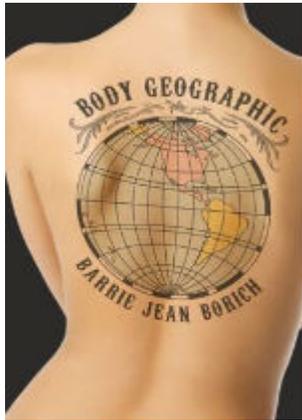
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# 'Body Geographic' by Barrie Jean Borich

Posted on 02. Apr, 2013 by Rachel Wexelbaum

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## **Body Geographic**

By Barrie Jean Borich

University of Nebraska Press

Paperback, 9780803239852, 272 pp.

During the dawn of the Middle Ages, the average peasant rarely traveled more than sixty miles from their ancestral home. People did not dare move far from familiar people, places, professions, or ideas, for fear of falling off the edge of the known world. At the same time, peasant faces and bodies reflected their exposure to the elements, revealing a deeper connection and knowledge of that world than modern people will ever have. As they had no mirrors, those peasants did not spend much time reflecting on their identities or their sense of place. The longest journey they would ever make would be to Heaven, and they believed what priests and fellow villagers told them to be true about themselves.

Today, the average American may move up to three times in his or her lifetime. Education, career, finances, marriage, and family discord are just a few of the reasons why roughly 40 million Americans uproot themselves every year, sometimes from one coast to another, sometimes from North to South. These pathways are rarely preordained. Quite often, people reinvent themselves with every move. Whether they like it or not, they may lose their connection to the place and culture that shaped their core identity. Not only our physical body, but our soul and psyche, travels from Point A to Point B.

In her third creative non-fiction book *Body Geographic*, creative writing professor Barrie Jean Borich traces the development of her identity as an American, a Midwesterner, a woman, a lesbian, and a writer. She connects these identities to the routes of her immigrant ancestors who traveled to Chicago, the historical evolution of Chicago itself, her own movement through the

city as a child, a teenager, and an adult, followed by her “emigration” to Minneapolis. Borich also re-travels her roads through adolescence and substance abuse as she takes Amtrak and other forms of public transportation. These stories take place simultaneously, through musical narrative, historical research, and maps. *Body Geographic* was selected for inclusion in the American Lives Series (edited by Tobias Wolff). The series embodies this theme:

*The singular American life is a source of endless diversity, and the methods of telling the life are as important as the details themselves.*

Borich’s story could easily fill in the blanks of many American memoirs, if those Americans had the time and inclination to write them.

Borich’s lyrical memoir begins with the acquisition of a tattoo. While it is not the first tattoo she has ever received, it is more painful than previous ones, in part due to its location across her lower back and the memories it evokes. Borich feels compelled to mark her body to remind herself that she is a Chicagoan even though she has lived in Minneapolis for the past thirty years. While Chicago remains near and dear to her heart, perhaps Borich has the tattoo etched on her back to compel her to never look back at the old days. Significant is her mention of the male tattoo artist inking her from behind. She notes that this is the last time in recent memory she shared such an intimate space with a man—the last boyfriends left behind in the city of her birth. She has committed herself to this tattoo; it is her own design, defining and marking her forever. A tattoo, in certain respects, is also the end of a journey. Borich makes the statement that, though she may continue to follow her life’s path, it will begin and end somewhere between Chicago and Minneapolis.

Unlike Borich’s previous work *My Lesbian Husband*, *Body Geographic* is not particularly a lesbian story, even though Borich describes events with past girlfriends and her current partner. Borich does not consider herself an outsider looking in. *Body Geographic* is an *American* story, complete with the sights and sounds of our country, capturing the complex relationship between identity, place, and growth for most people living in the fifty states.