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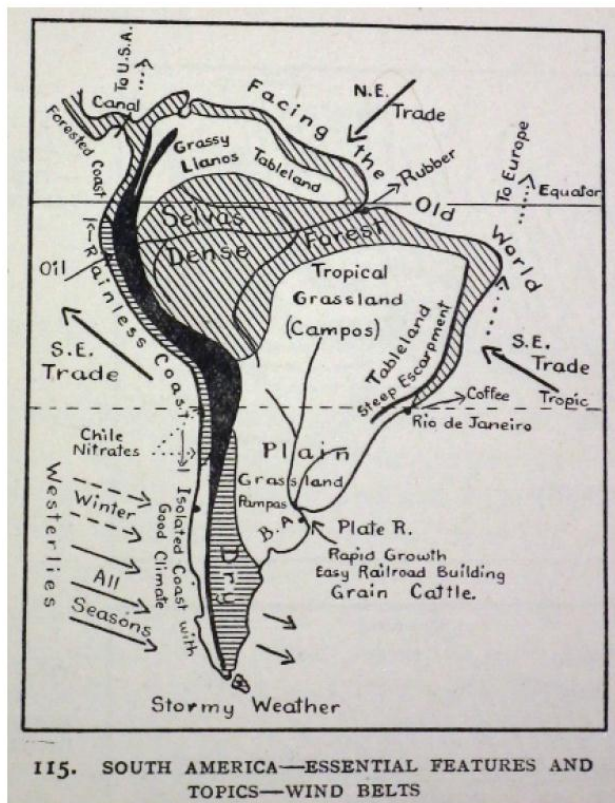
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Sketch Maps and the Geographical Visual Tradition in Twentieth-Century School Texts

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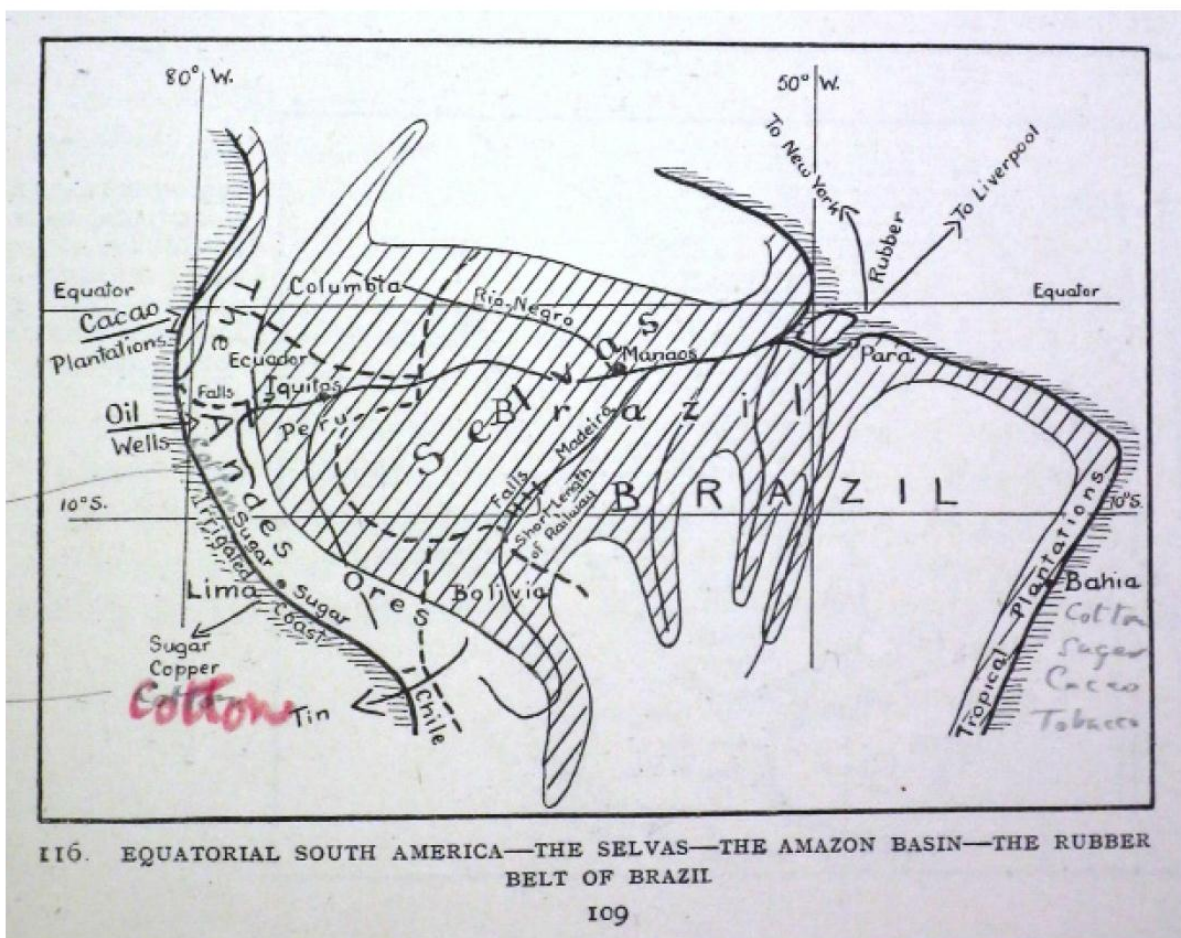


Eva Germaine Rimington Taylor, *A Sketch-Map Geography*, p. 115. Newberry Library call number: Baskes G127 .T39 1921.

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Geography is a discipline with an important graphic tradition; indeed, the root “Graphic” forms part of its name. The intimate relationship between geography and maps seems to provide a foundation strong enough to keep that imagery alive. Yet over the last two centuries geography has become more a literary discipline in practice, in the process neglecting some aspects of its visual tradition.¹ That visual tradition once included not only the display of geographical information through maps and other visual devices, but also the kinds of drawing skills students would develop while learning geography in primary schools.

It is unclear whether this neglect has been a result of a renewed inscription of geography among the humanities and social sciences (as opposed to the physical sciences), or to the increasingly autonomous development of the field of cartography (increasingly guided by graphic designers), though certainly those factors may have had some influence on what has been a tendency to analyze cartographic images rather than produce them. Furthermore, the tracing of maps, once among the most traditional of primary school practices, has been criticized in recent years by pedagogical theorists who see it as a method of learning that is encyclopedic and repeti-



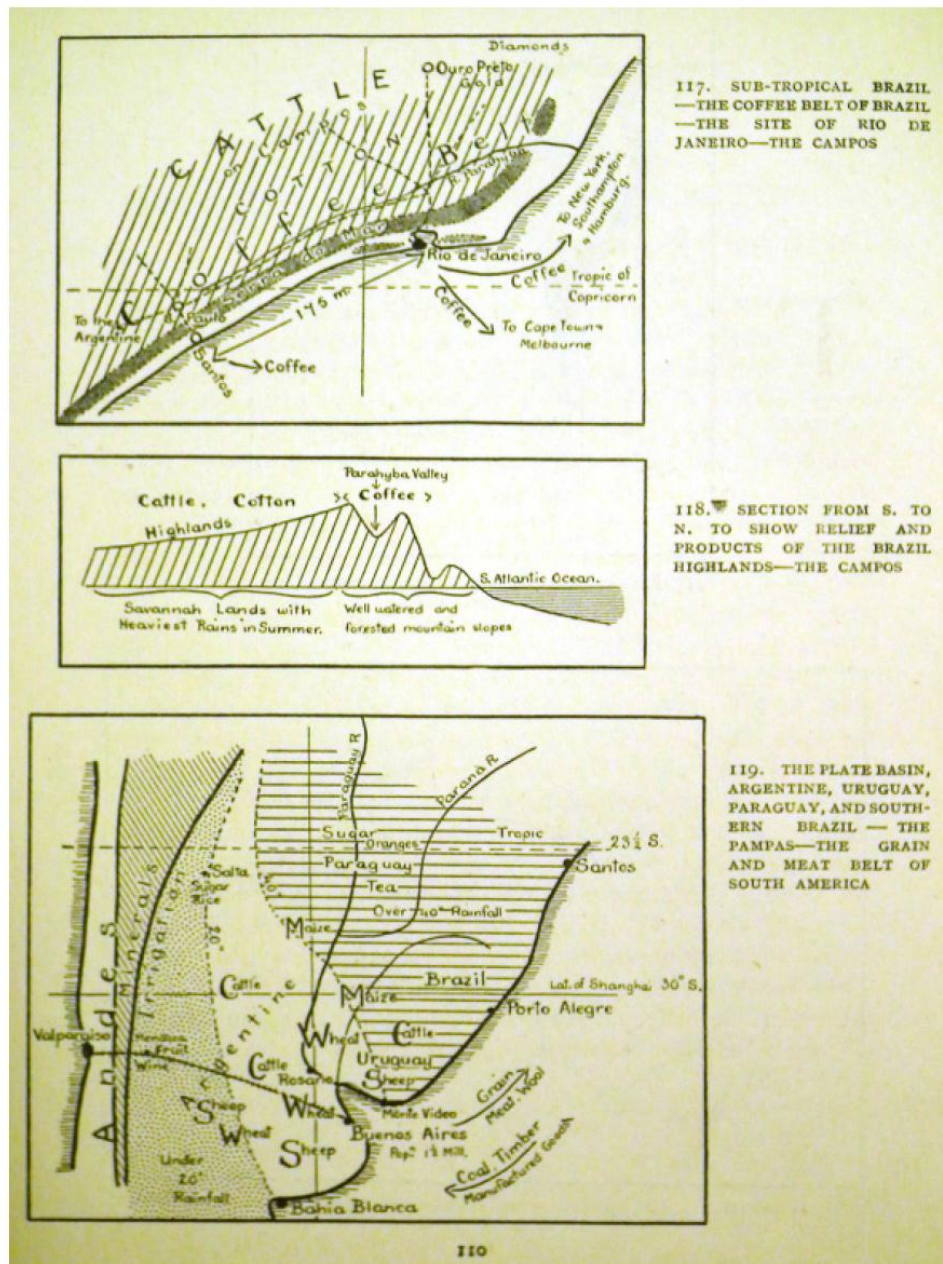
Eva Germaine Rimington Taylor, *A Sketch-Map Geography*, p. 109. Newberry Library call number: Baskes G127 .T39 1921.

tive, rather than on encouraging creative and independent thinking.

Far from this, at the end of nineteenth century, it was broadly accepted that the act of drawing was a useful exercise which not only helped students remember places, but which taught them to think in terms of geographical processes. In 1890, a journal for teachers published by the National Ministry of Education in Argentina recommended cartographic exercises to better learn geography lessons; for those practices, it was "convenient that the student produces those designs by heart or imaginatively, without the model ahead, after having copied it once and again." It also clearly explains that "the best lesson of geography will be one based simultaneously on the observation of Nature and, when possible, on the use of maps,

image of reality, and on the geographic designs made by the student himself. For those cartographic exercises the model must be not highly detailed maps, but simplified sketches."²

The Baskes Collection at the Newberry Library holds two editions of school texts exclusively devoted to the use of such sketch maps. Eva Germaine Rimington Taylor (1879-1966), published *A Sketch-Map Geography: A Text-Book of World and Regional Geography for the Middle and Upper School* in London in 1921.³ A later edition would appear with minor corrections nearly a half century later, in 1966, after the original edition had gone through fifteen reprints.⁴ *A Sketch-Map Geography* begins with a note about "this book and its use," where it is stated that "not one of the maps is a mere transcription



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from an atlas. In an atlas, facts as to topography, climate, vegetation, crops, and so forth are mapped separately. These sketch-maps show different categories of facts in combination, when they are seen to be not merely facts,

but factors, determining some particular geographical result.”⁵

The idea that sketch-maps deal with relationships, connections, and explanations is reinforced in the note

on “use of the atlas” that appears in both 1921 and 1966 editions: “This text-book, like all others, must be used in conjunction with a good atlas (not necessarily an expensive one), which shows the relief of the land, as well as political divisions. The general physical features of each country, its boundaries, and so forth, should be learned directly from the atlas before the set of sketch-maps dealing with that country is attacked.”⁶

The final section, “Memory and revision aids,” includes shorthand sketch maps, an index of place names, and an index of subjects with some pedagogical tips: “The ‘shorthand’ sketch maps on the two following pages may be used as memory aids or memory tests. Anyone who knows their geography well will see at once what the symbols and initials mean. Each map may be drawn on the blackboard, and members of the class set to find out what towns or region it represents. From the ‘shorthand’ maps a sketch-map of the usual type can readily be drawn. Pupils should be warned always to draw out the map in full in an examination paper, although they will find it a great help to jot down the ‘shorthand’ form on rough paper as a guide” (1921: 135).

This sort of book has not received much attention from scholars. This might be because such books do not seem to fit well in traditional genres (textbooks, atlases, etc.). However, they could certainly provide useful material for an inquiry into the visual tradition in geography from a less explored and more original angle.

In a recent study conducted by this author, six hundred people from ten different cities across Argentina participated in a visual survey by sketching a map of the country. The project aimed to explore expressions of a sort of “geographical common sense,” that is, simple premises regarding territory, geopolitics, and how people imagined their communities geographically.⁷ Beyond the results of the research (which showed the impact of formal geographical education, territorial policies of the Argentine government, and the way that “official input” or maps studied within the formal education system were combined with the cohort’s filters, the relational perspective of the interviewer, and other factors), an introductory methodological note remarked that the first reaction of the interviewers was a generalized initial resistance to drawing in order to express a geographical idea. People did not want to draw maps, even to express geographical concepts.

It is at least curious that, in a society with an increasing

emphasis on the visual, a traditionally visual discipline seems to have become disconnected from promoting the graphic skills that it once emphasized. So why should we pay attention to this? Maybe because field notes, schemes, sketch maps, designs—all of these are not only graphics to display but also creative acts that demand our active participation. That is, they are ways of shaping our own geographies, our ways of producing, internalizing, communicating, and criticizing knowledge, and our ways of expressing ourselves with our “own words.”

¹ Godlewska, Anne M. C., “Humboldt’s Visual Thinking: From Enlightenment Vision to Modern Science” in David Livingstone and Charles Withers, *Geography and Enlightenment* (Chicago, 1999).

² “La mejor lección de geografía será la que se funde a la vez en la observación de la Naturaleza y, cuando sea posible, en el uso de mapas, imagen de la realidad, y en los trazados geográficos que el mismo alumno haga. Para esos ejercicios cartográficos deben servir de modelo, no los mapas muy detallados, sino croquis simplificados, y para la seguridad de la eficacia del estudio conviene que el alumno haga eso trazados de memoria o imaginativamente, sin tener el modelo delante, después que lo haya copiado una y otra vez.” Antonio Atienza y Medrano (1890) “Material de enseñanza de la Geografía,” in *El Monitor de la Educación Común*, Consejo Nacional de Educación, Año XI, N. 180, pp. 1381-1383, [online].

³ viii, 147 pp. : maps ; 22 cm. Contents: Part I. Regional geography. The British Isles; Europe; Asia; Africa; North America; South America; Australia and New Zealand -- Part II. World geography. General maps -- Part III. Memory and revision aids. Shorthand sketch maps; index of subjects; index of place names. Part of the Roger S. Baskes Collection at the Newberry Library. Call no.: Baskes G127 .T39 1921.

⁴ By E.G.R. Taylor and E.M.J. Campbell. viii, 163 pp. : ill., maps ; 21 cm. The book was reprinted thirteen times before being completely revised in 1950 with the help of Eila Campbell, when all the maps were redrawn in a bolder, simpler style. This edition published in 1966 came after a further revision (Taylor and Campbell 1962). “Taylor, Eva Germaine Rimington, 1879-1966”. *Geographers. Biobibliographical Studies*. Mansell, London (1977). Millesime : 2012, vol. 31 [pp. 1-29].

⁵ *A Sketch-Map Geography*, 1921, v.

⁶ *A Sketch-Map Geography*, 1921, vii; and 1966, vii.

⁷ “La Argentina a mano alzada. El sentido común geográfico y la imaginación gráfica en los mapas que dibujan los argentinos”. In Carla Lois and Verónica Hollman (2012) (eds.), *Geografía y cultura visual: los usos de las imágenes en las reflexiones sobre el espacio*, Rosario: Ediciones Prohistoria (in press).