An Inside Look at the *Britannica Encyclopedia*

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fig. 1: Timeline

Era 1 (1st to 6th)

The *Britannica Encyclopedia* was cofounded by Colin Macfarquhar and Andrew Bell. This was one of the most enduring legacies of the Scottish Enlightenment. Following the outlooks of the Enlightenment Era, the cofounders emphasized the utility and intellectual benefits of learning. The first few editions used the treatise system: the shorter material were written as articles and the longer more detailed references are in treatises.

Era 2 (7th to 9th)

The management was handed over to the publishing firm A & C Black. At this point, the *Britannica Encylopedia* had garnered enough reputation that prolific individuals (e.g. mathematical physicist Lord Kelvin and novelist Robert Louis Stevenson) have started contributing. During this time, there was a large growth in technological advances in printing. As a result of the increase of production, the encyclopedia was widely distributed from Scotland to the USA.

Era 3 (10th to 14th)

The *Britannica Encylopedia* has changed ownership from Horace Hooper to Sears Roebuck due to financial issues. Then, it transfered ownership to Elkan Harrison Powell who began the policy of continuous revision in 1936, where the encyclopedia was maintained by a continuous editorial staff. New printings would come out every year to keep the information edited and updated. In 1941, ownership once again changed hands to William Benton, the VP of University of Chicago at the time. Under UChicago, the university had a large say in editorial management.

Era 4 (15th edition)

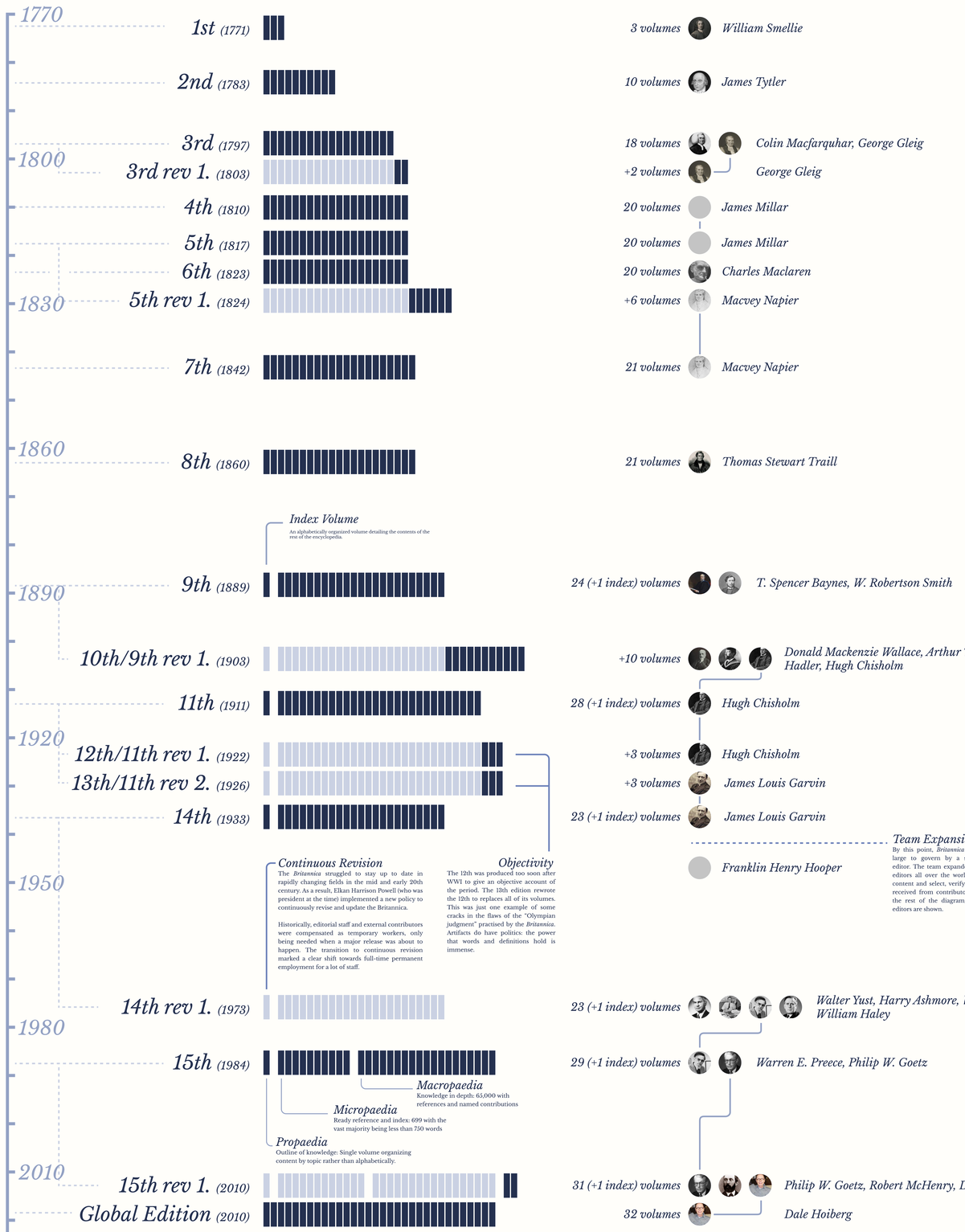
The 15th edition marked the split of the Encyclopedia into 3 distinct sections: the Propaedia, Micropaedia, and Macropaedia. The Propaedia was an outline of the information, organizing the contents by topics. The Micropaedia were short articles. The Macropaedia contained more in-depth articles.

Era 5 (Digital)

Britannica was bought by Jacqui Safra. The company *Encyclopaedia Britannica Inc* split in 1999 into two companies. One kept the former name and focused on the print version while *Britannica.com Inc* developed the digital version. The company now focuseds solely on the online edition and other educational tools.

fig. 1.1: Editions and Volume Size

fig. 1.2: Main editors



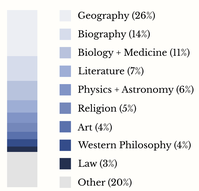


fig. 1.3 (left)
Content Breakdown of the Global Edition

fig. 2: Lifecycle

What other systems and infrastructures affect how the *Britannica* is created, maintained, and consumed?

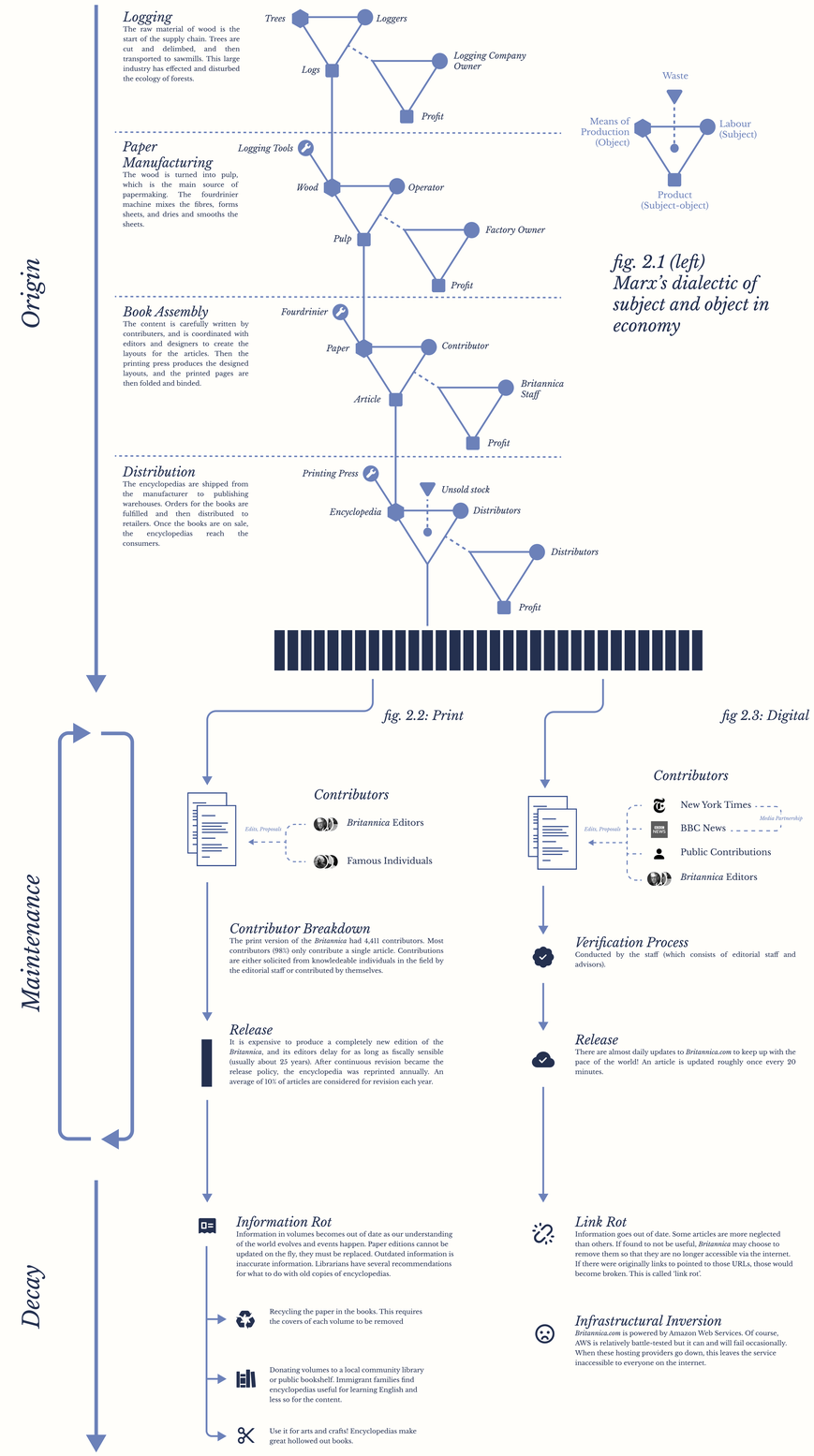


fig. 2.1 (left)
Marx's dialectic of subject and object in economy