

Laws of Form in Understanding Information

An autopoietic approach understands information as self-referential, which shares similar conceptual foundations as the second-order cybernetics that considers performance as a form to be observed that carries the potential for perturbation. Performance is form taking. Spencer-Brown's Laws of Form is a breakthrough in understanding how a system emerges and how it is observed. An observer observes by drawing distinction. To put it another way, what we perceive always follows from an act of making distinction. Spencer-Brown, in his revolutionary work *Laws of Form* (1972) improvises on George Boole's algebra and gives it an arithmetical notation to introduce the basic and fundamental human act of making distinction. Spencer-Brown uses \neg for a marked and an empty space for an unmarked universe. Making distinction is fundamental, as this is how something is marked, indicated and created. Marking an unmarked world is also the way something emerges from the unconscious into conscious, for consciousness itself is the progressive emergence of a self-reflective, recursive cycle of ever more subtle distinctions. By making distinction, which means marking an unknown whole into a known and an unknown, form arises that unfolds through different tokens. Tokens are the clues for perturbation. Laws of Form is helpful in understanding the way a system, in this case an individual, observes a form evolving in an external system that may trigger difference in the system. Difference is what an autopoietic approach considers information. This poster takes the autopoietic theory of information as the point of departure, which is developed to an elaborated understanding with the conceptual support of the theory of laws of form.