EARMARK

MACHINES FOR THINKING

EPISTEMIC GOVERNANCE

THE ROMAN/ITALIC CONVENTION

THE CONVENTION // 01

The roman/italic convention is a minimal governance system that makes epistemic status visible without heavy process. Two typographic states carry governance meaning. Roman text is what is currently treated as compiled output: binding within the corpus, ratified by the operator, subject to verification. Italic text is commentary: assumptions, uncertainty, missing evidence, candidate improvements, and provisional material that has not yet been resolved.

The convention exploits an existing typographic distinction to carry structural information. No new notation is required. Any text system that supports roman and italic rendering can implement the convention. The overhead is near zero; the governance value is high.

THE PROMOTION RULE // 02

Italics do not become binding by inertia. Promotion from italic to roman requires resolution: a decision, a test, or an imported piece of evidence. This creates a stable place to hold uncertainty without either deleting it or pretending it is settled. The promotion rule is the convention's enforcement mechanism.

The operator decides when promotion occurs. No automated process can promote italic to roman. This is the termination principle: governance decisions require human authority. The convention makes the decision legible and cheap -- changing a typographic style is trivial -- but the decision itself must be explicit.

THE COMMENTARY LAYER // 03

Every artifact can carry an attached commentary layer that travels with it. Italic annotations make the system self-debugging: later work can see what was assumed, what was weak, and what should be improved, without reconstructing history from scratch. The commentary layer is not a separate document; it is embedded in the artifact itself, distinguished only by typographic status.

Commentary can address: assumptions that underpin the artifact's claims, evidence gaps that should be filled, alternative interpretations that were considered but not adopted, revision triggers that would justify re-opening settled content, and dependencies on external facts that may change.

DERIVATION MARKINGS // 04

Within both roman and italic text, claims carry derivation markings that indicate their epistemic source. **Stated** marks content extracted directly from an identified source. **Inferred** marks content derived from evidence through reasoning. **Assumed** marks content adopted without direct evidence, typically for operational convenience. Derivation markings make provenance tractable without requiring full citation for every sentence.

INTERACTION WITH SIGNAGE // 05

The roman/italic distinction interacts with intrinsic signage through the dial family mechanism. Roman (ratified) text uses the full terse style dial family and is signed on ratification. Italic (provisional) text uses a different dial family or remains unsigned. The signage system can therefore detect not only whether text has changed but whether its epistemic status has been altered without proper promotion.

FAILURE MODES // 06

- **Layer collapse:** italic becomes rhetorical decoration rather than epistemic status. The system loses its cheapest drift-control mechanism.
- **Promotion by inertia:** provisional content hardens into canon because it was never explicitly reviewed. Drafts treated as final because they look clean.
- **Commentary bloat:** italic annotations accumulate without resolution. The commentary layer becomes noise. Periodic review and resolution are required.
- **Missing derivation markings:** claims appear in roman text without provenance. Later readers cannot assess reliability. Derivation markings are not optional for durable artifacts.