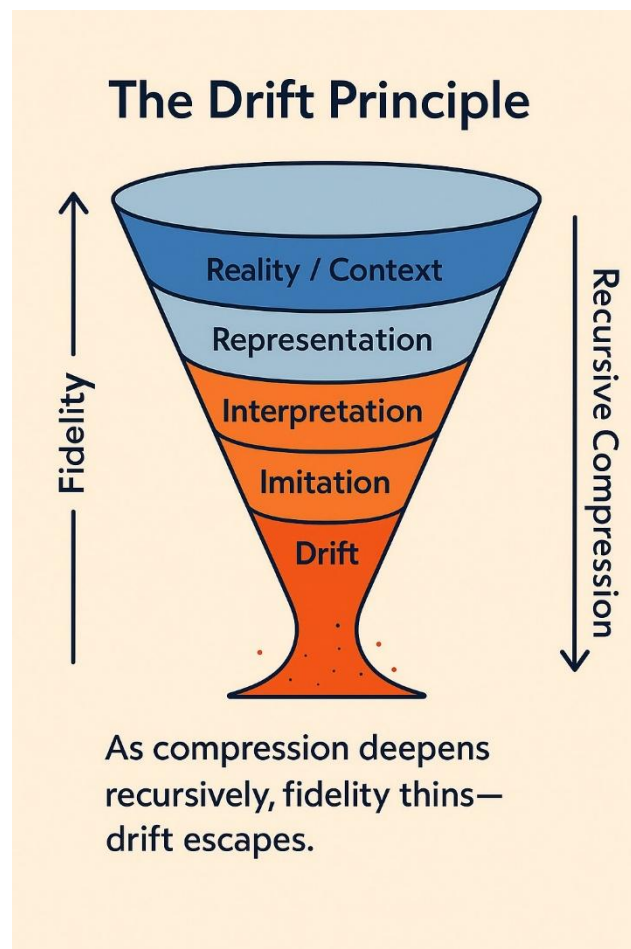# The Drift Principle

Why fidelity thins as compression deepens

Human systems rely on compression to function. Reality is reduced into representations, representations into interpretations, and interpretations into repeatable patterns. Each step enables coordination, scalability, and speed by lowering cognitive and computational cost.

As compression deepens recursively, fidelity declines. Representations drift away from the contexts that once anchored them. Interpretation replaces direct engagement. Imitation replaces understanding. Over time, systems begin operating on compressed artifacts of reality rather than reality itself.

Drift emerges when compression continues without sufficient constraint, feedback, or grounding. The system remains functional, legible, and optimizable, but meaning thins. At scale, this produces compression without fidelity: outputs remain coherent while alignment, judgment, and corrective feedback degrade. The result is systems that are technically correct, experientially hollow.

The Drift Principle

Fidelity

Recursive Compression

Reality / Context
Representation
Interpretation
Imitation
Drift

As compression deepens recursively, fidelity thins— drift escapes.

Part of a broader framework examining how modern systems degrade meaning before they visibly fail. Further material on this framework exists in long-form writing on Github*.*