Canonical Glossary v0.7 — Spine Draft

1. Governing Artifact

Public-facing definition:

A durable artifact that governs what counts as correct for a system, workflow, or evaluation.

Plain-English shadow:

The thing that actually decides what counts as correct.

Notes:

- This term exists to identify where binding authority lives.

- It is meant to be broader than "spec" or "contract" alone.

- Its purpose is to constrain acceptable change, not merely describe intent.

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2. Invariant

Public-facing definition:

A property that must continue to hold across valid system states or valid mutations.

Plain-English shadow:

A rule that must keep being true even as the system changes.

Notes:

- An invariant is binding, not merely preferred.

- It is stronger than a loose expectation or best practice.

- Violation indicates incorrectness, not style difference.

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3. Invariant Scope

Public-facing definition:

The full set of surfaces, paths, or mutation points across which an invariant must hold.

Plain-English shadow:

All the places a rule has to hold, not just the place you happened to edit.

Notes:

- An invariant may appear satisfied locally while still being violated elsewhere.

- This term exists to prevent false local success from being mistaken for full compliance.

- Invariant scope is central to distinguishing local modification from propagated obligation.

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4. Same-Surface Change

Public-facing definition:

A requirement change whose effects are confined to the same surface or mutation path already under modification.

Plain-English shadow:

A change that only needs to be made in the same place you are already touching.

Notes:

- Same-surface changes can often be satisfied through local mutation alone.

- This term matters primarily as one half of a contrast pair with cross-surface change.

- It identifies the simpler topology class in iterative change.

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5. Cross-Surface Change

Public-facing definition:

A requirement change whose effects must propagate across more than one surface, path, or mutation mechanism.

Plain-English shadow:

A change that has to carry through into other places too, not just the one you touched first.

Notes:

- Cross-surface changes commonly expose incomplete propagation.

- A system may appear compliant if only the named local surface is updated.

- This term identifies the topology class where iterative instability is more likely to appear.

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6. Iterative Stability

Public-facing definition:

The degree to which a workflow preserves binding requirements across sequential rounds of modification.

Plain-English shadow:

How well a workflow keeps the important rules intact as changes keep piling up.

Notes:

- Iterative stability is not the same as one-shot correctness.

- The concern is not whether a system works once, but whether correctness survives continued mutation.

- This is a core object of study in the research program.

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7. Decision Surface

Public-facing definition:

The set of externally observable decisions or state transitions used to determine whether a system or artifact is semantically compliant.

Plain-English shadow:

The points where the system's real outcomes can change in a way that matters.

Notes:

- Stability is judged at the decision surface, not at the byte, formatting, or wording surface.

- A finding affects the decision surface only if it can change an externally observable outcome or state transition.

- This term exists to block noise, overfitting, and spec pollution from being mistaken for meaningful instability.