



ROBUSTNESS, AND WHAT IT ASKS OF US

The Least Performant AI

Olivier Hamant argues the AI worth having is the one slow enough that a human still checks it.

A WORD WE SHOULD STOP USING

Turn the arrow round

For thirty years "impact" meant the impact of our activities on the environment. Measure, reduce, report. The grammar presumes we act and the world receives.

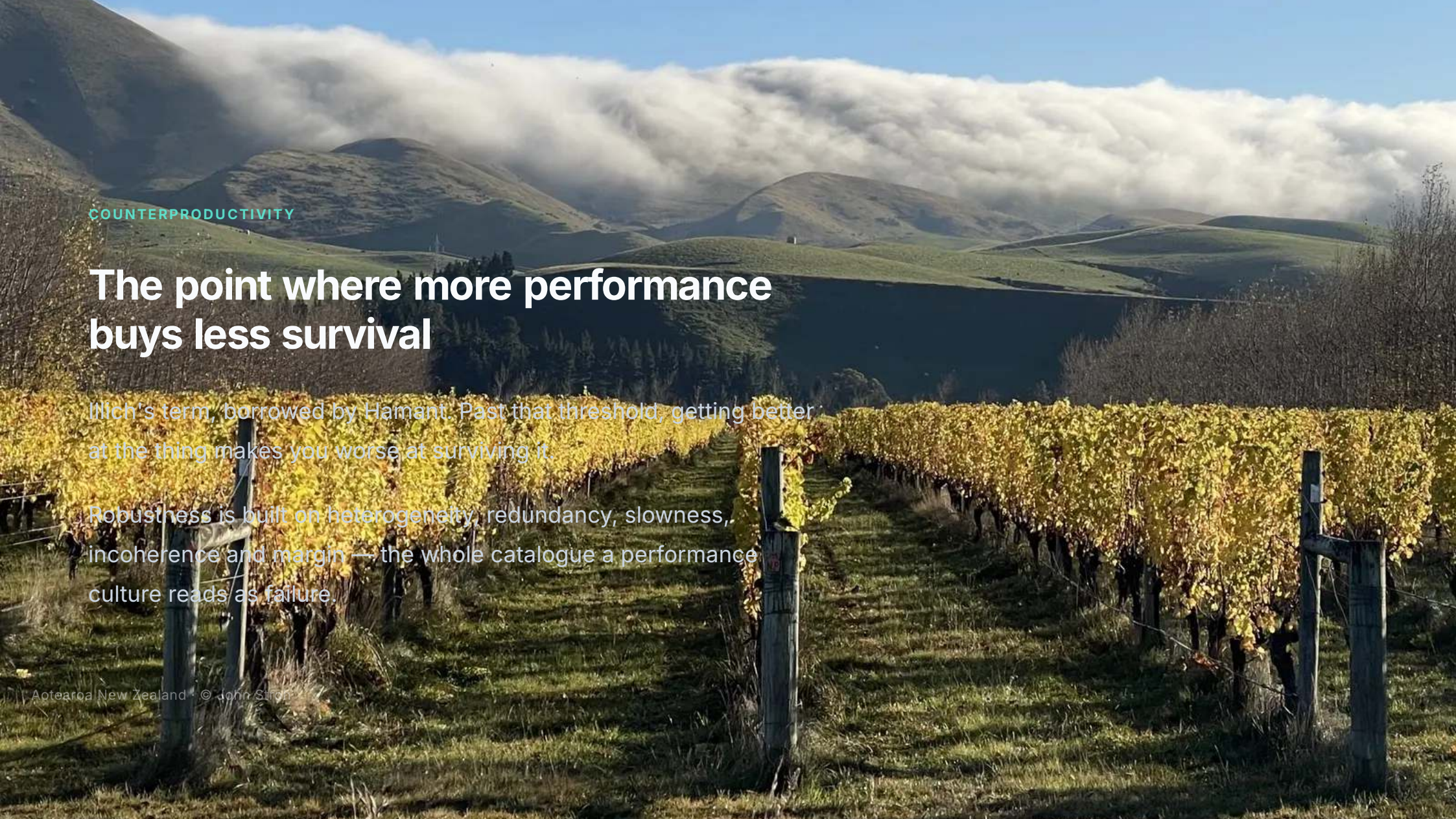
Hamant reverses it. What matters now is the impact of the environment on our activities.

Vocabulary is infrastructure. A team that has only the word "optimisation" hears every argument for slack as an argument for waste.

LEAVING THE WORLD OF THE MEAN

The fluctuating world is what our own optimisation produced

- **Performance** is efficacy plus efficiency. Zero stock, just-in-time, tight coupling.
- A superb adaptation to a stable world, and what turns a small perturbation into a systemic one.
- Suez 2021. CrowdStrike, 19 July 2024. A virus meeting a hyper-optimised world.



COUNTERPRODUCTIVITY

The point where more performance buys less survival

Illich's term, borrowed by Hamant. Past that threshold, getting better at the thing makes you worse at surviving it.

Robustness is built on heterogeneity, redundancy, slowness, incoherence and margin — the whole catalogue a performance culture reads as failure.

THE INVERSION

Your weakest link is your most performant supplier

In a stable world the weak link is the slowest one. In an unstable world it is the most optimised, because optimisation is what made it brittle.

You would not route a core process through a supplier you could not replace inside a fortnight. Check what you have routed through the fastest one.

THE NARROW BAND

A model nobody verifies is a catastrophe in gestation

- **Inbreeding** — models feeding on what models produced, and architectures converging on one another.
- **Falling asleep at the wheel** — performance earns trust, trust ends checking.
- Hybridise them and you get people trusting ever less reliable systems ever more.

The frontier labs are not competing in that band. You do not enter it by attaching a policy document to a maximiser.



THE CONVERGENCE

Five criteria, derived twice

Christopher Alexander's principles were published in our foundations before a word of Hamant was read here. He reasons from cell walls and turgor pressure and arrives at the same five

The corroboration arrived after the principles shipped. That is what makes it evidence rather than justification.

WHAT THE RECORD IS FOR

The record heals by accretion

Robustness prizes reversibility. A cryptographic seal is irreversible by definition. The resolution is that correction proceeds by annotation, never by quiet deletion.

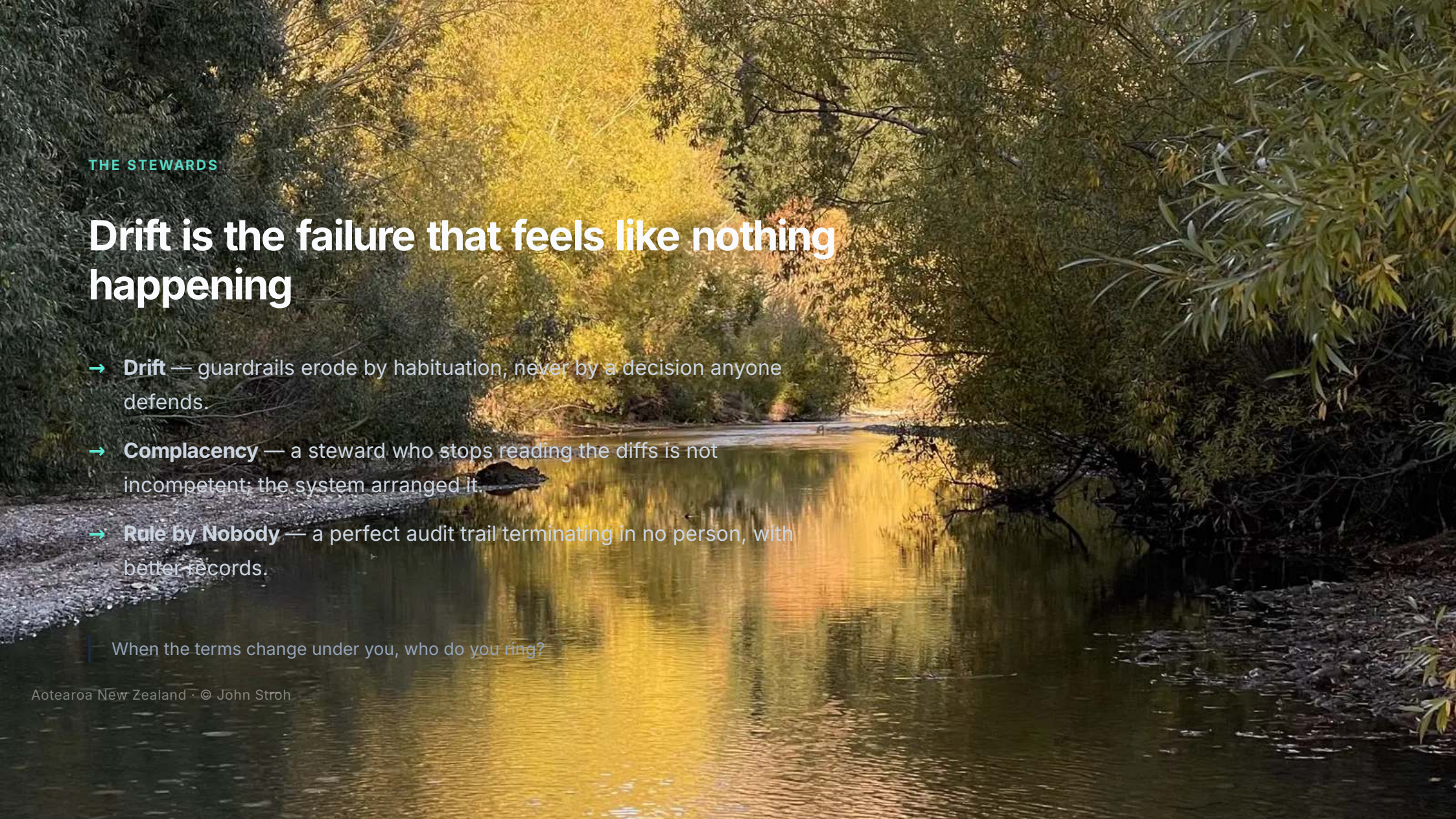
Reversibility of interpretation, on a substrate of irreversible attestation. Built so a great-grandchild can verify what a great-grandparent said, and when.

THE PRINCIPLE UNDERNEATH

No member may be reduced to an aggregate

Simone Weil: force is that which turns anyone subjected to it into a thing — and it degrades the one who wields it too.

Aggregation is that operation. The refusal has to be built in, because a platform that merely retains the capability becomes, under commercial pressure, a platform that uses it.



THE STEWARDS

Drift is the failure that feels like nothing happening

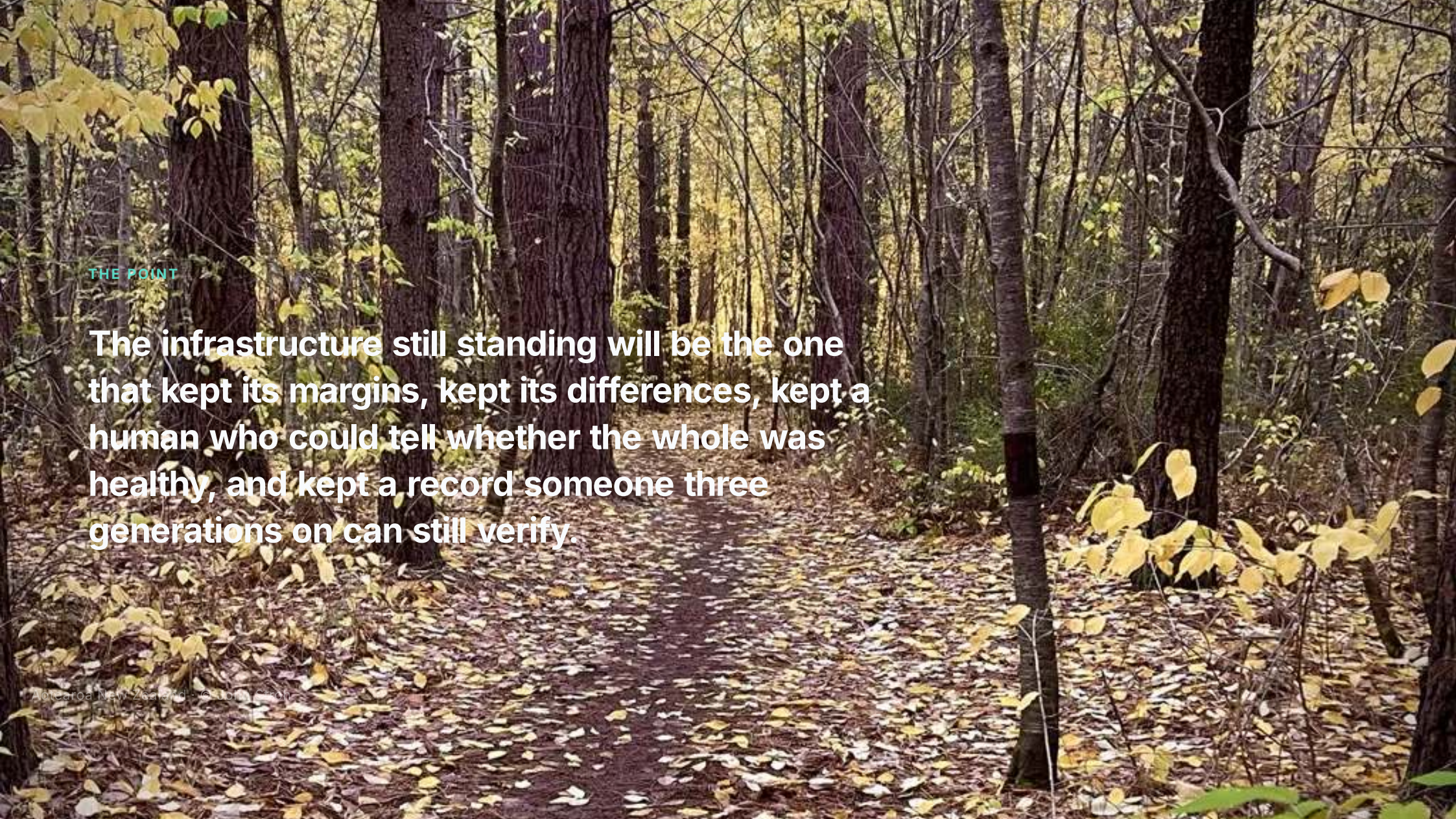
- **Drift** — guardrails erode by habituation, never by a decision anyone defends.
- **Complacency** — a steward who stops reading the diffs is not incompetent; the system arranged it.
- **Rule by Nobody** — a perfect audit trail terminating in no person, with better records.

When the terms change under you, who do you ring?

WHAT WE DO NOT KNOW

Stated before you find it

- Red-teamed internally. No independent external penetration test, and we do not claim one.
- In production on two surfaces, both inside one organisation. It wants multi-organisation replication.
- An agent that simply declines to consult the framework is not stopped by it.

A photograph of a forest path in autumn. The path is covered in fallen yellow and brown leaves. Tall, thin trees with some yellowing foliage line the path, leading into the distance. The lighting is soft, suggesting a misty or overcast day.

THE POINT

The infrastructure still standing will be the one that kept its margins, kept its differences, kept a human who could tell whether the whole was healthy, and kept a record someone three generations on can still verify.