Wave, Particle, Bit: Completing the Thomson Legacy Through Operational Metrology of Evidence

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The history of quantum physics is often told through a duality: wave and particle, coherence and detection, superposition and collapse. This narrative—epitomized by the intertwined legacies of J. J. Thomson (who discovered the electron as a particle) and G. P. Thomson (who revealed its wave nature)—has shaped both theoretical inquiry and experimental design for over a century. Yet in an era of quantum engineering, a third dimension is operationally decisive: the bit, or the recorded outcome. It is the bit that turns ephemeral quantum behavior into verifiable, auditable, and interoperable data. This paper argues that only by making the bit a first-class entity—on equal footing with wave and particle—can we complete the arc from discovery to control. We propose a triadic framework in which dynamics, events, and records are treated distinctly and metrologically, allowing for precise standards, coherence auditing, and comparability across platforms. In doing so, we reframe the wave–particle duality as part of a broader geometry of record-generating systems, and recast quantum evidence itself as the primary engineering object. This framework continues, rather than replaces, the Thomson tradition—bridging conceptual clarity with metrological rigor in a world where evidence is the true unit of truth.

Keywords: wave particle bit, JJ Thomson, GP Thomson, quantum metrology, record-based physics, evidence chain, traceable records, quantum engineering, coherence verification, quantum information, measurement theory, duality triad, quantum standards, metrological records, record geometry, state distance, operational physics, phase–event–bit separation, reproducibility, quantum benchmark.

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Outline

1. Introduction: Revisiting the Thomsons Through the Lens of Evidence
1.1 The duality legacy: discovery, diffraction, and contradiction
1.2 Why duality is not enough for quantum engineering
1.3 Completing the legacy: the bit as experimental closure

2. The Triad Framework: Wave, Particle, Bit
2.1 Definitions: dynamics, events, and records
2.2 From interference to interaction to irreversibility
2.3 Epistemic vs operational: when the bit matters most

3. Historical Continuity: From Discovery to Record Discipline
3.1 The cathode ray tube to cloud chamber: traceable tracks
3.2 The diffraction plate to quantum tomography
3.3 Where the records begin: standardization, not symbolism

4. Metrological Premises: What We Measure, Not Just What Is
4.1 Records as ontologically prior to interpretation
4.2 The geometry of state-space and device-space
4.3 The "bit" as the final operator: what enters the archive

5. Experimental Design Under the Triad Model
5.1 Separating domains: coherence vs detection vs reporting
5.2 Engineering layers: entanglement is not a record
5.3 Designing for visibility, not just veracity

6. Debugging Quantum Systems: Where the Triad Helps
6.1 Coherence failure vs leakage of records
6.2 When fidelity is indistinguishable from drift
6.3 How the bit becomes a falsifier

7. Operational Metrics and Record Geometry
7.1 Mapping state distance into meters
7.2 Devices as bit-transducers: comparing performance
7.3 Interoperability through record protocols

8. Foundational Rigor Without Metaphysical Overreach
8.1 "Information is physical" → "Records are physical"
8.2 Avoiding Planck-scale mysticism: operational scale discipline
8.3 Science as geometry of reproducible records

9. Practical Templates and Shared Benchmarks
9.1 Verification checklists for triad-based experiments
9.2 Reporting standards and audit trails
9.3 Shared datasets: toward bit-fidelity comparison

10. Conclusion: Completing the Story of Evidence
10.1 Restating the triad's payoff: clarity and comparability
10.2 A return to the Thomsons: not contradiction, but completion
10.3 Next steps: reference devices, triad standards, and living record theory

References

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1. Introduction: Revisiting the Thomsons Through the Lens of Evidence

1.1 The duality legacy: discovery, diffraction, and contradiction

The story of quantum mechanics begins with paradox. In 1897, J. J. Thomson discovered the electron and established its particle-like behavior through cathode ray deflection. A generation later, his son G. P. Thomson demonstrated electron diffraction through thin metal foils, proving electrons behave as waves. This ironic historical arc—father reveals the particle, son the wave—has become a pedagogical fixture in physics. Yet, the seeming contradiction it frames has only deepened, rather than resolved, over a century of quantum development. The so-called wave–particle duality remains a metaphor more than a mechanism, a paradox more than a principle.

1.2 Why duality is not enough for quantum engineering

While duality offers a narrative bridge between different behaviors, it fails to account for the operational transition from possibility to fact. Engineers must build systems that make decisions, not just respect amplitudes. The transition from superposition to outcome requires more than interference or localization—it demands the creation of stable, reproducible records. Without this bit-level closure, quantum systems remain metaphysical gestures rather than accountable machines. In this light, the modern challenge is not reconciling wave and particle, but grounding their interplay in the logic of recordable events.

1.3 Completing the legacy: the bit as experimental closure

This paper proposes that the full closure of the wave–particle debate lies in explicitly including the bit. By treating the creation of durable records as a physically realizable, metrologically traceable step—not a mere act of observation or collapse—we build a triadic framework: wave, particle, bit. This triad not only resolves interpretational ambiguities, but also provides the architectural substrate for quantum engineering. It extends the Thomsons' legacy by turning a philosophical contradiction into a working model of empirical closure. In doing so, it reframes the foundations of quantum science as a discipline of record dynamics.

2. The Triad Framework: Wave, Particle, Bit

The traditional wave-particle duality that dominated 20th-century quantum discourse needs a crucial third component to make it complete: the bit. The triad model—wave, particle, bit—anchors our understanding not only in physical dynamics but in the traceable evidence left behind. This section lays out the definitional roles of each member of the triad, tracks their transition through experimental epochs, and clarifies the distinction between epistemic speculation and operational closure.

2.1 Definitions: dynamics, events, and records

- **Wave**: A coherent, continuous evolution governed by the Schrödinger equation. It represents the potentiality, superposition, and propagating structure of quantum systems. In practical terms, it governs what could happen.
- **Particle**: The localized event or interaction—an outcome of wavefunction collapse or environmental decoherence. Particles represent what *does* happen: a measurement, a click in a detector, a charge collected.
- **Bit**: The recordable and reproducible token of the particle event. It enters the ledger, the archive, or the memory of a system. The bit defines what is remembered to have happened and is what scientists and devices can point to in a shared protocol.

Each member of the triad serves a distinct role in experimental narratives: the wave defines possibilities, the particle defines the actualization, and the bit defines the **record** that persists and propagates scientific knowledge.

2.2 From interference to interaction to irreversibility

Historically, the wave–particle duality was embodied in interference (e.g., double-slit experiments) and interaction (e.g., photoelectric effect). But each of these phenomena must eventually yield a stable outcome—a bit. It is this final stage that carries irreversibility, giving scientific claims their operational anchor. For instance, in quantum optics, one may observe coherent interference patterns, but only the registered detection events—those that produce a timestamped bit—carry forward into analysis, protocol, and claim.

Without the irreversibility of bit-formation, neither waves nor particles rise above the level of ontological curiosity. The bit completes the transition from metaphysical postulate to actionable science.

2.3 Epistemic vs operational: when the bit matters most

The distinction between epistemic interpretations (what we *believe* or *model*) and operational acts (what we *measure* and *record*) becomes sharp under the triad framework. Many foundational debates—between Copenhagen, many-worlds, pilot-wave, and QBism—hinge on interpretations of wavefunction dynamics or collapse. Yet these rarely alter the actual bitstream flowing from experimental systems.

The bit matters most:

- In systems engineering, where error correction and auditability require precise control of records.
- In metrology, where reproducibility and traceability depend on the physical encoding of outcomes.
- In governance and accountability, where each bit is an entry in the chain of trust.

In this light, the triad framework reframes "wave-particle duality" not as a paradox to be explained but as an incomplete operational model. Only by adding the bit can we speak rigorously about evidence and its transformation through physical, informational, and institutional systems.

3. Engineering Duality: From Historical Mystery to Operational Clarity

3.1 Thomson to Thomson: From Discovery to Contradiction

The story of duality began with J. J. Thomson's 1897 discovery of the electron as a discrete, charged particle, a foundational moment that helped define modern physics. Yet, just a generation later, his son G. P. Thomson demonstrated electron diffraction through crystals—clear wave behavior—using the same entity. This familial contradiction encapsulates quantum mechanics' central tension: how can something be both a particle and a wave? In hindsight, the apparent paradox reflects not confusion but incompleteness—specifically, the absence of an explicit framework for records. The elder Thomson focused on registration events (deflections in fields, scintillation flashes), while the younger captured coherence patterns (diffraction rings). Each saw a different projection of a deeper triad. What they lacked was the third axis: the bit—the stable, reproducible record that commits a quantum system to a classical outcome.

3.2 Wave–Particle–Bit as Closure, Not Replacement

The triad framework does not dissolve duality; it completes it. Wave and particle refer to dynamics and discrete events, but engineering requires knowing what survives as a traceable record. By naming the bit as a first-class category, the framework brings operational closure: it clarifies when a phenomenon has transitioned from quantum ambiguity to classical commitment. This shift is not merely philosophical—it maps directly onto lab instrumentation, error budgets, and repeatability protocols. The bit does not override the wave or the particle; it integrates them into a testable geometry of decisions.

3.3 What the Thomsons Could Not Have Known

The Thomsons were explorers without maps for their own contradictions. They lacked both the technological means to control decoherence and the conceptual vocabulary to interpret it. The very idea that the environment records quantum systems—that the world acts as a "which-path" monitor—emerged decades later through quantum decoherence theory. Today, what seemed paradoxical becomes a lesson in incomplete framing: if the final record isn't part of your ontology, your experiments will seem haunted by contradiction. By revisiting the Thomsons not as relics of mystery but as precursors of operational insight, we illuminate the enduring value of making evidence itself the final actor in quantum theory.

4. Metrological Premises: What We Measure, Not Just What Is

4.1 Records as Ontologically Prior to Interpretation

A foundational shift in quantum epistemology arises when we treat records not as afterthoughts, but as ontological primitives. In classical physics, the reality of the system precedes the measurement. But in quantum practice, particularly under a record-centric regime, this ordering inverts: it is the registered trace, the discrete "click," or the persistent inscription that defines what counts as observable. These are not mere shadows of a preexisting reality—they are the very scaffolding of what is *taken* to be real. Interpretation—whether statistical, ontological, or metaphysical—comes after the fact. The apparatus speaks before the theorist. Thus, the epistemic order begins with the archive.

4.2 The Geometry of State-Space and Device-Space

The modern apparatus is no longer a passive lens. It defines constraints on what can be known by shaping both the accessible state-space of the quantum system and the configuration space of the measurement device itself. These two spaces—state-space and device-space—are entwined. A quantum state is not simply "out there," waiting to be revealed; it is defined *relative to the measurement capabilities* and their embedded assumptions. Geometry here is literal and informational. Experimental design becomes a cartography of mutually permissible mappings. To navigate this terrain is to engineer the conditions under which bits may crystallize.

4.3 The "Bit" as the Final Operator: What Enters the Archive

All measurement chains culminate in one brutal step: registration. The bit, in this framework, is not a metaphor. It is the final operator—the moment at which ambiguity collapses and a value enters the archive. Whether photon detected or not, spin up or down, pulse present or absent—this binary result is the condition of record-formation. The bit is not the quantum of action, nor the wave of probability—it is the act of being remembered. Metrology, in its highest form, is the discipline of ensuring that this final operator functions with fidelity, meaning, and comparability. Without this, the history of science becomes a litany of untraceable impressions. With it, we gain a spine of coherence through which past, present, and future findings can be aligned and trusted. The bit thus completes not just the experimental loop—but the epistemological circle of knowability itself.

5. Experimental Design Under the Triad Model

5.1 Separating Domains: Coherence vs Detection vs Reporting

In traditional experimental designs, the distinction between quantum coherence, particle detection, and final data reporting is often blurred under the banner of "measurement." The triad model—wave, particle, bit—requires a radical unbundling. Coherence pertains to wavefunction dynamics, sustained within isolated or entangled subsystems. Detection is the transient event where potential collapses into an observable interaction, such as an ionizing hit or a photonic absorption. Reporting is the final transformation: when a fleeting interaction becomes a stable, retrievable record. Each layer imposes different constraints, noise profiles, and design implications. Conflating them—treating coherence as a sign of observation, or detection as sufficient for record—has led to interpretive confusion and technical misdesign. A properly triadic experiment must honor the separation of these domains and design interfaces that preserve the integrity of each transition.

5.2 Engineering Layers: Entanglement Is Not a Record

Entanglement is often romanticized as a kind of "quantum knowledge," but under the triad lens, it belongs squarely in the coherence domain, not the record domain. An entangled state—however strong or nonlocal—does not constitute a recorded fact unless it results in a detectable, reportable bit. The paradoxes of delayed choice and quantum erasure become clearer: what matters epistemically is not the abstract entanglement structure, but whether any irreversible bit-formation occurred. Experimentalists must design with this in mind: distinguishing between quantum correlations that can be post-selected or inferred, versus those that were archived in real time. The apparatus must be built not just to witness interference, but to channel it into irreversible reporting mechanisms. This also means that engineering entanglement without engineering its readout is epistemologically incomplete.

5.3 Designing for Visibility, Not Just Veracity

Scientific experiments are often judged on their truth-claims—did they measure what they claimed to measure? But under the triad framework, visibility becomes as important as veracity. Visibility refers to the traceability, stability, and communicability of the bit that enters the archive. A correct experiment that fails to record its output in a standardized, reproducible, or shareable form does not enter science. Thus, a triad-aware design must not only ensure correct physical behavior at the detection layer—it must also ensure the archival behavior is robust, interpretable, and lossless. This includes timestamping, metadata encoding, error logging, and long-term traceability. In the triad view, a good experiment is not one that merely “works,” but one that creates legible history—a causal trail from wave to bit that can survive scrutiny, reinterpretation, and reuse.

6. Debugging Quantum Systems: Where the Triad Helps

6.1 Coherence Failure vs Leakage of Records

Debugging quantum systems demands clarity about where in the triad failure occurs: wave, particle, or bit. Many supposed failures of coherence—such as loss of interference visibility or degradation of entanglement—are in fact leakages at the record level. For instance, if an ancillary system interacts subtly with the quantum system and stores a trace, even unintentionally, coherence is compromised—not by dynamics, but by premature bit formation. The triad model helps distinguish true decoherence (loss of superposition due to environmental entanglement) from record leakage, where a subsystem has inadvertently exited the quantum domain and entered the classical archive. This reframes debugging as an exercise in detecting invisible observers—not philosophical ones, but engineering artifacts that act as unintentional reporters.

6.2 When Fidelity Is Indistinguishable from Drift

In quantum systems, high-fidelity output can sometimes mask slow drift. A gate sequence may maintain apparent correctness across test vectors while the underlying quantum state evolves unpredictably. The triad lens clarifies this ambiguity: fidelity pertains to the wave-particle regime, while drift often reveals itself only at the bit level—in record asymmetries, timestamp anomalies, or subtle shifts in cumulative outcome distributions. Without a strong bit-discipline—clear archival segmentation and long-term trace analysis—this class of errors remains elusive. Thus, debugging requires instrumentation of the bit-layer, not merely statistical calibration of gates or coherence durations. The triad model recommends embedding meta-records—logs about logs—to ensure the long-term legibility of both intended and unintended system behavior.

6.3 How the Bit Becomes a Falsifier

In classical science, the definitive falsifier is the observation: the empirical data point that refutes a theory. In quantum systems, only the bit plays that role. A mere interaction, detection, or even entanglement does not count unless it leaves a retrievable mark. Thus, the bit is not merely a representation of truth—it is a logical operator that enforces truth conditions. When debugging, the absence of a bit is not neutral; it is epistemic silence, which may signal either a malfunction or a missing falsifier. This reframes the debugging process: one does not simply look for expected outcomes, but for irreversible divergences from expected records. A bit formed too early, or a missing bit at the expected junction, is the true sign of error. Hence, robust quantum debugging is not a matter of interpreting collapse—it is a matter of disciplining the archive.

7. Operational Metrics and Record Geometry

7.1 Mapping State Distance into Meters

The distance between quantum states—often expressed in fidelity, trace distance, or Hilbert space angles—is typically an abstract metric, internal to the mathematics of quantum theory. But in operational terms, state distance must be mapped to real-world impact: in meters, nanoseconds, or energy thresholds. For instance, a small phase error in a qubit system might correspond to a millimeter-scale misalignment in an ion trap or a picosecond-scale timing drift in a photonic interferometer. Under the triad model, wave, particle, and bit each offer a distinct "ruler," but only bit-based records provide external reference points. A well-calibrated archive of bits allows us to trace how state distances translate into engineering tolerances. Thus, debugging, optimization, and certification all require a geometry of deviation rooted in the space of records, not just wavefunctions.

7.2 Devices as Bit-Transducers: Comparing Performance

From the triad perspective, every experimental apparatus is a bit-transducer—a system that converts quantum possibility (wave) and probabilistic interaction (particle) into archival certainty (bit). This redefinition reframes performance: not as an abstract "quantum volume," but as a bit-yield efficiency under known constraints. Two detectors may perform similarly in raw quantum metrics, yet differ profoundly in their bit-formation behavior—one generating ambiguous timestamps, another introducing polarization bias at the archive level. Comparative evaluation, therefore, must occur not merely in qubit space, but in bit-space geometry: how clean, timely, complete, and irreversible the device's records are. This makes record discipline a first-class benchmarking tool, essential for both cross-platform validation and device certification.

7.3 Interoperability Through Record Protocols

As quantum systems grow more distributed—spanning multiple labs, devices, or layers of abstraction—interoperability becomes a pressing concern. But entanglement alone does not ensure coordination. What makes systems interoperable is record alignment: timestamps, encodings, and metadata standards that permit post hoc stitching of distributed bitstreams. In classical computing, this is the domain of protocol design; in quantum systems, it becomes record geometry: the shared shape and granularity of the bit-level logs. Whether in quantum key distribution, teleportation experiments, or distributed computing, success hinges on whether records can be made mutually legible. Thus, the triad framework pushes beyond coherence maintenance and interaction design to emphasize record fusion protocols—a kind of topological glue across systems. This is not just about formatting logs; it's about ensuring that every bit carries sufficient structure to participate in a larger epistemic geometry.

8. Foundational Rigor Without Metaphysical Overreach

8.1 "Information is physical" → "Records are physical"

The oft-repeated slogan "information is physical" has served as a rallying cry for physicists and computer scientists alike, particularly in fields like thermodynamics of computation and quantum information theory. Yet under scrutiny, the statement is too permissive: it conflates possibility spaces with actual records, leading to ontological inflation. The triad model refines this posture. Instead of assigning physical status to abstract informational structures, it insists that only recorded information—irreversible, timestamped, stored—carries physical weight. A qubit in superposition is not "information" in the same sense as a logged detection event. This shift from "information" to "record" grounds quantum theory in epistemic minimalism: what matters is not potentiality, but what actually enters the archive. This narrows the metaphysical claims while tightening experimental expectations.

8.2 Avoiding Planck-Scale Mysticism: Operational Scale Discipline

Modern quantum discourse is vulnerable to scale confusion. The invocation of Planck length, Planck time, or even gravitational effects in the lab has become a rhetorical flourish, often disconnected from experimental reach. The triad model insists on operational scale discipline: one should not posit metaphysical phenomena where no records can, even in principle, be retrieved. A theory that depends on Planck-scale undetectables introduces not just elegance but epistemic opacity. The triad approach restricts itself to scales at which all three vertices—wave, particle, bit—can be enacted and separated. This means, in practice, resisting the temptation to explain macroscopic mysteries (e.g. consciousness, cosmogenesis) with unrecordable microphysics. Bit-generation is our metrological ground floor; where it ends, physics should cease to claim authority.

8.3 Science as Geometry of Reproducible Records

At its most austere, science is not a metaphysical map of reality but a discipline of reproducible records. The wave and particle may model what *could* happen; only the bit declares what *did*. The geometry of these records—spanning spatial coordinates, timing, error bounds, correlations, and metadata layers—is what constitutes knowledge. Experimental physics, under the triad lens, becomes an exercise in record geometry design: how to build apparatuses that translate wavefunction possibilities into stable, transferable evidence. Metaphysical claims (e.g., “collapse is real,” “the universe is a simulation”) that exceed this geometry must be seen as interpretive overlays, not scientific necessities. Foundational rigor lies in refusing to mistake simulation for specification. Records are our only commitment, and they alone define the territory where theories can be tested, compared, and falsified.

9. Practical Templates and Shared Benchmarks

9.1 Verification Checklists for Triad-Based Experiments

The triad model—wave, particle, bit—demands a revised experimental design ethos: one that tracks coherence, interaction, and record creation as distinct phases with distinct integrity checks. A standardized triad verification checklist can guide this process, with items such as:

- **Wave integrity**: Have coherence lengths and phases been characterized pre-measurement? Is decoherence timing modeled relative to system geometry?
- **Interaction logging**: Are system-apparatus interactions controllably entangling without collapsing? Has entanglement been engineered or merely assumed?
- **Bit confirmation**: Has irreversible record generation been verified through classical logging? Are timestamps, entropy sinks, and audit logs in place?
- **Cross-domain boundaries**: Are transitions between wave, particle, and bit domains explicitly defined (e.g. via gate closure, shutter events, readout pulses)?

These checklists formalize where and how the epistemic shift from potentiality to record takes place—preventing misattribution of data and guarding against the silent collapse of interpretive clarity.

9.2 Reporting Standards and Audit Trails

The centrality of the "bit" as the physical residue of experimentation implies new obligations in reporting. Traditional lab notebooks and journal summaries fall short for high-stakes quantum experiments. A triad-compliant audit trail should include:

- Raw detection data, including null results and environmental monitors
- Device geometry and control logic at each phase (coherence, interaction, recording)
- Real-time logging of control software decisions and postselection protocols
- Versioned firmware and operator annotations, captured alongside the primary dataset

By adopting machine-readable, timestamped audit structures, reproducibility becomes not a retrospective ideal but an architectural feature of every experiment. This aligns quantum systems with modern data integrity practices from aerospace, cryptography, and finance—domains where silent errors cannot be tolerated.

9.3 Shared Datasets: Toward Bit-Fidelity Comparison

To move from theoretical agreement to experimental convergence, the field needs benchmark datasets that reflect not just results but recording structures. These should emphasize:

- **Bit-level granularity**: Inclusion of individual detection events with context metadata (e.g. gate timing, detector temperature)
- **Entanglement logs**: Tagged records of which states were considered coherent, and which were collapsed, including pre- and postselection criteria
- **Record lineage**: Complete provenance chains from device configuration to published figure, allowing community-level audits

Such datasets can support cross-platform bit-fidelity comparisons, revealing how different systems—photonic, superconducting, ion-trap—preserve or distort records. The eventual goal is not just operational parity but a record geometry equivalence layer: a shared space where experiments speak to one another through their archived bits.

10. Conclusion: Completing the Story of Evidence

10.1 Restating the Triad's Payoff: Clarity and Comparability

The triad framework—wave, particle, bit—offers more than a reinterpretation of quantum behavior. It operationalizes a layered view of experimental structure: coherence (wave), interaction (particle), and irreversibility (bit) as sequential domains with different rules, risks, and responsibilities. By cleanly distinguishing these stages, the triad clarifies *where* uncertainty resides, *how* it collapses, and *what* is left as evidence. This clarity improves the comparability of results across platforms, experiments, and interpretations—not by flattening them into sameness, but by illuminating where the real differences lie: in how coherence is prepared, how entanglement is managed, and how bits are finalized into the record.

10.2 A Return to the Thomsons: Not Contradiction, But Completion

What began in the era of J.J. Thomson and his son G.P. Thomson as a puzzling duality—particle vs wave—now appears less as a contradiction and more as a complementary layering of physical operations. Their respective experimental triumphs (the electron as a particle; the electron as a wave) were not in opposition but in different relationships to the bit: one isolating the discrete charge in deflection, the other revealing interference in diffraction. The modern triad does not erase this historical tension; it completes the arc by showing how both views are projections of a deeper experimental structure that only resolves with the recording of a bit.

10.3 Next Steps: Reference Devices, Triad Standards, and Living Record Theory

Moving forward, three avenues of development solidify the triad's utility:

- **Reference devices**: Standardized apparatuses built specifically to test, tune, and falsify each stage of the triad. These would act as metrological cornerstones, akin to primary standards in voltage, mass, or time.
- **Triad standards**: Protocols for separating coherence operations, interaction events, and record formation, with each requiring its own audit trail and hardware validation. This enables **inter-lab reproducibility** and structured disagreement.
- **Living record theory**: A future extension of the triad, treating bits not as dead ends but as stateful entities with lineage, context, and entropy cost. This theory would model records as physical entities that themselves undergo transformations, propagate constraints, and mediate reality across time.

In the end, the triad framework allows us to say something more disciplined about what has happened in an experiment, and to do so in a way that avoids metaphysical inflation while preserving epistemic integrity. The wave, the particle, and the bit are not just aspects of nature, but coordinates of responsible evidence in the age of engineered uncertainty.

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