

Unified Science or Ecologies of Practices?

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Throughout their history, the modern sciences have displayed two outstanding features fuelling a creative tension that has pervaded that history. The first feature concerns the diversity of their objects, approaches, practices, modes of organizing their activities and of certifying the knowledge they produce, as well as of the types of links they have maintained with other areas of human activity and forms of knowledge, with funding entities and with the State. The other feature takes shape in the reiterated calls for the unity of science or in the attempts at promoting a unified science, as have seen the day in the early decades of the twentieth century or as they have reemerged, more recently, under different versions, such as E.O Wilson's "consilience". Both features have been documented in detail by many contributions to the history, philosophy and social studies of science. More recently, other proposals have been advanced to account for the diversity, the convergences and the divergences in objects, research questions, procedures and attachments that characterize the range of practices recognized nowadays as scientific and to address their tension. This is the case of approaches to scientific activities and, more generally, to knowledge-producing activities as "ecologies of practices" (Stengers), which allow both the recognition of the specificity of scientific activities as compared to other types of activities and of their diversity and heterogeneity.

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