
Applied Neighbourship: Physical Methods and their Perception in Chemistry

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Abstract

In the twentieth century, more and more chemists applied research techniques with origins in physics to their research. Seeking a contrast from their then common tools of the trade, chemists named them physical methods. This notion carried a bundle of mixed meanings, among them a perceived superiority of the “more fundamental” discipline and the attractiveness of high-technology in an age of electronics. But it also pointed to the “otherness” of physics with respect to the loss of a chemist’s identity when applying the instrumentation of the neighbouring discipline. Some perceptions of physical methods in chemistry were explored, from opposition to embracement, which ranged from attempts to strip away physical meaning to endeavours of using methods as carriers of concepts and theories. In the outcome, some chemists saw their fortunes in using the image of physics and high-technology for the distribution of research methods, building up a community of method makers that did not just cross the boundaries inside the physical sciences, but of the life sciences and medicine as well.

References

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