Despite a thoroughly androcentric environment, women’s studies in Europe have been able to develop into a sophisticated field. The field has been able to grow in very different institutional and disciplinary contexts. By now women’s studies know several methodological outlooks and their criticizing of mainstream epistemology has expanded into well-considered feminist epistemologies.

My PhD project deals with concrete feminist knowledge practices in different institutional and disciplinary settings in different European countries using the methodology of (critical) science studies: comparative ‘ethnographic’ science research. To study daily practices in three institutes participant observation will be used and a text analysis will be made of the scientific production in the institutes. Ultimately, the project aims to map (the development of) European women’s studies using a Latourian approach.

The Latourian approach has been criticized by several feminists. Still, I consider the approach to be very useful when the methodological assumptions of different approaches within women’s studies are at stake. The Latourian approach has built a rich (both empirically and philosophically), varied (e.g. Latour versus Haraway) and critical (e.g. Haraway, Leigh Star) body of knowledge. A comprehensive model of knowledge production has been set up in which epistemology is related to ontology, ethics, politics, etcetera. In the Dutch academic setting, the Latourian approach engendered the tradition of ‘empirical philosophy.’ This tradition opposes to traditional epistemologies, stating that traditional epistemologies are not able to give realistic accounts of science (development).

The paper I want present concentrates on the possibilities, even the potentialities of the Latourian approach for a project like mine.