

# Historische Wissensforschung Essay

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Hess, Johannes

## Selen

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With the discovery of its light sensitivity in 1873, the chemical element selenium suddenly found the eyes of all manner of researchers and inventors turned on it. Its place in the early history of television was assured by its ability to allow the light of images to be converted into electricity and transmitted by telegraph. However, this is only one part of selenium's rich material history, in which neither individuals, institutions nor technologies had the starring role, but the element itself. Selenium's migration took it from chemical factories, through electro-physical laboratories and inventors' workshops, and into experimental artists' studios during the course of sixty years between 1870 and 1930. The story effortlessly surpasses the supposed limits of discourse and by way of the element's migration, Johannes Hess is able to reveal just how closely industry, science, and art are interwoven.

Hoffmann, Christoph

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»I write in order to see, to do, to specify, to prolong – not to duplicate what has existed.« (Paul Valéry)  
Wherever one looks in the sciences, writing is taking place: in the laboratory, in the field, in the archive, in the office. Seldom does this activity attract attention; it is simply too self-evident, too trivial. Closer inspection reveals that writing does not merely serve to aid memory or convey insights. Christoph Hoffmann shows that in research, writing takes on the character of a procedure that yields epistemic effects. Whoever writes not only processes things, but in so doing shapes them and makes them available. As Paul Valéry suggests: the act of writing itself becomes an instrument of exploration.