

Jillian Hess
Department of English, Stanford University
jmhess@stanford.edu

*Technologies of Extraction: The Commonplace Book, Scrapbook, and Friendship
Album in Nineteenth-Century England*

This paper, examines the nineteenth-century commonplace book as a technology of reading, which transformed from its early modern manifestations to fit the needs of a new century of readers. Based on my archival research of over one-hundred-and-fifty nineteenth-century commonplace books, I contend that the period's new readers (particularly women and lower class students) transformed the commonplace book's original structure in two fundamental ways: rather than focusing exclusively on neatly organized hand written extracts, these readers included more material extracts and more original contributions from friends and family. These changes gave rise to the scrapbook and friendship album, which, I argue, were not simply outgrowths of the commonplace book tradition, but commonplace books in their own right, modified to fit the needs of a new century of readers and writers. I begin by analyzing the structural changes endemic to the nineteenth century commonplace book (particularly material extracts and original verse) and end by suggesting that we have failed to see the scrapbook and friendship album as commonplace books because they revise the tradition's epistemic center. Rather than supporting a Cartesian epistemology (which assumes the subject of knowledge to be singular), nineteenth-century commonplace books emerge from a *communal* epistemology: they demonstrate that reading is never done by an isolated individual, but by a pluralistic reader, or, in other words, the community.