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2 English at King's College London where he teaches nineteenth-  
3 century studies and queer studies. His publications include  
4 *Trollope and the Magazines* (Macmillan, 2000), *Backward Glances*  
5 (Reaktion, 2003), and two volumes of Oscar Wilde's journalism,  
6 co-edited with John Stokes, for Oxford's *Collected Works*  
7 (2013). He is one of the founding co-editors of the journal  
8 *Media History*.

9 <ABS>This article explores the relationship between seriality,  
10 miscellaneity, and compression in nineteenth-century print.  
11 Thinking about seriality and miscellaneity raises questions  
12 about form and format (aesthetics) alongside mechanism  
13 (technology). I argue that, taken together, seriality and  
14 miscellaneity are the twin engines that drive a compressive  
15 dynamic of print in the period, in which we see the pressures  
16 of expansion and spread. They are also, however, engines of  
17 reduction and contraction. I discuss several print media  
18 examples--including newspaper press directories, G. W. M.  
19 Reynolds's serial *The Mysteries of London*, and literary  
20 miscellanies--to complicate our understanding of both  
21 seriality and miscellaneity and to posit a more enmeshed  
22 understanding of both.

23 <AT>Seriality, Miscellaneity, and Compression in Nineteenth-  
24 Century Print

25 <AU>Mark W. Turner

1 By the 1840s, an explosion in print had come to define print  
2 culture in Britain, enabled by such technological and  
3 institutional developments as the railways and postal system,  
4 and by the rise of cheap print and radical politics. All of  
5 these modern phenomena offered new possibilities for  
6 circulation, dissemination, and innovation when it came to  
7 forms and formats of print media. In what follows, I discuss  
8 the relationship between what I take to be two key mechanisms  
9 which drove print across the century: seriality and  
10 miscellaneity. In the first part, I synthesize ideas I have  
11 developed recently that argue for seriality as an expansive  
12 mode and mechanism of nineteenth-century print.<sup>1</sup> I then shift  
13 to think about miscellaneity as a mode working in tandem with  
14 seriality to suggest that these two combined forces drive a  
15 compressive dynamics of print across the century. I hope to  
16 prize open these terms in ways that push us to consider  
17 further not only the enmeshed and pervasive forms of print in  
18 the period, but also the formats, genres, modes, and networks  
19 that were jostling around in the marketplace. More implicitly,  
20 I also seek to bring into contact disciplines including  
21 literary studies, media history, and digital studies to  
22 consider ways to avoid presentism about information networks,  
23 connectivity, and processes of reading and understanding.

24         There are any number of ways in which we can see the  
25 effects of the explosion in print in the 1830 and 1840s, not

1 least by looking at how the print media industry marked its  
2 developments across the century. A quick glimpse of  
3 advertisements in almost any periodical from the period shows  
4 the abundance and variety of print, with lists of new and  
5 cheap books and proliferating periodical titles. Or we might  
6 flip through the pages of a trade journal such as the  
7 *Publishers' Circular*, launched in 1837, which documented the  
8 growth of print through extensive advertisements, lists of new  
9 books, and literary intelligence about industry trends. Or we  
10 could take seriously the genre of newspaper and press  
11 directories. Launched in the 1840s, these directories are  
12 interesting for demonstrating how the industry represented  
13 itself to itself, mapping the spread of serial print.  
14 Essentially, the newspaper and press directories in Britain--  
15 for example, the genre-defining Mitchell's *Newspaper Press*  
16 *Directory* (intermittent from 1846; annual from 1856-1907) and,  
17 later, *Sell's Dictionary of the World's Press* (1883-1921)--  
18 were long lists and indices of serial print composed of local  
19 and international titles. These expansive volumes, designed to  
20 sell advertising in print media, contained digests of  
21 information about serial print. They were large-scale  
22 exercises in indexing all newspaper and periodical titles,  
23 beginning with those of Great Britain and then moving across  
24 the world, working outward from the metropolitan center of

1 London across regions and then the globe (figs. 1 and 2).<sup>2</sup>

2 <fig. 1> <fig. 2>

3         The information management contained within the  
4 directories helps us to see two things: first, the expansion  
5 of print in the period emanating out of metropolitan and  
6 regional centers and their links to wider imperial movements;  
7 and second, the need to give some shape and form to the  
8 proliferation of print. What is captured in these volumes is  
9 the breadth and reach of serial print, the logic of which  
10 requires forms of containment because of its propensity to  
11 expand. Many forms and formats were tried and tested as the  
12 press shifted alongside such diverse factors as technological  
13 innovation, syndication, distribution, and literacy. There  
14 were magazines and miscellanies, part-issues, supplements and  
15 companions, dailies, weeklies, monthlies, quarterlies, and  
16 annuals; there were retrospects, handbooks, almanacs,  
17 registers, penny papers, and so on. All of these words appear  
18 as **signifying titles of serial print**, signifiers that were not  
19 always discrete but frequently overlapping. A magazine or a  
20 newspaper can also be a miscellany; a monthly is also a  
21 magazine; an annual is often a retrospect. In other words,  
22 serial form was not singular or discrete any more than it was  
23 fixed and stable.

24         In order to think through some of these instabilities, I  
25 raise the case of the complicated serialization of George

1 Reynolds's urban, gothic, sensational novel, *The Mysteries of*  
2 *London* (published in weekly penny numbers and sixpenny monthly  
3 parts from 1846-56). As anyone familiar with this enormously  
4 popular text will know, it was not a serial novel in any  
5 simple sense. Anne Humpherys has noted that there were "800  
6 double-column pages in each series, some million and a half  
7 words (for a total of around nine million words for the whole  
8 12 volumes)" (125). With multiple authors and illustrators,  
9 two publishers, and shifting titles, what the novel's  
10 seriality actually is can be difficult to pin down. The whole  
11 is a sprawling, mercurial text that challenges the boundaries  
12 between such apparently stable categories as author, genre,  
13 and periodicity. Yet it shows us how the serial is not only a  
14 shifting and unstable form, but also an organizing and  
15 stabilizing one. The regularity of the serial, the stability  
16 of its periodicity, its endurance across time, and its promise  
17 of the ever-new delivered in familiar ways: all help to  
18 contain the sprawl of print and hold it in check. This  
19 fundamental tension between expansion and containment is built  
20 into seriality.

21         One way that serial brands work is through initiating  
22 imitators; that is, serials create constellations of like-  
23 minded texts. On the strength of *The Mysteries of London*,  
24 Reynolds founded a magazine in 1856, *Reynolds's Miscellany*,  
25 capitalizing on the popularity of his serials. There was an

1 entire vogue for urban "mysteries," in fact, instigated first  
2 by Eugène Sue's *Les Mystères de Paris* (1842-43), and over the  
3 next decade or so the sub-genre proliferated. There were  
4 mysteries from Lisbon to St. Louis, with the latter, *The*  
5 *Mysteries of St. Louis*, serialized in a German-language St.  
6 Louis periodical in 1851. Mostly these mysteries followed the  
7 lead of Sue and then Reynolds in their urban gothic  
8 sensationalism, creating an international constellation of  
9 like-minded print connected partly through serial publication  
10 across different forms.

11 In the case of *The Mysteries of London*, it was not just  
12 the sensational content but also the very serial form that  
13 became a much cited and copied model for others, instigating  
14 the production of print beyond that of fiction. In March of  
15 1847, for instance, an advertisement in *Reynolds's Miscellany*  
16 announced the publication of *The Household Book of Practical*  
17 *Receipts* by Susannah Frances Reynolds (Reynolds's wife) and  
18 William E. Hall.<sup>3</sup> *The Household Book* includes recipes and how-  
19 to advice on a range of domestic topics, from roasting a  
20 woodcock to preventing birds from nesting in chimneys (fig.  
21 3). <fig. 3> There is apparently no order to the contents; it  
22 is truly miscellaneous in that regard. It could contain  
23 anything; the contents head in any direction. The  
24 advertisement tells us that it is uncertain how long this  
25 serial will run, but adds that it "shall be completed in not

1 less than twelve and not more than eighteen Numbers, and when  
2 concluded, it will form the most perfect, the most valuable,  
3 and the most comprehensive Book of Practical and Useful  
4 Receipts ever issued to the public. And it is reprinted and  
5 issued in the same form as 'The Mysteries of London'"  
6 ("Advertisement" 288). That form was illustrated, weekly penny  
7 numbers and monthly sixpenny parts. Here, serial forms cross  
8 genres, and it may be that readers responded to this aspect of  
9 seriality as much as to genre and content.

10 In the volume form of *The Household Book* that was issued  
11 later in 1847, the preface states:

12 <EXT>In the performance of the task of compilation, the chief  
13 aim has been to render this work as extensively useful as  
14 possible. It will be found to contain directions, &c., of more  
15 than *Two Thousand* Receipts of interest and utility. A general  
16 arrangement has been adopted, because the object of the work  
17 is popular and universal, and especially directed to practical  
18 persons and the public at large. The whole book, it is hoped,  
19 forms a compendious Cyclopaedia for the tradesman, mechanic,  
20 emigrant, and amateur, as well as the heads of families; and  
21 it is believed, that there are few persons who will not find,  
22 on looking over its pages, some articles that will interest  
23 them. (Reynolds and Hall n. p.)</EXT>

24 Compilation, arrangement, and encyclopaedism: *The Household*  
25 *Book* makes a claim for comprehensiveness. Here we have an

1 example of the ecology of seriality--in which we move from  
2 serial text to volume--organizing an otherwise disordered  
3 print text. The preface seeks to demystify the problem of  
4 abundance in the serial print world, and the volume form  
5 includes an alphabetical index (another quickly developing  
6 technology in the period), providing a rational way of  
7 gathering what is otherwise random and disordered.

8       In this example, then, serial form and structure (length,  
9 periodicity, and price) connect *The Household Book* to the  
10 hugely popular and never-ending *Mysteries of London*. The  
11 serial form contains and delimits the potential vastness,  
12 randomness, and plenitude of the text, the wholeness of which  
13 the individual reader cannot easily grasp. Theoretically,  
14 nothing stops these serials from continuing: not plot, not  
15 author, not publisher. At the same time, these theoretically  
16 endless texts tease us with the idea of a knowable whole.  
17 There is a contradiction here: while these different kinds of  
18 serials appeal to our desire for completeness and  
19 comprehensiveness, they also implicitly (and sometimes  
20 explicitly) suggest that such completeness can never be  
21 attained.

22       What if, however, we thought about *The Household Book* in  
23 terms of its miscellaneity rather than its seriality? How  
24 might miscellaneity conceptually frame and/or shape the

1 discussion of this material differently? And what is the  
2 relationship between seriality and miscellaneity?

3 A number of critics have already begun to think about  
4 such questions for us. For example, James Mussell writes in  
5 *The Nineteenth-Century Press in the Digital Age* about the ways  
6 in which miscellaneity and seriality combine as forces that  
7 define the periodical press:

8 <EXT>Both miscellaneity and seriality might be predicated on  
9 difference--this article is different to the others on the  
10 page; this issue is different to the last--but this difference  
11 is tempered in each case by various recurrent features. It is  
12 these predominantly formal aspects of the publication, running  
13 across and between issues, that permit it to assert its  
14 identity and establish its persistence over time. They provide  
15 a means for a publication to signal its place in the market,  
16 indicating to readers that it belongs to a particular genre of  
17 newspaper or periodical, but is different to its rivals.

18 (50)</EXT>

19 And:

20 <EXT>Miscellaneity was a generic marker in its own right, and  
21 each publication established its own sense of coherence with  
22 regards to its diverse content . . . . Miscellaneity was  
23 common to all newspapers and periodicals: what differed was  
24 the way that this feature was represented within the printed  
25 object. (Mussell 51)</EXT>

1 Two things here are especially helpful in Mussell's account of  
2 miscellaneous print. First, there is an ongoing tension at the  
3 heart of this print material between difference and sameness,  
4 and markers of difference and sameness work variously, at the  
5 level of periodical issue, the single page, and, we could add,  
6 periodicity. Second, miscellaneity became generic, but generic  
7 miscellaneity took different forms and formats. It is through  
8 noticing these forms of difference (and sameness) and  
9 attending to the specifics of each generic iteration that we  
10 come to know our periodicals and our print. Calling something  
11 a serial or a miscellany--something that I, like many others,  
12 have tended to do perhaps too casually--may not tell us much.  
13 What wasn't a serial or miscellaneous in the vastness of  
14 nineteenth-century print? What wasn't enmeshed in the ecology  
15 of serial print, which included part-issues, installments,  
16 volumes and reissues? Rather, we could shift the focus and  
17 ask: what is particular about a serial or miscellaneous text  
18 and what specifically makes it what it is?

19 One way to frame this is through the problem of abundance  
20 mentioned above--the tendency of serial print toward  
21 proliferation, what I have called serials' "unruliness"  
22 (Turner, "Unruliness" 20) or what Paul Fyfe has called the  
23 "mushroom-like profusion and spontaneity" (3) of cheap print  
24 in this period. As we have seen, seriality and miscellaneity

1 are curious mechanisms, enabling the growth of print but also  
2 offering the means by which to control or contain it.

3       Take the example of *The Household Book* again. Its serial  
4 form, borrowed from *The Mysteries of London*, holds it in  
5 check, giving it familiarity by relating it to other popular  
6 serials published in the same form. But this is also a  
7 miscellaneous serial (serialized in a miscellaneous  
8 periodical), and its miscellaneity allows for its expansion (a  
9 hefty two thousand various receipts) while also giving it  
10 shape and form. The receipts are organized retrospectively in  
11 volume form, numbered, titled, and indexed. This may be an  
12 example of what Brian Maidment has discussed as the "messy  
13 arbitrariness" of the miscellany which is in opposition to the  
14 "useful knowledge" of the volume ( 376). Seriality and  
15 miscellaneity both exercise forms of control here, differently  
16 but also in concert. In *The Household Book*, seriality gives  
17 readers familiar forms, and miscellaneity offers a familiar  
18 way to understand otherwise disparate, fragmented material.

19       Miscellaneity has other controlling functions, especially  
20 through processes of selectivity. Take, for example, *The*  
21 *Miscellanist of Literature . . . Comprising Unique Selections*  
22 *from the most interesting works published within the past*  
23 *year*, a volume published in 1826. The preface makes clear that  
24 the annual publication's function is to sift through the

1 mountains of print being published so that the reader does not  
2 have to:

3 <EXT>To a mind constantly engaged in the toils of Literature,  
4 even the advertising columns of the Newspapers can scarcely  
5 fail to suggest some new scheme; and such a reflection,  
6 interrupted by repeated applications for "new books," and  
7 "anything new," may be said to have given rise to the plan of  
8 *The Miscellanist of Literature*. . . .

9       The Editor does not, however, arrogate to himself  
10 exclusive originality in the arrangement of the following  
11 sheets. He is aware of the existence of works of a similar  
12 nature, and of the promptitude with which the quintessence of  
13 new books is conveyed to the reading public, in weekly,  
14 monthly, quarterly, and annual Reviews, though, it must be  
15 confessed, somewhat scantily in the latter class of journals.  
16 (*The Miscellanist* iv-v)</EXT>

17 Here, miscellaneity is a means to edit the seemingly endless  
18 proliferation of the "new" which faces readers in weekly,  
19 monthly, and quarterly schedules. But the editor also  
20 emphasizes the sheer scale of print in circulation--already in  
21 1826, well before the explosion of cheap print a decade or so  
22 later--which requires organization. For example, *The*  
23 *Miscellanist's* table of contents deploys generic categories  
24 such as "Autobiography" and "Memoir" to help gather material  
25 and make sense of it all (fig. 4). Once selected, the material

1 is managed and structured, and what is being structured, by  
2 analogy, is the vast world of print beyond the grasp of any  
3 individual reader. The miscellany selects from the huge array  
4 of new print out there, but it then requires internal  
5 organization to make sense of the selection. <fig. 4>

6       There were other ways of managing selection, and not all  
7       miscellanies used genre to organize the contents page.

8       Repetition, for example, is important in *Chambers's Miscellany*  
9       *of Useful and Entertaining Tracts* (XXXyear). In this  
10       miscellaneous serial, a poetry selection always appears last  
11       in the list of contents, which provides a kind of reassurance  
12       and stability within a fundamentally unstable genre. The  
13       reader knows that the poetry will always be there, the final  
14       offering in the serial issue.

15       Miscellaneity was not a nineteenth-century invention. The  
16       serial newspaper, which emerges at the end of the seventeenth  
17       century, was, of course, miscellaneous, bringing together  
18       shipping schedules with commercial and other types of news.  
19       Genres that pre-date the nineteenth century, including  
20       anthologies, almanacs, scrapbooks, pocket books and  
21       commonplace books, are all miscellaneous in different ways.  
22       Andrew Piper, writing about the significance of miscellaneous  
23       books in the Romantic period, contrasts the idea of the  
24       collected edition with miscellany, which he describes as "far  
25       more a document of the carnivalesque impulse to undo such

1 rules, standards, or means. With the absence of any obvious  
2 organizing principle and the simultaneous presence of high,  
3 low, and outright weird texts, the romantic miscellany  
4 authorized the reader to create the linkages between such  
5 cultural strata" (122). The "disorder of the miscellanies,"  
6 Piper suggests, can usefully be thought of alongside other  
7 forms and genres which are insistent upon order,  
8 comprehensiveness, and encyclopaedism (122). However,  
9 disorderly miscellaneity and orderly encyclopaedism are both  
10 part of a linked dynamics of print marked by processes of  
11 expansion and reduction. The "compendious Cyclopaedia" that is  
12 *The Household Book*, for example, is no more complete than any  
13 other proposed encyclopaedia, despite its claims or  
14 intentions. The encyclopaedic form seeks to control print  
15 through a fantasy of completeness. The twin engines of  
16 miscellaneity and seriality help to produce but also trouble  
17 that notion of wholeness.

18         One way miscellaneity works against wholeness and  
19 completeness is through brevity. Miscellaneity requires one to  
20 select, anthologize, extract, and sample, but in the service  
21 of breadth and multiplicity rather than singularity. Brevity  
22 stands against the endlessness of new print by cutting through  
23 it, by offering readers some small part of all that they might  
24 possibly read or know. So, for example, the editor of *The*  
25 *Miscellanist of Literature* selects from books so that the

1 reader does not have to. The editors of any newspaper provide  
2 a selection of all that is going on in the world, suggesting  
3 that if you know what is in your newspaper, then you know a  
4 reasonable amount. Put another way, the form demands  
5 selectivity. A periodical such as *Reynolds's Miscellany*, like  
6 so many similar periodicals, contains a miscellaneous range of  
7 fiction and non-fiction, much of which is itself miscellaneous  
8 in nature (like *The Household Book*). Underpinning all of these  
9 formats of miscellaneity--all of these container technologies--  
10 -is some understanding of shortening, condensing, digesting,  
11 contracting, or reducing.

12 By the end of the nineteenth century, the practice of  
13 shortening had become a defining feature of print journalism.  
14 As J. W. Robertson-Scott said of the New Journalism, "the  
15 demand rises on all hands for succinctness, for forceful  
16 terseness, for information in compendiums, encyclopaedic  
17 handbooks and primers, for blue-book facts in precis form, for  
18 the gist of things, for extracts and cuttings, tit-bits and  
19 boilings down" (49). A quick read of the newspaper directories  
20 reveals that, by the end of the century, one of the key skills  
21 in the industry was "**shorthand**," the word for stenography and  
22 brachygraphy, meaning the compression of words and compression  
23 of time or speed. Even standard, lengthy court reports  
24 published in the *Times* earlier in the century were only ever

1 shortened, analogue versions of the real thing,  
2 representations and mediations of an event in a reduced form.

3       What is worth thinking about further, and which I can  
4 only briefly suggest here, is how we conceptualize these acts  
5 of brevity and reducing when it comes to studying seriality,  
6 miscellaneity, and print. This is where the idea of  
7 compression might be useful. Compression frequently is  
8 understood as a phenomenon of the digital age, a loosely  
9 defined period which emerges in the wake of computer  
10 technologies and cybernetics around the mid-twentieth century  
11 and which gets deployed variously to understand and describe  
12 the contemporary. But I want to take the idea of compression  
13 beyond this presentism and use it to think back into the print  
14 media of the nineteenth century.<sup>4</sup>

15       Put simply, compression is the act of pressing or  
16 squeezing things together, condensing through pressure, and  
17 making smaller through a process of transformation. Most  
18 frequently, it is a concept that connotes processes in the  
19 sciences, and the most important compressive technology in the  
20 nineteenth century was perhaps the steam engine, which drove  
21 the railways, steam ships, and printing presses. Compression,  
22 in other words, made possible those key technologies which  
23 ensured the global spread of media and communications.  
24 Compression created the energy and motive force for the  
25 movement and transport of people, ideas, and commodities; it

1 enabled the expansion of print and the processes of  
2 production, dissemination, and consumption connected to  
3 it. For us today, compression is often thought of more  
4 specifically as the key to the sharing of data and information  
5 in the digital age, but a sense of movement of code, signal,  
6 and message also underpinned nineteenth-century forms of  
7 communication and aesthetics, though not in precisely the same  
8 ways.

9       Miscellaneity and seriality: these are the enmeshed  
10 forces driving print in the nineteenth century. They are the  
11 primary forms of print, but they are also the primary formats,  
12 the "look, feel, experience and workings of a medium," to  
13 borrow from Jonathan Sterne's writings about the MP3 (7).  
14 Furthermore, they produce an aesthetics in which, I think, we  
15 can perhaps see something of that compressive energy--that  
16 repeated movement of expansion and contraction, of profusion  
17 and containment--in a process of transformation which always  
18 produces more while also managing to leave something out as  
19 well. In studying serial and miscellaneous print, we mostly  
20 look closely at what is there in front of us on the page, and  
21 we likely spend less time thinking about what has been  
22 excluded from it. As the media philosophers Alexander R.  
23 Galloway and Jason R. LaRiviere remind us: "in engineering  
24 jargon, 'lossy compression' describes any technique in which  
25 information is lost or deleted as a consequence of

1 compression, while 'lossless compression' indicates that no  
2 information is deleted" (126). The concept of compression  
3 might be a means for us to get inside miscellaneity and  
4 seriality as mechanisms of print, in which there is always the  
5 question of loss. What is left out in our formats? What isn't  
6 selected or anthologized? What gets lost in the often messy  
7 translation from telegraphic code to news story, from one  
8 medium to another? In the exhibition catalogue to *Victorians*  
9 *Decoded: Art and Telegraphy*, Caroline Arscott and Clare  
10 Pettitt make precisely this point, in noting how loss and  
11 miscommunication were simply a part of the telegraphic system  
12 and the aesthetics it helped shape: "complex information had  
13 to be packed into small enough units to enable it to travel  
14 vast distances. . . . in the context of coding and decoding,  
15 loss was endemic. The physicality of spoken language could not  
16 be conveyed and messages could be mangled in transmission  
17 through error or technical incapacity" (6). They suggest that  
18 paintings by **Solomon, Tissot, and Watts**, for example,  
19 registered this loss in often melancholic ways. However, loss  
20 needn't always be melancholic. Thinking about seriality and  
21 miscellaneity as part of a larger compressive energy that  
22 drives print in the period may help us deal with these  
23 mechanisms of simultaneous abundance and reduction, in which  
24 lossiness is a defining feature.

25 <AFF>*King's College London*

1 **NOTES**

2 1. For my ongoing attempts to map out the complexity of  
3 seriality, see Turner, "Companions"; Turner, "Unruliness";  
4 Turner, "Serial Culture."

5 2. On the newspaper press directories, see Brake; O'Malley;  
6 and Turner, "Sell's Dictionary."

7 3. See Turner, "Serial Culture," where I use Reynolds's  
8 *Mysteries* and *The Household Book* to discuss enmeshed forms of  
9 seriality. Here, I take these same examples in a different  
10 direction to explore the link between seriality and  
11 miscellaneity.

12 4. My thinking is implicitly in conversation with many others  
13 interested in avoiding overly presentist views of technology,  
14 culture, and the long history of the digital. In addition to  
15 critics cited in this paper, see Lee; and Menke.

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