As the popularity of Media Studies courses increases, so the need for good introductory texts covering different theoretical and methodological perspectives becomes more important. It is clear from the size and scope of this collection that Berkowitz has aimed at becoming a stable addition to course reading lists. The book takes as its starting point the premise that news is a human construction, shaped by individuals in a social setting. From this, two interesting questions develop (and are developed): 'What is news?', and 'Why does news turn out like it does?' (Berkowitz, 1997, p. xii). In answering such questions, we must look at the variety of influencing, shaping and controlling factors coming to bare, in a number of ways and on a number of levels, on journalistic practice. Attention should be given to journalistic values of newsworthiness; journalistic norms of both conduct and product; the practicalities and concerns of newsgathering; the influence of the political environment on output; and the social values - or, the very ‘cultural air which we breathe’ informing (mass?..) communication. Berkowitz recognises this, and after the first section on General Perspectives, in which the ‘Sociology of News Production’ is introduced, the collection is arranged in such a way as to introduce the concept of ‘levels of analysis’. Thus, the second section of the book introduces the Individual, the Organisational, the Professional and the Societal factors influencing news production, and their different methodological approaches to research.

The third section develops the notion of news as discourse or ‘text’, - i.e. as both product of and producer of culture. In this way, Berkowitz squares the circle of the Sociology of News in a way which I have not seen before. Through the presentation of the various theoretical perspectives, the news report is seen as being the product of all four (scaled) levels of analysis, and moreover, as their producer. Berkowitz has attempted to show the ‘feedback loops’ in the system whereby the news as ‘Myth, Chronicle and Story’ can shape the concerns and desires of the audience, which in turn influence the news media due to the audience’s buying power.

This approach works quite well, but at a cost. The scale of the book’s ambition (perhaps necessarily) results in rather a shallow development of each of these news paradigms. This in itself is not a major fault, the book is an introductory text-reader after all, but as a result of this, basic texts are given emphasis to the detriment of more critical work. The problem here is concision. Arguments developed in the different chapters need to be concise in order to be included, thus authors such as van Dijk, Herman, Curtis, Shahak, Foucault and others, whose theories require additional supportive argumentation, are excluded. That said, even the more ‘mainstream’ critical theorists such as Franklin, Kellner, Said, Schiller, Schlesinger, The Glasgow Media Group, and others are absent form the text. Although this may have been due to the author’s thematic concerns not being compatible with the book’s stated focus of the ‘Social Meanings of News’, their absence lends the collection a distinctively ‘uncritical’ appearance.

As an introductory text Berkowitz has done well to cover the majority of the dominant paradigms of news analysis, and will no doubt be included in a significant number of First Year Undergraduate reading lists because of this. The inclusion of more ‘critical’ theorists would have improved the scope of analysis, throwing a bit more light onto the issue of power within the news media, and more importantly perhaps, the influence of societal power structures upon the news media.