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Vincent Mosco's Critical-Humanist Political Economy of Communication

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Abstract:
Vincent Mosco (1948-2024) grounded and advanced the approach of the Political Economy of Communication (PEC). This paper discusses some aspects of his Critical-Humanist approach to the Political Economy of Communication. It engages with the foundations of Vincent Mosco's thought; the roles that labour and communication play in it; Karl Marx and Marxian scholarship in Media and Communication Studies; culture, ideology critique, and the digital sublime; as well as democracy, the media, and the public good. Vincent Mosco's life and work will forever be remembered and will shape future generations of activist-scholars.

Keywords: Vincent Mosco, Political Economy of Communication, Critical Humanism

When my family and I moved from the UK to Germany in 2022, the first message in my new university e-mail account was from my new Faculty's Dean. The second one came from Vinny Mosco, who congratulated me on my appointment and new job as a media economics professor. Vinny was a generous and compassionate human being and a dedicated Humanist who showed so much sympathy, care, and concern for others – friends, colleagues, workers, the oppressed, and the world. His work on the Political Economy of Communication and the Internet is of extremely high quality and importance and has done much to advance this field of study.

Vinny passed away suddenly and unexpectedly at the age of 75 on February 9, 2024. He leaves behind his partner in life Catherine McKercher, their two daughters Madeline and Rosemary and their partners, his two grandchildren Colin Morton and Noelle, his sister Bernadette, his brother Joe, his nephew Frank, and further family members. He is and will be massively missed by his family, friends, and the international community of critical scholars in Media and Communication Studies.

Vincent Mosco was born on July 23, 1948, as a son of Italian working-class immigrants in New York City where he grew up. Experiencing life in Manhattan's Little Italy shaped his lifelong awareness of and concern about class, poverty, and labour. He obtained a BA in History from Georgetown University (1970) and a PhD in Sociology from Harvard University (1975). His dissertation, supervised by Daniel Bell, the author of the book *The Coming of Post-Industrial Society*, focused on "The Regulation of Broadcasting in the United States: A Comparative Analysis". Vincent Mosco held academic positions in Sociology and Communication Studies at the University of Massachusetts, Lowell (Assistant Professor and Chair, 1973-1977), Georgetown University (Associate Professor, 1978-1981), Temple University (Associate Professor, 1981-1984), Queen's University (1984-1986, Associate Professor and Professor), Harvard University (Visiting Research Professor, 1993-1994), Carleton University (1989-2003), and again Queen's University (2003-2011, Professor and Canada Research Chair in Communication and Society). He was a Professor Emeritus at Queen's University and continued to work professionally after his retirement as a researcher, writer, editor, mentor, speaker, and Distinguished Professor at Fudan University.

1. The Political Economy of Communication

Vinny helped to establish and develop the field of the Political Economy of Communication. He worked on the foundations of this approach, which resulted in two English editions of his influential textbook *The Political Economy of Communication* which was translated into Chinese, Korean, and Spanish. He applied Critical Political Economy to a multitude of research topics, including, among others, the political economy of the Internet, digital media/technologies, knowledge labour, the labour movement and trade unionism, media and tech ideologies, smart cities, cloud computing, big data, the information society, communication policy, broadcasting, videotex, media utopias and dystopias, media infrastructures, journalism, artificial intelligence, electronic surveillance, the media and globalisation, media and gender, media and democracy, the public sphere, the media in war and peace, etc.

His work was honoured with various awards, including the C. Edwin Baker Award for Outstanding Scholarship in Media, Markets, and Democracy by the International Communication Association (2019), the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication's Professional Freedom and Responsibility Award for leadership in research and activism that he obtained together with Catherine McKercher (2014), and the Dallas W. Smythe Award for Outstanding Contribution to Communication Research by the Union for Democratic Communication (2004).

As part of his manyfold professional activities, Vincent Mosco was Chair of the International Association for Media and Communication Research's (IAMCR) Political Economy Section (1989-1994) and served on the IAMCR's International Council. Together with Janet Wasko and others, he played a decisive role in creating the Union for Democratic Communications in 1981, a North American association of critical scholars in Media and Communication Studies.

Vinny was a highly reliable and very active member of the editorial board of the journal *tripleC: Communication, Capitalism & Critique* since 2009 and the University of Westminster Press's open access book series *Critical Digital and Social Media Studies* since 2015. His reviews were of extremely high quality and always timely and right on point. He was the kind of reviewer that editors enjoy working with and depend on. Such reviewers form a minority group in the academic community. They are constructive and critical, thorough, reliable, committed, and timely. The way he supported countless academics in numerous ways was a manifestation of his deep generosity, Humanism, kindness, and compassionateness.

In a recent interview, Vinny ended by saying something that reminds us of the importance of the compassionateness and genuine Humanism that he lived: "I think it is important for academics and activists to recognise the importance of generosity in our lives today. […] If there is an area I think a scholar-activist, particularly in the world we live in today where there is a genuine feeling of being battered and blasted on all sides, [has] to recognise [it is] the need to be generous with ourselves and to be generous with those we care about including those who may oppose what we believe is right" (Mosco 2024, 51:50-52:18).

In an obituary, his family writes about Vinny: "He loved helping his daughters grow into the talented, independent women they have become. In his final years, nothing made him happier than playing with his grandchildren, pulling coins out of their ears, pushing them on the swing, or spraying them with a garden hose. His family, which included dozens of graduate students who have gone on to scholarly careers of their own, was a source of enormous pride, joy, and love and they will miss him dearly" (Vincent Mosco's Family 2024).

I first encountered and became aware of Vincent Mosco's works when as a PhD student I was interested in how to utilise Marxian Political Economy to understand the role of computing and information technology in capitalism. Mosco's textbook introduction to the field of *The Political Economy of Communication* (Mosco 1996, 2008) was for me and countless others a medium of entry into and a medium for learning about the international community of scholars and research focused on the critical study of communication and capitalism.

In his textbook, Mosco introduces and explains seven principles of a Critical Political Economy analysis of communication: history, totality, moral philosophy, social praxis, commodification (of content, audiences, labour-power), space-time, and structuration. Concerning the first "four ideas at the cornerstone" (Mosco 2009, 26) of the Political Economy of Communication, he follows an influential essay by Graham Murdock and Peter Golding (2005, 61) who introduced the first four principles in an essay that was reprinted several times in an influential introduction to the study of media and society. The strength of this set of principles is that they are comprehensive and practically applicable. Teaching and practising the Political Economy of Communication for me means showing how the application of these seven principles and their interconnections creates critical insights into communication phenomena. Critical Political Economy scholars analyse class relations and class and social struggles in the context of communication and the media. In doing so, they utilise social research, social theory,

and ethics and are guided by the insights that humans should advance the public good and democratic communication(s).

What makes Vincent Mosco's approach to the Political Economy of Communication special is his stress on the importance of human activity – labour and praxis. This means that for him, the Political Economy of Communication is guided by concrete utopias of a good society, which opens up connections of scholarship to politics, activism, social movement unionism, and social struggles. Vinny was an activist-scholar committed to the public good and analyses guided by the struggle for the public good. Praxis "refers to human activity and specifically to the free and creative activity by which people produce and change the world, including changing themselves" (Mosco 2009, 34). Political Economy "measures political economic knowledge against the values that guide our praxis, including the social democratic values of public participation and equality" (Mosco 2009, 11).

Vincent Mosco advocated an approach to Political Economy that analyses society and communication based on the dialectic of structures (structuration, commodity structures, class structures, power structures) and agency (labour, social movement unionism, praxis). Based on Marx and Giddens, he conceives of structuration as the analysis of how we "are the product of structures that our social action or agency produces" (Mosco 2009, 185). Critical Political Economy analyses how "social action takes place within the constraints and the opportunities provided by the structures within which action happens. We can bring about social change and 'make history' but only under the terms that social structures enable" (Mosco 2009, 16). Such an approach challenges structuralist Political Economy that is too focused on the analysis of structures (16). Vincent Mosco emphasizes the interaction of structures with "agency, social process, and social practice" (16). He advocated a critical-Humanist approach to the Political Economy of Communication (PEC).

The importance of the analysis of commodification, capital(ism), and labour in Vincent Mosco's approach shows the stress it gives to the analysis of class relations. Structuration is, however, not purely focused on class but also on the "mutual constitution of class, gender, and race" (Mosco 2009, 202). This is also why he points out that PEC is "starting with the centrality of *power* in the analysis of communication" (Mosco 2009, 220). Not everyone agrees with this view[1], but its importance lies in the stress that gender relations, racism, fascism, nationalism, etc. have economic and class aspects that matter for a political-economic analysis of communication phenomena. "Social class is the starting point for examining the process of structuration" (Mosco 2009, 233). Class analysis is the "central entry point for comprehending social life", including communication", that needs to be analysed together with "other dimensions to structuration that complement and clash with social class analysis, including gender, race, and social movements" (Mosco 2009, 188). Such an approach differs from class analysis without domination analysis and domination analysis without class analysis. It analyses the complex interplays and dialectics of class and domination. An example is the importance of the analysis of the situation of women workers in the communication industries (see Mosco and McKercher 2008, chapter 3), which requires a focus on Feminist Political Economy, paid and unpaid labour, reproductive labour, and the gendered structures of communicative capitalism.

2. Labour and Communication

Vincent Mosco pointed out the importance of labour studies as part of the Political Economy of Communication. He warned against the tendency "to eliminate almost entirely any interest in work and the labor process in communication" (Mosco 2009, 233).

Mosco and McKercher (2008, 21) ascertained that labour "remains the blind spot of communication studies". Today, there is a wealth of analyses of labour conditions and labour struggles in the media and communication industries (for overviews, see, for example, Maxwell 2015; Qiu, Maxwell, and Yeo Forthcoming), which means that the kind of approach that Vincent Mosco favoured has expanded and become more important.

Vincent Mosco and Catherine McKercher's (2008) book *The Laboring of Communication* provides an introduction to the foundations of labour analysis in the Political Economy of Communication. They distinguish between narrow, expansive, and extended concepts of knowledge labour. Narrow understandings define knowledge work as labour that is "directly creative" (24). More expansive concepts see knowledge work as the labour of those "who handle, distribute, and convey information and knowledge" (24). And finally, "the most expansive definition of the knowledge worker" includes "anyone in the chain of producing and distributing knowledge products" (25).

Vincent Mosco and Catherine McKercher argue that not purely theoretical arguments should be used for deciding how to best define knowledge labour but rather political arguments. Historically, trade unions have been weak when they were small and fragmented. Capital, including media capital, has become more concentrated and acts globally in the form of global corporations. In the media sector, the convergence of media technologies has accelerated these trends. When capital is global, flexible, networked, and monopolised and labour on the contrary national, inflexible, static, and fragmented, then unions lack the power to practically challenge the power of global (media) corporations.

Vincent Mosco and Catherine McKercher argue for an understanding of knowledge labour that can underpin the creation of large unions and expand trade union power and workers' power. Therefore, they favour the third, most expansive definition of knowledge workers, which allows them to make the argument that a large number of workers should be included in unions that organise service and knowledge workers. Such an understanding points towards a politics that is "predicated on questions about whether knowledge workers can unite across occupational or national boundaries" (Mosco and McKercher 2008, 26) and organises one big union beyond the "great division that have traditionally constrained opportunities for resistance and the pursuit of a worker agenda" (11) so that it becomes easier for knowledge workers to unite. The decisive political question in this context is: "Will knowledge workers of the world unite?"[2] (13).

Vinny Mosco worked himself as an activist-scholar with trade unions such as the Communications, Energy and Paperworkers Union of Canada and the Telecommunications Workers Union. Mosco and McKercher use the term "labour convergence" for the mergers between unions, networked unions, and the creation of large unions across sectors and national, occupational, and other boundaries (such as the boundary between media technology and media content, home and office, paid and unpaid, full-time and part-time, wage-workers and freelancers, etc.) (41-42). Labour convergence promises the empowerment of working-class interests. Examples of converged unions are the Communications Workers of America (CWA) in North America (https://cwa-union.org/), ver.di in Germany (https://www.verdi.de/), and UNI Global Union (https://uniglobalunion.org/). The CWA represents flight attendants, telecommunications workers, industrial workers in the automotive, aerospace, furniture and appliances sectors, public health care workers, public education employees, journalists, and workers in the audio-visual industries. ver.di is a German union of service workers in sectors such as financial services, culture, media, printing, transport, public services,

health care, retail, and transport. CWA Canada is a regional branch of CWA (https://www.cwa-scacanada.ca/). UNI Global Union is a global trade union organised in 150 countries. It is a service union active in sectors such as agency work, care, commerce, finance, gaming, publishing, printing, ICT services, media, arts, logistics, property services, professionals, and management. UNI has more than 20 million members[3]. Such large unions can pool significant resources that they utilise in labour disputes, industrial actions, legal conflicts, public relations, and campaigning, which empowers them vis-à-vis capital.

Vincent Mosco (2011, 377) reminds media and communication scholars that they should not simply focus on "the next new thing" – "new technology, new programming, new audience", but also on political questions such as, "will communication workers of the world unite?".

3. Karl Marx and Marxian Scholarship

Karl Marx's ideas were a constant inspiration to Vincent Mosco's thought, analyses, and works. For example, in his book *Pushbutton Fantasies,* he quotes Marx writing that capitalist technology degrades the worker to "an appendage of the machine" for arguing that in the age of digital media, digital automation continues "the degradation of work" (Mosco 1982, 123). in the book *The Pay-Per Society. Computers & Communication in the Information Age*, he cites Marx for arguing that there is a connection between "the means of communication" and "the overall process of growth or capital accumulation" (Mosco 1989, 49) and that capitalism incorporates "communication and information technology into its fundamental processes of production" (Mosco 1989, 50).

In his discussion of spatialisation as principle of the Political Economy of Communication, Vincent Mosco (2009, 157) refers to Marx's insights that capitalism has the tendency to "annihilate […] space with time" (Marx 1857/1858/1993, 539): "This refers to the growing power of capitalism to use and improve on the means of transportation and communication, to shrink the time it takes to move goods, people, and messages over space, thereby diminishing the significance of spatial distance as a constraint on the expansion of capital" (Mosco 2009, 157). Vincent Mosco writes that the Marxian tradition is committed to "history, the social totality, moral philosophy, and praxis" (Mosco 2009, 58), which are important principles of the approach he advocated. In his essay on the "two Marxes" (Karl Marx and Leo Marx), Vincent Mosco writes that the Political Economy of Communication has been inspired by Marx's materialism which concentrated on "class domination, exploitation, contradiction, struggle, and resistance" (Mosco 2013, 60). In the essay "Marx in the Cloud", he argues that Marx's notion of the general intellect should today inspire us to think about the following questions: "how can we move the digital world closer to the vision of the General Intellect where information is a resource available to all, where it is managed by citizens democratically, where the concept of a public cloud means a digital world subject to public control rather than one where rights are limited to the right to purchase digital services?" (Mosco 2016, 532).

The IAMCR's 2011 conference took place in Istanbul from July 13 to 17. Accidentally, Vinny Mosco and I both submitted papers on Marx and communication. Vinny was scheduled to speak on "Marx is Back, but Which One? On Knowledge Labour and Media Practice" and I on "The State of Critical Internet Studies" from a Marxian Political Economy perspective. Vinny could not attend. After the conference, we started an e-mail exchange on Marx and communication, which led to the idea that we co-edit a special issue of the open access journal *tripleC: Communication, Capitalism & Critique*

that focuses on the importance of Marx for the analysis of media and communication. To my rather dull suggestion we call the special issue "Karl Marx and Critical Media/Communication Studies Today", Vinny rightfully replied that such a title is "a bit awkward" and instead suggested "Capitalism, Communication and Class Struggle: The Importance of Karl Marx Today" and "Marx is Back: The Importance of Marxist Theory and Research for Critical Communication Studies Today" as two alternative options. Vinny knew how to pinpoint things very well, so we went with the second of his suggestions that became the special issue's title. It was published in May 2012 and consists of 29 contributions comprising around 500 pages (Fuchs and Mosco 2012). To us as editors, the collection's contributions evidenced that Marx was indeed back. The essays also show how Marxian-inspired thought helps us to critically understand media and communication today. We arranged the essays in four sections: 1) Marx, the Media, Commodities, and Capital Accumulation; 2) Marx and Ideology Critique; 3) Marx and Media Use; 4) Marx, Alternative/Socialist Media and Social Struggles.

Sometime later, I met up with David Fasenfest, editor of the excellent journal *Critical Sociology* and the book series Studies in Critical Social Science, at the 2013 European Sociological Association conference in Turin. David had the idea that works from *tripleC* could be reprinted as a book in his series. After consultation, Vinny and I decided we wanted to take on this offer to publish the Marx special issue as a two-volume-book: *Marx and the Political Economy of the Media*; *Marx in the Age of Digital Capitalism* (paperback: Fuchs and Mosco 2017a, 2017b; hardcover: Fuchs and Mosco 2016a, 2016b). The two volumes also contain additional essays not included in the original special issue.

It was an absolute pleasure to work together with Vinny. I am sure anyone who has co-operated with him had the same experience. Not only did we share a great interest in the topic of Marx and the Political Economy of Communication and the Media, but it was also a very constructive process and interesting to together discuss all of the contributions, consult on and suggest improvements, etc.

In his contribution to the Marx special issue, Vinny asked: What aspects of Marx's works are relevant today for Critical Media and Communication Studies?: "*The most general answer is all of Marx, from the early work on consciousness, ideology and culture, which has informed critical cultural studies through to the later work on the structure and dynamics of capitalism that provides bedrock for the political economy of communication*" (Mosco 2012, 570). He argues that *the Grundrisse* and Marx's journalism are of particular importance. From the *Grundrisse*, Vincent Mosco writes, we can learn that "communication technology becomes a key tool, along with the development of the means of transportation, in the spatial expansion of capitalism, what we now call globalization" (571) and that social knowledge (the general intellect) in the course of capitalist development becomes commodified. The general intellect "holds great potential for expanding capitalism into what we now call the knowledge, culture, and information industries" but "controlling such labour is far more challenging than it is to control and channel manual labour whose knowledge and affect were less consequential to meet the needs of capital" (573), which implies that knowledge labour also has potentials to resist subsumption under capital and to advance knowledge commons. In respect to Marx as a journalist, Vincent Mosco stresses that "Marx used his journalism to give attention to the critical issues facing the world" (575), to speak out in favour of "freedom of expression and [in] opposition to censorship" (575) and to "focus on the major issues facing the world" (575). He concludes: "Whereas the *Grundrisse* suggested ways to theorize knowledge and communication labour, his journalism demonstrated how to practice it with passion and intelligence. These are

lessons that communication students, and not just Marxist scholars, would do well to learn" (576).

There are various versions of the Political Economy of Communication. The one inspired by Marx, the Critique of the Political Economy of Communication and the Media, is certainly a very important one that Vincent Mosco greatly helped to advance. We can learn from Vinny's engagement with Marx that reading Marx in manifold ways helps scholars today to advance the critical analysis of communication and society.

4. Culture, Ideology Critique, and the Digital Sublime

Media are cultural in that they communicate ideas in public that humans interpret and discuss. In class societies, they are therefore also sites of struggles over ideas, worldviews, and ideologies. There are ideologies in the media and ideologies of the media.

In the book *The Digital Sublime*, Vincent Mosco (2004) analyses ideologies of the Internet. Myths are "seductive tales containing promises unfulfilled or even unfulfillable" (Mosco 2004, 22). They are fictitious, untrue, popular images and narratives (22). Vincent Mosco coined the notion of the digital sublime, by which he means myths about computing that claim that digital technologies are new wonders that by necessity bring about drastic changes. The digital sublime, so to speak, is technological determinism applied to digital media. Vinny builds on the two historians and philosophers of science and technology Leo Marx and David E. Nye's concept of the technological sublime (see Mosco 2013; Mosco 2004, 22-23):

> "Whereas in a sublime encounter in nature human reason intervenes and triumphs when the imagination finds itself overwhelmed, in the technological sublime reason had a new meaning. Because human beings had created the awe-inspiring steamboats, railroads, bridges, and dams, the sublime object itself was a manifestation of reason. Because the overwhelming power displayed was human rather than natural, the 'dialogue' was now not between man and nature but between man and the manmade. […] The nineteenthcentury technological sublime had encouraged men to believe in their power to manipulate and control the world. Those enthralled by the dynamic technological, geometrical, electrical, or industrial sublime felt omnipotence and exaltation, counterpointed by fears of individual powerlessness and insignificance" (Nye 1994, 60, 295).

Vincent Mosco shows that the Internet is "a central force in the growth of [..] central myths of our time" (Mosco 2004, 13). These myths include the claims that the Internet brings about an end of history and politics where a radically new age starts and peace and democracy rule forever so that wars and conflicts come to an end, as well as the end of geography so that humans come together in a global village beyond nationalism and conflicts, become independent from place, and live in a weightless economy that stops climate change.

Vincent Mosco shows how these myths "fall short of reality" (28) and that the Internet "is indeed a deeply political place" (31). He deconstructs the digital sublime through a political economy analysis that demonstrates that the Internet is embedded in commodification, corporate monopolies, neoliberalism, surveillance, warfare, and crisis tendencies.

The Digital Sublime is an ideology critique of the Internet. Vincent Mosco reminds us that ideology matters in the analysis of the political economy of communication

phenomena. Myth "inflects human values with ideology" (Mosco 2004, 30) because myths naturalise certain realities or constructed realities.

In the book *Pushbutton Fantasies: Critical Perspectives on Videotex and Information Technology*, Vincent Mosco (1982) analyses videotex's political economy, which includes the deconstruction of ideologies about videotex that he confronts with the realities of political and economic power underpinning information and communication technologies.

Videotex was a set of interactive information and communication systems that combined computer software and hardware, databases, and data transmission via telephone networks. Related to it was Teletext, an information system that combined textual information, television receivers, and data transmission via broadcasting networks. Videotex was an early form of the contemporary Internet that was, however, not global but nationally contained. In France and Canada, videotex and teletext were developed as public systems. The public postal service and telephone operator Postes, Télégraphes et Téléphones operated the French videotex system Minitel. The Canadian Department of Communications operated the Telidon system, the Canadian version of videotex. In Britain, teletext (Ceefax) was a public system operated by the BBC. Videotex (Prestel) was first a public system run by the Post Office and British Telecom. In 1984, the Thatcher government privatised British Telecom (BT) and Prestel became part of a division of the privatised BT. It was turned into a system operated under capitalist ownership structures. In the USA, videotex development and operation were entirely controlled by capitalist corporations. Knight-Ridder and AT&T operated Viewtron. Prodigy started as a joint venture of CBS (broadcasting corporation), IBM (computing corporation), and Sears, Roebuch and Co. (retail corporation) in 1984. CBS quit its participation in 1986.

In *Pushbutton Fantasies,* Vincent Mosco challenges videotex ideology, namely "the dominant fantasy" that capitalist videotex systems only have advantages and "will offer masses of people the opportunity to learn, shop, bank, work, play, and generally enrich their lives without ever leaving the living room" (Mosco 1982, ix). He deconstructs ideologies that shaped videotex: Post-industrial ideology claimed that capitalist videotex created wealth for all and a mass of creative, satisfying knowledge jobs. Pluralism claimed that capitalist videotex created a pluralist democracy where everyone was empowered and participated in politics. Mass society thought claimed that capitalist videotex either created a democratic global community or a totalitarian surveillance society. Developmentalism claimed that Western capitalist corporations' export of capitalist videotex systems to the Global South would create wealth and democracy in poor countries.

Vincent Mosco challenges these claims as ideologies by building on Dallas Smythe's and Herbert Schiller's Political Economy of Communication, G. William Domhoff's power structure analysis, Harry Braverman's Labour Process Theory, and Immanuel Wallerstein's World Systems Theory. Analysing the reality of videotex in capitalism, Mosco (1982) shows that videotex helped some to "make money, have more control […] and simply *know* more" (8) while others faced alienated consumption and alienated labour (135). Building on Dallas Smythe's (1977) political economy of commercial media and his notions of the audience commodity and audience labour (see also Fuchs 2012), Vincent Mosco (1982, chapter 4) argues that videotex advanced consumer surveillance, turned the home into a factory, undermined privacy and the public sphere by the creation of the "audience sphere", which means the "intrusion of the audience commodity" into public and private life (111). Videotex extended

"the ability of companies to measure audiences, market them, and involve them deeply in the process of their own commercialization" (163).

The dominant development was "corporate uses of videotex for profit in a context of state support" (92) so that transnational corporations made "profits that a deeply oppressed low-wage population in the periphery helps to generate" (163) and videotex was a global power and "an instrument for the expansion of multinational enterprises" (144) that opened "information markets abroad" and domestically (140). "The result of these processes is a growing imbalance in the distribution of information resources. A decreasing number of large organizations control the production and distribution of information. The gap between the information rich and poor grows and thereby contributes to global power divisions" (163).

Political Economy and Ideology Critique have traditionally been kept separate. For example, Labour Process Analysis often tends to give little attention to ideology and Critical Discourse Analysis has only little focus on cultural labour as the process of the cultural production of discourses and ideologies. By focusing on Ideology Critique and Political Economy at the same time, Vincent Mosco implicitly makes an argument for seeing Ideology Critique as a part of Political Economy, as the eighth principle of the Political Economy of Communication so to speak. Already for Marx, Ideology Critique was part of Critical Political Economy. He understood the Critique of Political Economy not just as the analysis of capitalism but also as the critique of liberal economists' ideas about capitalism as well as the analysis of commodity fetishism as an interconnection of capitalist logic, aesthetics, and ideology. In *Capital Volume 1* (Marx 1867/1990), all three dimensions are present.

Vincent Mosco argues that the Political Economy of Communication requires theory, methods, philosophy, and praxis. He ascertains the importance of social science methods, especially interviewing people, as a rich source of information about media and society. At the same time, he stresses the importance of analysing how ideology works and that we can learn important things from cultural artefacts such as literature, movies, music, theatre, architecture, etc.

In his works, Vincent Mosco for example analyses as part of his book *To the Clouds* the cloud as a metaphor and what we can learn from it for cloud computing today by engaging with Artistophanes's play *The Clouds* (first performed 423 BC), the 14th-century spiritual guide *The Cloud of the Unknowing*, Dave Mitchell's 2004 novel *Cloud Atlas*, and artworks about clouds by Andy Warhol and Tomás Saraceno (Mosco 2014, chapter 5). In *The Smart City in a Digital World*, Vincent Mosco (2019, chapter 7) analyses how the city is organised in utopian and dystopian imaginaries such as the writings of the urban planner Ebenezer Howard on utopian cities, the monumentalist architecture advocated by the planner Le Corbusier, the architectural concepts of the organic city in the work of the activist and writer Jane Jacobs, and the creative city. In The *Digital Sublime*, there is an analysis of the stories, myths, and imaginaries popular in the context of the rise of the telegraph, electrification, the telephone, radio, television, and the Internet (Mosco 2004).

Vincent Mosco understood Political Economy as the bridging of the social sciences, the arts, and the humanities, sociological and cultural analysis, talk and text, Political Economy and Cultural Studies, society and technology, etc. "There is increasing attention to developing a third way that would neither return to the world in which the sciences and the humanities fill separate spheres, nor to a world in which one dominates over the other. Some have argued that this calls for the formation of a fourth culture, neither science nor art, nor some combination of the two, but rather a new way of thinking and acting in worlds described by the two. […] And political economy,

especially the political economy of communication, needs to enter the debate. The latter brings together what have traditionally been viewed as a social science (political economy) with an art (communication)" (Mosco 2009, 235-236).

5. Democracy, the Media, and the Public Good

Given moral philosophy and praxis are two of the seven principles of the Political Economy of Communication that Vincent Mosco advocated, thinking about how to advance democratic communications is an important aspect of that approach. In his works, Vinny gave ample attention to this aspect. As an activist-scholar, he stressed the importance of labour and social struggles and the trade union movement.

Vincent Mosco writes that "the free spaces in communication include traditional forms, such as the alternative press, public service (as opposed to state controlled) broadcasting, as well as new forms, like public access cable channels and computer networks that open an electronic meeting place through blogging and social networking" (Mosco 2009, 153). He argues that these alternatives are constrained by the "unequal structure of representation, of hierarchies organized according to class, gender, and race" (154). "What we call the public media is public, not because it occupies a separate space, relatively free from market considerations, but because it is constituted out of a particular patterning of processes that privilege the democratic over commodification" (154). Vincent Mosco (2009, 124-125) stresses the importance of media activism and media reform groups such as Free Press.

Given capitalism is a contradictory system, Vinny Mosco (1982) argues in his analysis of videotex's political economy that videotex had its own contradictions and cracks (163). He writes that workers and consumers should change the direction of videotex development and use through social struggles. He envisioned versions of videotex that empower workers to "control the productive process" (135) and argued that the public character that was at the heart of videotex in some countries such as France and Canada should be strengthened. By building on Bertolt Brecht's radio theory and Hans Magnus Enzensberger's concept of emancipatory media use (167-169), Vincent Mosco argued for turning videotex into "public interest projects" (174) and advancing "public access to and control over information technologies such as videotex" (177). He concludes that *Pushbutton Fantasies* "is part of the struggle to achieve democratic control and an equitable distribution of information. It anticipates a time when these goals are more than visions, more than pushbutton fantasies" (179).

In chapter 2 of his book *To the Cloud. Big Data in a Turbulent World*, Vincent Mosco (2014) argues that the history of computers has featured ideas, projects, and technologies that see information and information technologies as public utilities that "like roads, water, and electricity" (18) are often treated as "regulated utilities and public corporations" (46) in order to curb or prevent capitalist monopoly power. In subsequent works, Vincent Mosco further developed the idea of a democratic Internet as a public utility that is an alternative to the capitalist Internet:

> "Public utilities would keep public data under citizen control. The decision to use data for public benefit should be made by citizens and their representatives whether that means providing it to public institutions such as schools and health authorities or licensing it to private entities, which would pay for the right to create platforms that draw from data. […] Public information utilities would be driven by the commitment to universal and equal access to open networks. They would support public control over platforms for social media to create a genuine electronic commons. They would also promote analog alternatives to the digital world.

> Moreover, public information utilities would provide an essential space for addressing the environmental, privacy and workplace issues that bedevil the post-Internet world" (Mosco 2017, 211-212).

Vincent Mosco (2017, chapter 6) stresses that in order to establish a public Internet, social struggles, the break-up of tech monopolies, the regulation of commercialism, the control of electronic waste and pollution, the restoration of privacy, the introduction of a basic income guarantee, etc. are needed.

Social struggles would determine the future of the Internet and society:

> "The digital world is at a critical juncture represented by two clashing visions of the information society. The first imagines a democratic world where information is fully accessible to all citizens as an essential service. This world manages information through forms of regulation and control that are governed by representative institutions whose goal is the fullest possible access for the greatest number of citizens. Governance might take multiple forms, including different combinations of centralized and decentralized approaches at local, regional, national, and international levels. The second imagines a world governed by global corporations and the surveillance and intelligence arms of national governments" (Mosco 2016, 516).

Having experienced the contradictions of life in cities such as New York City, Vinny Mosco had a social consciousness and cared about and gave attention to cities as social environments. In the book *The Smart City in a Digital World*, Vincent Mosco (2019) analyses the realities, problems, and potentials of smart cities' political economy. He shows the problems of state-controlled smart cities and corporate smart cities. As an alternative, he focuses on citizen-led smart cities and discusses the example of Barcelona. The book shows how the smart city as one of the contemporary digital sublimes as well as its political economy work and what democratic alternatives there are. The book ends with a Manifesto for Smart Cities that outlines a vision of a democratic smart city: that is based on ten principles:

> "*People make cities smart*. […] Next Internet systems like the IoT, big data analytics and cloud computing, is first and foremost to help improve the quality of life and the capabilities of those who live in cities. It is not principally to expand the profit and power of businesses or the control of government over its citizens. *Smart cities are democratic cities.* Citizens must be involved in decision-making about smart city applications. […] *Smart cities value public space.* Data gathered from smart city projects belongs to the people from whom it is collected. […] *Smart cities share data*. […] Citizens can agree to have private and public institutions make use of their data, but only when all parties are fully informed and when there is a guarantee that, if people choose not to share data at any time in the process, there will be no repercussions. *Smart cities defend privacy*. […] *Smart cities do not discriminate*. […] *Smart cities preserve the right to communicate*. […] *Smart cities protect the environment*. […] *Smart cities and their streets are about people, not cars*. […] *Smart cities deliver services*" (Mosco 2019, 242-244).

For Vinny Mosco, the emphasis on struggles for democratic communications that are public goods, democratic systems, and utilities was an important part of the Political

Economy of Communication. His works show that and how corporate power, authoritarian state power, and ideological power undermine the democratic power of the media and that therefore democratic media as part of the public sphere are much needed.

6. No End

I have an interest in how books end and had a look at the last sentences in some of Vincent Mosco's books:

> "Critical communication scholars have devoted considerable attention to understanding how the information society can be a source of liberation for knowledge workers, not just a means of deepening and extending capital's control. If the information society is to be a genuinely democratic one, then it is time we all paid serious attention to the laboring of communication" (Mosco and McKercher 2008, 221).

> "Whether the reconstitution of the arts and sciences becomes a project of genuine human liberation or merely another way capitalism turns creativity into profitable industry will depend on who joins the struggle to shape this project. Political economists, especially those who study communication, need to be at its center" (Mosco 2009, 236).

> "In the hands of an artist, clouds of data come alive with the emotional resonance needed to energize an informed response. This convergence of technology, art and politics renews the hope that dark clouds are not the only ones on our collective horizon" (Mosco 2014, 226).

> "It remains to be seen whether we can build the social movements essential to bringing about a more democratic and egalitarian post-Internet world" (Mosco 2017, 212).

> The book *Pushbutton Fantasies* "is part of the struggle to achieve democratic control and an equitable distribution of information. It anticipates a time when these goals are more than visions, more than pushbutton fantasies" (Mosco 1982, 179).

> Vincent Mosco concludes his first monograph *Broadcasting in the United States* by writing that creating a public broadcasting system and "the issue of nationalization is not one that has been studied much, or, for that matter, frequently raised. […] It is time that more attention be paid to this alternative, if only to advance discussion beyond the instinctive reaction level. Perhaps, to be successful, proposals to change the broadcasting system in America need to parallel the profits of the broadcasting networks – in their immodesty" (Mosco 1979, 131).

All of these perspectives have in common that they stress the need for liberation and genuine democracy as well as media that serve these goals. To advance these visions, critique and activism are needed. The dedication to critical scholarship guided by the vision of democratic communications, the public good, and good work, combined with scholarship-activism was characteristic for Vincent Mosco's work. These features form the heart of the Critical-Humanist Political Economy of Communication.

Vinny's life and work was based on a deeply Humanist philosophy. He will be missed in many respects by many people. We should take his life and work as a beacon and model in our everyday lives and future scholarship. The Critical-Humanist Political Economy of Communication that Vinny grounded will live on and inspire academics. Vincent Mosco's life and work will forever be remembered and will shape future generations of scholars/activists.

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[1] See, for example, Curran (2014), who does not provide a definition of PEC, but elsewhere writes together with co-authors that what they term the Political Economy of Media Institutions analyses the media's "structures of ownership and control" and the analysis of how "media and the meanings carried by their messages are according to this view primarily determined by the economic base of the organizations in which they are produced" (Curran, Gurevitch and Woollacott 1982, 13). This understanding has a strong focus on structural analysis and economic structures, while giving less attention to labour as the other side of the economic class relation between capital and labour that underpins the capitalist economy. It also has less focus on class struggles and social struggles (praxis). For the analysis of such an approach to Political Economy of Communication in "narrower terms" (Brophy and Mosco 2016, 171) and its debates, see Brophy and Mosco (2016).

[2] Naturally, not everyone agrees with extended concepts of knowledge labour. For example, Hesmondhalgh and Baker (2011, 58-60) argue that extended concepts "risk eliminating the specific importance of *culture*, *mediated communication*, and of the *content* of communication products" (Hesmondhalgh and Baker 2011, 59). Based on a narrow concept of culture, Hesmondhalgh and

Baker's alternative is the narrow definition of cultural and knowledge labour, which risks depoliticising the very concept.

[3] Data source: https://uniglobalunion.org/, accessed on 14 February 14, 2024.