

To the Cloud: Big Data in a Turbulent World

Vincent Mosco

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This exploration of one of the most significant modern technological developments is both provocative and informative.

“Cloud computing” is one of those technological buzzwords that has entered mainstream consciousness. Not surprisingly, writes Vincent Mosco in *To the Cloud*, it has been widely adopted and promoted by industry giants in their individual efforts to dominate the playing field. But Mosco goes well beyond technology in this exploration of cloud computing that also addresses “its political, economic, social, and cultural significance.”

Mosco begins by pointing out that “there is no generally accepted definition of cloud computing,” but he offers a technical yet easy-to-understand explanation of what cloud computing typically includes. Interestingly, and perhaps to the surprise of some readers, he acknowledges that it is Amazon that, through its division Amazon Web Services, has taken the lead position in US cloud computing. After an authoritative discussion of the nature of cloud computing and providers such as Amazon, Google, IBM, and Microsoft, Mosco discusses the global influence of cloud computing. He follows this with a fascinating chapter delving into the manner in which the concept of cloud computing has been marketed by technology companies and research firms alike.

In two of the most provocative chapters, “Dark Clouds” and “Big Data and Cloud Culture,” Mosco authoritatively covers privacy and security concerns of cloud computing. He also talks at length about the NSA’s use of big data, a timely topic that leverages recent headlines. At the same time, Mosco deftly stretches the scope of the book by observing the world of “cloud culture.” He takes the reader on a fanciful tour of some of the ways clouds have been interpreted over thousands of years, from Aristophanes’s *The Clouds*, a play first performed in 423 BC, to David Mitchell’s novel *Cloud Atlas*. While this is a significant departure from cloud computing itself (and may be a bit extraneous), Mosco’s point is that the “cloud” has a rich and deep history.

As Mosco concludes, “The cloud is an enormously powerful metaphor, arguably the most important developed in the short history of the IT world.” In *To the Cloud*, he has done a fine job of validating this statement. His exploration of cloud computing is technically grounded and also offers important insight into the extended influence cloud computing has already had, and could have on generations to come.

BARRY SILVERSTEIN (Fall 2014)

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