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## FOREWORD

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I am very delighted to see Adrian Scribano and Pedro Lisdero publishing *Digital Labour, Society and the Politics of Sensibilities* with Palgrave Macmillan. Although I was not able to contribute with my own chapter, I have tried to support the project as much as I can from the beginning onwards. This foreword gives me the opportunity to reflect on some developments within the field the book aims to cover. In the following, I would like to bring your attention to the ongoing research and debates in the fields of the gig economy, digital labour and Big Data analytics.

Firstly, in a similar way as the emergence of social media was mainly a reaction to the explosion of the dot-com bubble around 2000, online sharing platforms such as Airbnb, Uber and Deliveroo are often discussed as a reaction to the global financial crisis in 2008 in order to find new strategies of capital accumulation. These online sharing platforms can be considered as a new business model trying to commodify the idea of sharing in neoliberal times and individualized cultures. The companies tend to avoid taxes, create a new low-wage economy with precarious working and living conditions for the digital workers and weaken local economies. However, as a response to the gig economy, the idea of platform co-operativism has emerged that questions the exploitative logic of the capitalist digital platforms by advocating a change of ownership and solidarity in the twenty-first-century information society.

Secondly, there has recently been a lot of academic interest around the notions of value creation and digital labour in the context of digital media and technologies. Scholars have been discussing how far online activities of users are value creating and can be considered as work tasks (digital

labour debate). Besides this, a lot of research is at the moment being conducted that takes into account a global view on digital media and technologies by focusing on the international division of digital labour. Due to the imperialist character of digital capitalism, new inner colonies of exploitation are created: miners in Congo extracting minerals that are essential in the manufacture of a variety of electronic devices, assembly line workers at Foxconn with inhuman working conditions, IT workers in the Indian software industry and Call Centre workers in parts of Eastern Europe.

Thirdly, Big Data has become the new buzzword in the arena of digital media and technologies. For the processing of Big Data, some sort of software (including codes and algorithms) and hardware (including servers and data centres) are required, resulting into new global social and ecological challenges. The emergence of Big Data and cloud computing can be considered in the context of the neoliberal fetish of quantification and the belief in providing technological fixes to social problems. The algorithmic logic of Big Data analytics reinforces the instrumental and administrative understanding of society. Equally, data centres, which consist of servers that are able to store Big Data, use electricity for power and cooling on a permanent basis that causes new ecological problems in digital capitalism. Big Data and cloud computing also strengthen the idea of outsourcing IT labour to the cloud and bring new forms of deskilled labour.

Finally, a critical theory and political economy approach to digital media and technologies deals with questions and concepts of, to name but a few, ownership, labour, commodity, fetishism, ideology and alienation. Those concepts are still highly relevant for any theory and political praxis that is interested in establishing a commons-based information society that benefits the many, not the few. While the aforementioned developments impact civil society on a global scale, the visible research is mainly conducted in the Global North such as the US and the UK. This collection will undoubtedly serve as a fresh and inspiring contribution by going beyond the Anglo-American tradition and including perspectives and case studies from many parts of the world. I am sure this book has the potential to reach out widely.

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This book is fully dedicated to our families for their love and patience as always. To the authors who contributed passionately to this project, as well as the staff of Palgrave Macmillan, especially Anca Pusca and Katelyn Zingg for their generous support. In this way, we appreciate the work and time of the reviewers who made a substantial contribution with their observations. We must underline the editing work carried out by Majid Yar, with his usual kindness and excellence. Surely, we have not exhausted in this book all the connections between Digital Labour, Society 4.0 and Politics of the Sensibilities, but we are sure that the critical discussion of these topics should remain a central axis of the social sciences.