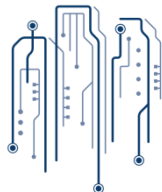


# Work Environments

Leighton Evans



The Programmable City  
[progcity.maynoothuniversity.ie](http://progcity.maynoothuniversity.ie)



**Maynooth University**  
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**Social  
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Ireland



# Summary of research

- This case study focused on the use of software, and its algorithms and models, in the work of individual workers
- The focus was on system users and how software shapes their work and workplace
- Interviews with workers and observations conducted in a typical workplace site: a large retail space.
- A nine-week period between September and November 2015 at a large retail store operating in Ireland.
- Examining in detail how software alters the tasks, forms, spaces and scales of work.





# Key findings

- Big data systems were extensively deployed across retail work and these software and hardware assemblages have a significant impact on operations
- The spaces and practices of retail are pervasively mediated through computation
- Big data has introduced a regime of control - management of labour is concerned with data capture and analysis.
- Management of work is automated, mediated, monitored and regulated by code and data that saturates all tasks and sites of labour.
- Even where managers are still directly involved, their work is directed by a series of auto-generated KPIs and data-reactive work processes

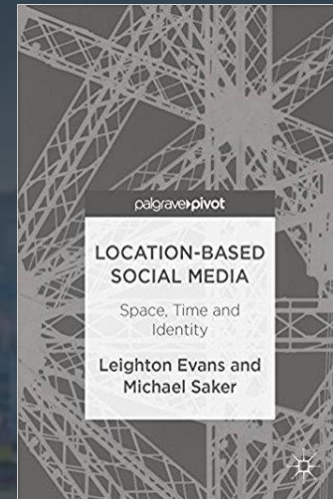


# Key lessons

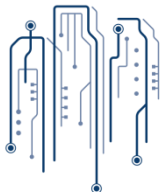
- The regime of control is **highly precarious and fallible**, open to vertical and horizontal fissures that disrupt the various operations vital to the functioning of a store.
  - Tasks can become data-satisfying rather than operations- or customer-focused;
  - Symbolic labour vital to customer satisfaction is largely ignored;
  - Systemic system and equipment failures continually disrupt operations.
- Thanks to this, retail work involves a continual movement between a regime of control that seeks to harness automation, and a disciplinary regime that deals with the symbolic and interactive labour that acts as a reserve mode of governmentality when control fails.

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