ABSTRACT

Networked computation is enabling the rise of crowdwork, gig work, and other forms of on–demand labor. A large and growing body of scholarship has sought to predict the socio–technical outcomes of this shift, especially **??** how complex and interdependent crowdwork's tasks can be, **??** how thinly crowdwork can be sliced and modularized, and **??** what the collective outcomes will be for crowdworkers. In this paper, we look to the historical scholarship on piecework — a strikingly similar trend of work decomposition, distribution, and payment that was popular at the turn of the 20th century — to understand how these questions might play out with modern crowdwork. To do so, we identify the mechanisms that limited piecework historically, and identify whether crowdwork faces the same mechanism limits or might differentiate itself.