

# EXAMINING CROWD WORK AND GIG WORK THROUGH THE HISTORICAL LENS OF PIECEWORK

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# OPEN PROBLEMS IN CROWDSOURCING



Tasks

# OPEN PROBLEMS IN CROWDSOURCING

## - Complexity

Suzuki et al. [38], Kim and Monroy-Hernández [15], Yuan et al. [43], Yu, Kittur, and Kraut [42], Nebeling et al. [28], and Hahn et al. [10]



Complexity



Tasks

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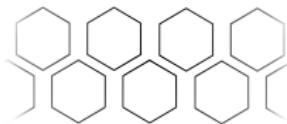
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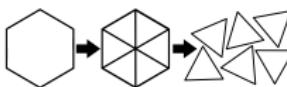
Complexity

- **Decomposition**

Celis et al. [3], Lykourentzou et al. [26], Law et al. [23], Chang, Kittur, and Hahn [4], and Newell and Ruths [29]



Tasks

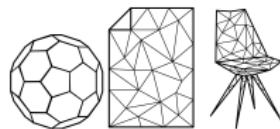


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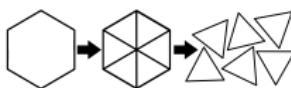
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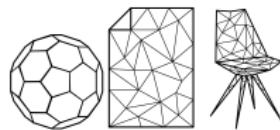


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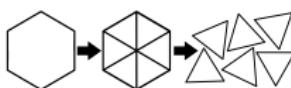
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Tasks



Decomposition

## - Relationships

Irani and Silberman [13, 12], Gray et al. [8], McInnis et al. [27], Salehi et al. [34], and Lee et al. [24]



# **WHAT IS THE FUTURE OF WORK?**

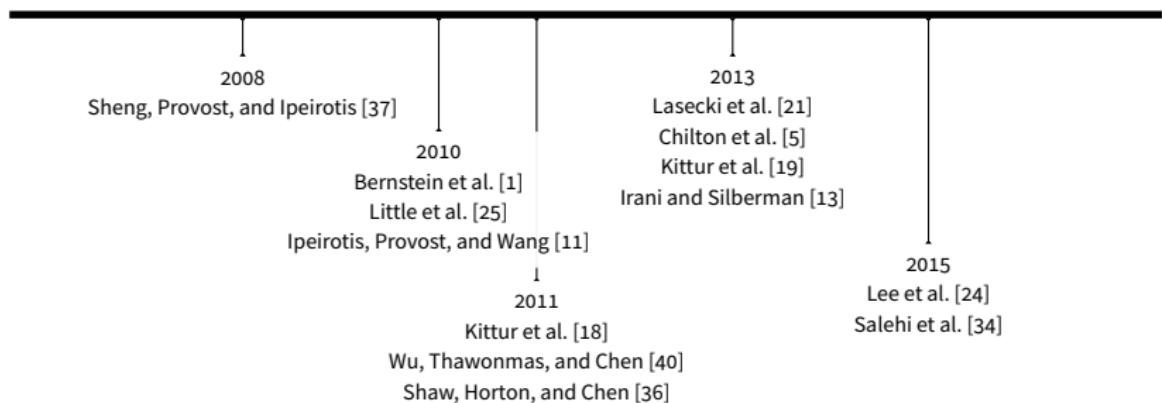
## WHAT IS THE FUTURE OF WORK?

How will **technology** affect the **complexity** of the work that on-demand workers do?

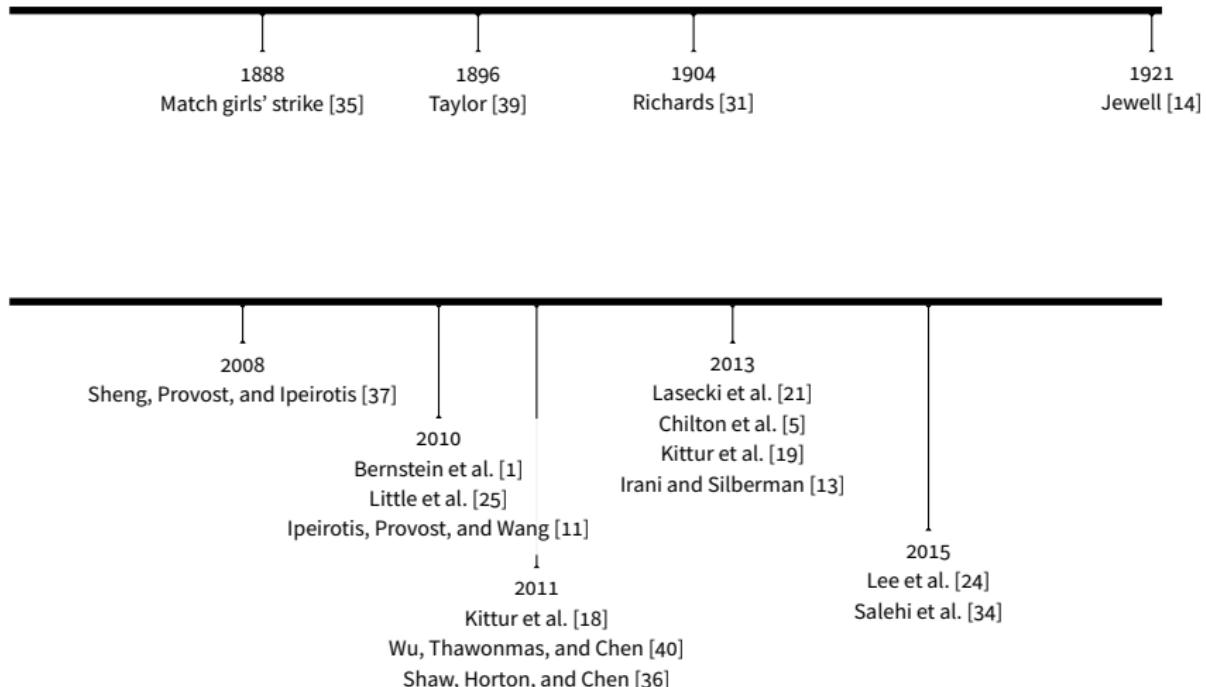
What are the **limits** of complexity in on-demand work?

How can we **reach** those limits?

# A TIMELINE OF CROWDSOURCING



# A TIMELINE OF CROWDSOURCING ON-DEMAND WORK



# INTRODUCTION

We hope to provide:

- A useful ontological lens for making sense of crowdsourcing and gig work (which we collectively call “*on-demand work*”) as a resurgence of *piecework*.
- A method for making sense of contemporary phenomena through *historical analysis*.

# A CASE FOR COMPARATIVE HISTORICAL ANALYSIS

- Historical analysis isn't new
  - In general  
Rosenberg [32, 33]
  - In HCI  
Wyche, Sengers, and Grinter [41] and Bødker [2]

## A BRIEF GLOSSARY

- Crowd work: digitally mediated **information work** — for example, work done on Amazon Mechanical Turk [19]
- Gig work: digitally mediated — but often **physically embodied** — one-off jobs, such as *driving*, *courier services*, and *administrative support* [6, 30]

## **COMPLEXITY**

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What kinds of problems do we mean when we talk about complexity?

- Can crowds help you write something?  
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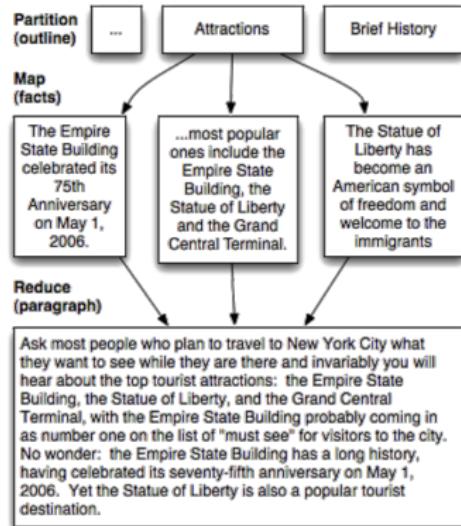
- Can crowds create things from whole cloth?

Kim and Monroy-Hernández [15], Kim et al. [16], Hahn et al. [10], and Lasecki, Kushalnagar, and Bigham [20]

# WHAT DOES THE CROWDSOURCING LITERATURE SAY?

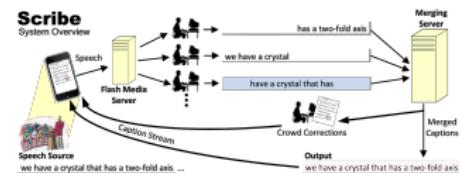
- Build complexity into the process
  - Apply CS methods to people

Kittur et al. [18]



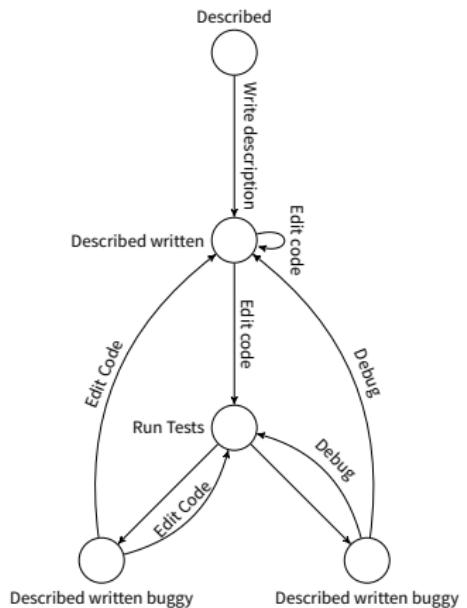
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Lasecki, Kushalnagar, and Bigham [20]
  - **Crowdsourcing workflows as function state machines**  
LaToza et al. [22]



# WHAT DOES THE PIECEWORK LITERATURE SAY?

George Airy (astronomer) used a very similar approach [9]



- Employed computers
- 13–20 years old
- Overworked
- Underpaid
- Could be fired at will

# GEORGE AIRY — WHIZ KID

Airy built complexity into the process, assigning *human computers* to compute, verify, and correct the right ascension and declination of stars.

No. of Swings.	Approximate Time (Astronomical Reckoning).	Number of Signals.	Mean of Times by SHELTON.	Mean of Times by EARNSHAW.	Interval by SHELTON.	Interval by EARNSHAW.	Rate EARNSHAW / SHELTON	Logarithm of Rate EARNSHAW / SHELTON	Corrected Logarithm of EARNSHAW / SHELTON
1....	Oct. 1.	23	22 3 19 36·505	21 23 28·764	h m s .....4 0 23·100	h m s 4 0 38·722	1·0010831	0·00047012	
2....	2.	3	21 7 19 59·605	1 24 7·486	.....3 58 21·652	3 58 37·400	1·0011011	0·00047793	
3....	2.	7	21 11 18 21·257	5 22 44·886	.....4 45 27·829	4 45 46·421	1·0010855	0·00047117	0·00047387
4....	2.	11	29 16 3 49·086	10 8 31·307	.....4 17 6·532	4 17 23·234	1·0010827	0·00046995	
5....	2.	16	17 20 20 55·618	14 25 54·541	.....3 13 21·898	3 13 34·795	1·0011116	0·00048249	
6....	2.	19	25 23 34 17·516	17 39 29·336	.....3 49 42·503	3 49 57·654	1·0010994	0·00047720	0·00047990
7....	2.	23	31 3 24 0·019	21 29 26·990	.....3 55 2·071	3 55 17·433	1·0010893	0·00047282	
8....	3.	3	21 7 19 2·090	1 24 44·423	.....4 2 41·510	4 2 57·445	1·0010944	0·00047503	
9....	3.	7	25 11 21 43·600	5 27 41·868	.....4 31 5·786	4 31 23·591	1·0010947	0·00047516	0·00046316
10....	3.	11	22 15 52 49·386	9 59 5·459	.....3 27 49·747	3 28 3·324	1·0010888	0·00047260	
11....	3.	15	24 19 20 39·133	13 27 8·783	.....3 59 47·292	4 0 3·188	1·0011049	0·00047959	
12....	3.	19	24 23 20 26·425	17 27 11·971	.....4 3 30·416	4 3 46·020	1·0010686	0·00046384	0·00047194

## HUMBLE ORIGINS

First implementations of piecework:

## HUMBLE ORIGINS

First implementations of piecework: farms



## HUMBLE ORIGINS

First implementations of piecework: farms, textiles



## HUMBLE ORIGINS

First implementations of piecework: farms, textiles, and other low-skill labor.



**FORD**

Fordism

# COMPARISONS

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