Epilogue

When we design new exchange platforms, we inherently adopt some assumptions about a social system—or create a new one. Markets are made, produced, and sustained by those involved in their functioning (Lampinen and Brown, 2017). Markets are human-created systems and, as such, it is up to us to fix them if they are broken, intervene when they are failing, and start new ones where they can be useful (Roth, 2015). Casting markets as human artifacts turns them into objects of design and critical scrutiny, and as such, more explicitly objects of study for HCI scholars. Beyond the exchange arrangements this book has focused on, there are many more we can work to improve —and endless others we could create.

Since markets are often instantiated in a technological form, the HCI community can take an active role in designing markets and intervening critically where they do not work fairly or effectively. This is not easy, and it will not do away with the fundamental interpersonal issues that peer-to-peer exchange entails. Yet, we are not powerless to intervene in existing systems or to create future alternatives. Just as we need to understand social relationships and interpersonal communication to design successful, or provocative, social media systems, insight into markets can help us create effective yet socially acceptable mechanisms for allocating resources and matching people. Studying peer-to-peer exchange and designing systems that help people to navigate the interpersonal challenges it entails is one important avenue for developing livable—and even desirable—futures.

This book is, first and foremost, an invitation to attend to the interpersonal issues that make peer-to-peer exchange so fraught with failure and yet so appealing. There are ripe opportunities for creating exchange arrangements that strike the contextually right balance between the convenience of assured transactions and the cherished social qualities that can only come into being through interpersonal effort. But the interpersonal is never disconnected from the (infra)structural. Over the past decade, platforms have become an increasingly dominant infrastructural and economic model for describing and understanding the social web. While profit-driven platforms have captured most of the attention in conversations about the sharing economy, they are not all that there is. We need to consider and create alternatives to how exchange arrangements function—and who owns and governs them. This is crucial not only as part of our broader efforts of designing technologies that are effective and enjoyable to engage with, but also because these systems play increasing roles in how people come together, consume, and get by in their daily lives.