



# Afterword

GISLI PALSSON

*Department of Anthropology, University of Iceland*

This is a timely and impressive collection of essays, offering a range of perspectives on anthropology beyond Earth. Overall, anthropology, much like geology and geography, has remained geocentric, down-to-earth, and earth-bound. How else would we manage to “ground” our observations, tap cognitive worlds, and produce thick descriptions, long considered the hallmarks of the discipline? This has clearly been changing significantly in recent decades, in line with politics of exploration and empire, progressive scientific understanding of outer space, and Anthropocenic concerns with a damaged Earth plagued by human signatures. A recurrent theme, the editors point out, is the possibility for humans to establish a viable base in outer space, a *domus* or *casa*. Mars now appears more Earth-like than perhaps ever before; the material humanity needs to construct buildings and colonies on Mars apparently exists within the planet’s soil, “no need to ship in the bricks.”<sup>1</sup> Literally every month, the public imagination is arrested by new space discoveries and predictions based on mathematics, physics, and biology.

One of the earliest contributions to the anthropology of space was the volume *Interstellar Migration and the Human Experience* (1985). Writing in the heat of the Cold War, under threat of nuclear war, Ben R. Finney, Eric M. Jones, and their colleagues reflected on the possibilities of colonization in space and the likely consequences for human evolution. As we see in the essays presented here, anthropology and related disciplines, environmental studies, and the humanities have come a long way, moving from narrow Cold War preoccupations to a surprisingly broad and exciting horizon of perspectives, taking space from the margin of anthropological inquiry right into the center, readdressing classic philosophical anthropological concerns with familiarizing the exotic and exoticizing the familiar.

Since time immemorial the moon has captured the human imagination, structuring time and emotions, inviting contemplation about native inhabitants both similar to and different from those on Earth, and projecting life on Earth “out there.” Now, planetary

1. St. Fleur, “If Mars Is Colonized.”

scientists gaze downward<sup>2</sup> from the heavens to establish Earth's internal features and workings, partly to reflect on our troubled Gaia. Philosopher and optician Giambattista della Porta would be bemused. In 1589 he proposed, in his *Magia Naturalis*, projecting earthbound life onto the surface of the moon through a parabolic mirror, using the moon as a screen.<sup>3</sup> As the editors of this special section explain, somewhat surprisingly outer space matters for anthropology and, likewise, anthropology matters for those concerned with space politics and space research. After all, space may be just as “natural” for humans as the Earth that produced them.

GISLI PALSSON is professor of anthropology at the University of Iceland. He has written extensively on a variety of issues, including human-environmental relations, biomedicine, and the social context of genomics. He has done fieldwork in Iceland, the Republic of Cape Verde, the Canadian Arctic, and the Virgin Islands. His most recent books are *Anthropology and the New Genetics* (2007); *Biosocial Becomings: Integrating Social and Biological Anthropology* (coedited with Tim Ingold, 2013); *Nature, Culture, and Society: Anthropological Perspectives on Life* (2015); *Can Science Resolve the Nature/Nurture Debate?* (coauthored with Margaret Lock, 2016); and *Hans Jonathan: The Man Who Stole Himself* (2016).

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2. Grinspoon, *Earth in Human Hands*.

3. Brunner, *Moon*.