This innovative book takes a fresh look at the anthropology of kinship and the comparative study of relatedness. Kinship has historically been central to the discipline of anthropology, but what sort of future does it have? What is the impact of recent studies of reproductive technologies, of gender, and of the social construction of science in the West? What significance does public anxiety about the family, or new family forms in the West, have for anthropology's analytic strategies? The study of kinship has rested on a distinction between the “biological” and the “social.” But recent technological developments have made this distinction no longer self-evident. What does this imply about the comparison of kinship institutions cross-culturally? Janet Carsten gives an approachable and original view of the past, present, and future of kinship in anthropology. Her observations will be of interest not just to anthropologists but to social scientists generally.

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After Kinship

JANET CARSTEN

University of Edinburgh
For Jonathan and Jessica
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Originally, this book was planned as a kind of companion volume and expansion of my introduction to *Cultures of Relatedness* (Carsten 2000a). Although in the end this plan was somewhat overtaken by events, readers will find many parallels between the themes in these two books – including the intellectual debts that I acknowledge here. David Schneider’s work forms a running thread through all the chapters. But I have learned most of the anthropology I know from Maurice Bloch and Marilyn Strathern – who for quite different reasons may disagree with parts of what follows. My discussion of personhood in Chapter 4 owes a great deal to conversations with Maurice Bloch, and especially to his article on “Death and the Concept of the Person,” published in 1988. The title, *After Kinship*, is of course playful; the message of this book appears to be that “after kinship” is – well, just more kinship (even if it might be of a slightly different kind). But it is also a serious gesture of acknowledgment.
Acknowledgments

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A somewhat different and longer version of Chapter 5 was published under the title “Substantivism, Antisubstantivism, and Anti-Antisubstantivism” in Relative Values: Reconfiguring Kinship Studies, edited by Sarah Franklin and Susan McKinnon (Duke University Press, 2001). I am grateful to Tony Good, Sarah Franklin, and Susan McKinnon for their comments on an earlier version of this chapter. Some of the material on adoption reunions in Chapter 6 was used to a different purpose in my article “‘Knowing Where You’ve Come From’: Ruptures and Continuities of Time and Kinship in Narratives of Adoption Reunions,” Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute 6: 687–703, 2000. I am grateful to the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland and the editors and publishers of this material for permission to use it here.

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Much of this book has been written in the shadow of a profound loss. My father, Francis Carsten, died in June 1998. Not long before his death, I discovered a surprising bit of kinship knowledge. As part of his Communist Party activism in the late 1920s and early 1930s, Francis had given talks on Friedrich Engels’ *Origins of the Family, Private Property and the State* to study groups in working-class neighborhoods of Berlin. From him I learned not to take kinship for granted, that relationships worth their salt are made rather than given, and that the unconditional gifts of love and support that are their true mark are both enduring and utterly irreplaceable.

Jonathan Spencer and Jessica Spencer have lived with the writing of this book. Apart from many other contributions, they have helped me to see that the givenness of kinship can be a restorative and creative force.