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# Scandal and Its Theory

*edited by*

Manfred J. Holler

*Homo oeconomicus XVI(1)*

*Accedo Verlagsgesellschaft 1999*

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# Scandal and Its Theory II

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Manfred J. Holler

*HOMO OECONOMICUS XIX(2)*  
*Accedo Verlagsgesellschaft 2002*

# HOMO OECONOMICUS XIX(2)

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## The Raw Material of Scandal: An Introduction

by

Manfred J. Holler\*

### *1. The raw material story*

The first *Call for Papers* for this volume was circulated in late 1995 and Sofia Blind presented an earlier version of her contribution to this volume at the 4th International Festival of ARTS&Games at Askov Højskole (Vejen, Denmark) in May, 1996. That is to say, the project to create such a volume is older than Monika Lewinsky's entry into scandal history.

There was no specific scandal which triggered off the project. In fact, I think the memory of my discussion with Sten Bülow Bredsted on the relationship of art and scandal in Autumn 1995 inspired me to start collecting publishable material on the scandal issue. My first perspective was to systematically confront contributions of art and social sciences on this issue. However, it is not always possible to present art in DIN A5 form without a substantial loss of quality. Moreover, the more I worked on the scandal phenomenon, the more I was convinced that the confrontation of art and social science does not make sense: There is no line of conflict, no border line, that justifies the confrontation of art and social sciences when it comes to scandal. There are many related cases in both areas, but only a few bridges that connect one territory to the other.

The following pages contain material that was collected with the intention of contributing to the understanding of an eminent social phenomenon such as scandals. It is at the very heart of this phenomenon to stick out, to protrude, to be notable, conspicuous, prominent and challenging. Surprisingly, however, social scientists seem to have very little systematic knowledge about this phenomenon. On the one hand, it is easy to read thousands of pages of scientific literature on social conduct and human interaction without a single word on scandal, and on the other hand, it is hardly possible to open a magazine or a daily newspaper that does not report scandals under the heading "Society" or, even more general, "People" (for the latter, see, e.g., *The Time Magazine*).

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Does this paradox indicate a serious shortcoming in the scientific discussion, and if so, what do we gain if we resolve it? To come closer to an answer to this question, the following pages present some raw material. I call this 'raw material' because they do not contain a conclusive theory of the scandal phenomenon, perhaps not even a convincing description or definition.

As scandals are a common phenomenon in the political and social arena as well as in the realm of arts and sciences, renowned scientists, writers and artists were invited to contribute. This explains part of the multitude of styles represented in the various contributions. Correspondingly, contributions in German,<sup>1</sup> English and Denglish<sup>2</sup> were accepted. The result should be interpreted as raw material to the discussion of scandal, but should also invite further contributions on this topic that could be published in this journal or elsewhere.

The notion of *raw material* has also been applied here to indicate that the contributions were selected in order to learn out about the constituent elements of a scandal, i.e., the motives and objectives of the agents and the social constraints and pre-conditions. This general perspective should be of help in evaluating the rather specific position within the various fields where the scandal phenomenon can be observed and where the phenomenon matters inasmuch as it affects the social conduct of people, their value systems and the social values.

## 2. *Evolution, chaos and art*

There seems to be a strong similarity between the Darwinian concept of mutation and scandal. So far this similarity has not been exploited. It suggests the incorporation of scandals in applications of evolutionary game theory to the explanation of social evolution. However, the similarity is limited: social processes are the result of human behavior (and decisions) while we see biological process driven by the laws of nature and from a human perspective, by randomness.<sup>3</sup> "Societies are fundamentally different from organisms because, in the first place, they are systems of ideas, of meaning, and of information flow..." (Hallpike, 1996, p. 683).

Moreover, social phenomenon, social research and social researchers are not transcendental to each other: All three are members of the same system and are mutually

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<sup>1</sup>Two contributions written in German have been published in *Homo oeconomicus* XVI(2), 1998.

<sup>2</sup>Denglish is a simplified version of English, widely read, which derives itself either from Danish or German (i.e., Deutsch) or both of them. Fenglish and Senglish are obvious candidates for future publications.

<sup>3</sup>Chaos theory teaches us that even if the world is deterministic we have to treat it as if it were indeterministic and unpredictable (see, e.g., Hodgson, 1996, and West, 1997).

dependent. There are social scientists which caused scandals through their writings and teaching. (See Hartmut Kliemt's contribution to this volume.)

*Evolution is simulation in reality and art is an evolutionary engine.* The work of an artist gives results when problems are - or seem to be - unsolvable. It is not unusual that an artist chooses scandals as a means to re-articulating problems such that they could be solved in the social or political arena.<sup>4</sup> A scandal is the quintessence of a Marcel Duchamp-like-idea that art is created in the struggle between the artist, represented by the artifact and the audience. The program of the Dada movement and its techniques are well-known: Its main weapon was a shock produced through a deliberate irrationality that led to scandals in a world which is proud of its rationality and order. Duchamp's urinal that was signed and exhibited by the artist as *Fountain* was a pioneer project. "With the unassisted *Readymade*, art changed its focus from the form of the language to what was being said. Which means that it changed the nature of art from a question of morphology to a question of function. This change - one from 'appearance' to 'conception' - was the beginning of 'modern' art and the beginning of 'conceptual' art. All art (after Duchamp) is conceptual (in nature) because art only exists conceptually" (Kosuth, 1974, p. 146). Today we find Damien Hirst's butchered animals, swimming in formaldehyde behind store windows, in many respectable museums: a piece was even included in a show called "sensation" at London's Royal Academy in 1997.

What are the consequences on art and on the artist's life? "Artists have never relinquished the position of outsider, protester, commentator, and visionary, even though they find it hard to fill these roles today. Irony, pornography, activism, revisionism, appropriation of the work of others, calculated and escalating outrageousness, attempts to shock or to extend the boundaries of permissible experience, have been among the artist's instruments, weapons used against the conventional world in the service of the artist's ideas about it" (Huxtable, 1999, p. 15). However, conventions change and in a world of many conventions it is difficult to cause a scandal. On the other hand, the fact that there (still) are scandals demonstrates that there (still) are conventions at work - even as a relic (see Airaksinen, *in this volume*).

### 3. Preliminary definition of scandal

Human beings learn by experience, communication and introspection. As a consequence, the properties, causes and effects of scandals will change along with their appearance and analysis. In Holler (1982), I argued that "since human beings are in a po-

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<sup>4</sup>For example, Resch (1995) describes the *steirischen herbst*, an annual avant-garde art festival at Graz (Austria), as a focal point of scandals caused by artists and exploited by politicians.