Scandal is the quintessential public event. Here is the first general and comprehensive analysis of this ubiquitous moral phenomenon. Taking up wide-ranging cases in society, politics, and art, Ari Adut shows when wrongdoings generate scandals and when they do not. He focuses on the emotional and cognitive experience of scandals and the relationships among those who are involved in or exposed to them. This perspective explains variations in the effects, frequency, elicited reactions, outcomes, and strategic uses of scandals. *On Scandal* offers provocative accounts of the Oscar Wilde, Watergate, and Lewinsky affairs. Adut also employs the lens of scandal to address puzzles and questions regarding public life. Why is American politics plagued by sex scandals? What is the cause of the rise in political scandals in Western democracies? Why were Victorians sometimes accommodating and other times intolerant of homosexuality? What is the social logic of hypocrisy? Why has transgression been so central to modern art?

Ari Adut is Assistant Professor of Sociology at the University of Texas at Austin. He holds postgraduate degrees from École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales in Paris and the University of Chicago, where he has also taught. His research has received support from the Social Science Research Council and the American Council of Learned Societies.
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The series Structural Analysis in the Social Sciences presents approaches that explain social behavior and institutions by reference to relations among such concrete entities as persons and organizations. This contrasts with at least four other popular strategies: (a) reductionist attempts to explain by a focus on individuals alone; (b) explanations stressing the causal primacy of such abstract concepts as ideas, values, mental harmonies, and cognitive maps (thus, “structuralism” on the Continent should be distinguished from structural analysis in the present sense); (c) technological and material determination; and (d) explanation using “variables” as the main analytic concepts (as in the “structural equation” models that dominated much of the sociology of the 1970s), where structure is that connecting variables rather than actual social entities.

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ON SCANDAL

Moral Disturbances in Society, Politics, and Art

Ari Adut
University of Texas at Austin
To Elyo and Ikbal Adut
And if your quarrels should rip up old stories,
And help them with a lie or two additional,
I’m not to blame, as you well know – no more is
Any one else – they were become traditional;
Besides, their resurrection aids our glories
By contrast, which is what we just were wishing all:
And science profits by this resurrection –
Dead scandals form good subjects for dissection.

Lord Byron, *Don Juan*, Canto I. St. 31
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Acknowledgments

I am grateful to Andy Abbott for his continuous, unstinting support since the late 1990s. I am extremely lucky to have worked with someone with such boundless intellectual scope and curiosity during my doctorate. I would also like to express my gratitude to Bill Sewell, who has helped me out in so many ways and from whom I have learned so much in Chicago and afterward. Andreas Glaeser and the late Roger Gould gave generously of their time and knowledge while I was in graduate school. I am indebted as well to Faruk Birtek, Nilüfer Göle, and Michel Wieviorka for initiating me to sociological thinking and research.

Randy Collins, Mark Granovetter, James Jasper, Michael Schudson, Christine Williams, and several anonymous reviewers provided munificent, detailed, and extremely helpful feedback on the entire book manuscript. Jack Katz and Charles Tilly generously made many incisive and useful comments on several chapters. I have tried to address most of the issues that they raised, and wherever I was successful in this enterprise, the book significantly improved. I should also like to thank Viviana Zelizer for her warm encouragement over the years. Thanks are due as well to Ed Parsons, my resourceful in-house editor at Cambridge University Press.

I profited quite a bit from exchanges with Damien de Blic, Luc Boltanski, Bruno Fay, Willie Jasso, Steven Lukes, Laurent Thévenot, Loïc Wacquant, and Ezra Zuckerman. The sociology departments of the University of Chicago and the University of Texas at Austin provided wonderful environments for research and writing. Parts of the book were presented at the various meetings of the American Sociological Association and the Social Science History Association, as
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

well as at the University of Chicago, University of Texas at Austin, Princeton University, University of California at Berkeley, University of Pennsylvania, New York University, and Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism. I benefited much from the responses of these audiences. The Social Science Research Council, the American Council of Learned Societies, Andrew Mellon Foundation, the University of Chicago, and the University of Texas at Austin furnished funds at various stages during this project. I was able to include artwork in this book only thanks to a University Co-Operative Society Subvention Grant generously awarded by the University of Texas. I am also grateful to Matt Valentine for the author photograph. The first, second, and fourth chapters of this book adapt some material that I have already published elsewhere: “A Theory of Scandal: Victorians, Homosexuality, and the Fall of Oscar Wilde” American Journal of Sociology 111 (1): 213–48; “Scandal as Norm Entrepreneurship Strategy: Corruption and the French Investigating Magistrates,” Theory and Society 33 (5): 529–578.

What I owe to the following people combines the personal with the intellectual. Ödül Bozkurt, Marc Breviglieri, Ozan Erözden, Diana Fleischman, Robert Hogg, Harris Kim, Jim Leitzel, Ali Hakan Muştu, Michael Reinhard, Atıla Sezen, Diego von Vacano, Brooke Wexler, and Levent Yılmaz helped me in myriad ways impossible to express here. I am indebted as well to my dear University of Texas colleagues Maya Charad, Andrés Villarreal, Michael Young, and Wei-Hsin Yu for their both cerebral and bigharted friendship, which aided me immensely while writing. The ideas that are proposed in this book started to take form in graduate school, mostly through conversations with fellow sufferers. Of the latter I am particularly thankful to Deborah Boucoyannis, Dorothee Brantz, Dave Grazian, Nicole Greene, Gülriz Kurban, Haydar Kurban, Paul Manning, Jacqueline Mraz, Esra Özyürek, Devin Pendas, Michael Rosenfeld, and Joan Stavo-Debauge. I would not have been able to write this book without the moral support of my family. My greatest debt is thus to all the members of my family, and especially to my parents, Elyo and Ikbal Adut, to whom this book is dedicated.