

Mapping corruption



Exposing delusions of power: The art of using visual evidence to expose corruption

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The story of the *Emperor's New Clothes*,¹ first told in 1837, has been told across the world in over a hundred languages. A vain emperor is swindled by two tailors into paying huge sums of money to make him a special outfit made of fabric that only those who are “unusually stupid” cannot see. When the emperor parades through the streets in his new outfit, no one dares confess that the emperor is naked for fear that they will be seen as a fool. In the end it is a child who breaks the silence and says what everyone knows but won't say: “But he hasn't got anything on.”

Perhaps this story from nearly 200 years ago is so well known the world over because it speaks to us about those in power; how they abuse their power for their own gain and how those around them conspire to support them, taking us all in their wake. Often it takes a special moment – an act of innocence, in the case of the child – or more often an act of integrity or justice to say what we all suspect but have not said out loud.

Corruption is one way that power is often abused. It is present the world over, affecting different societies at different levels. Sometimes corruption is something we can actually see, such as hands putting cash into other hands across a desk or through a window; sometimes it is something we intuitively know or can estimate; and sometimes it



The Emperor's New Clothes, original illustration by Vilhelm Pedersen (1820-1859). en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Emperor_Clothes_01.jpg

¹ [www.andersen.sdu.dk/vaerk/herholt/
TheEmperorsNewClothes_e.html](http://www.andersen.sdu.dk/vaerk/herholt/TheEmperorsNewClothes_e.html)



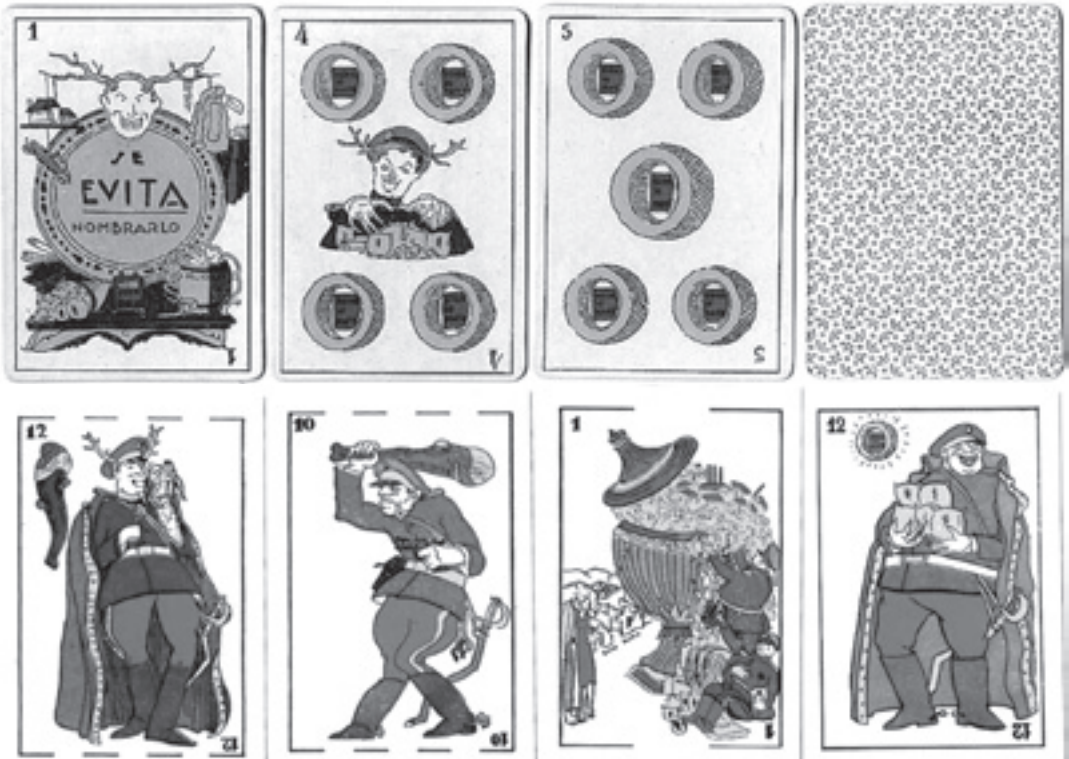
Peron election playing cards, 1951, Argentina

is in places and at levels we have never considered and is very hard to show. It can be out on the streets or deep within societies and institutions, affecting everything from education to health care and from water supplies to construction contracts.

There are two interlinked forms of corruption explicitly enabled by the misuse of power that this report focuses on: the use of power for personal

gain, usually by individuals to increase their direct access to funds; and the use of power and money to manipulate control of a dominant narrative in society – a control often motivated by the need to maintain and expand power.

The Peron election playing cards shown above were circulated in Argentina in 1951 for Juan Peron's election campaign. On each of the original cards



Anti-Peron cards. www.wopc.co.uk/argentina/peron/index.html

there is an illustration of a symbolic celebration of the regime, where Perón and his wife Evita are represented as emblems of “the people” – *el pueblo*. The Perón regime used this form of visual political communication to promote a specific narrative of them as saviours.

The second set of cards is a direct response to the official cards. These anti-Perón cards were released anonymously, also using symbolism and storytelling, but this time to construct a counter narrative that exposes the dark sides of the leader and his administration. The 12 of Batons shows Perón in his military attire portrayed as a thief, a greedy, violent and crooked leader. The 10 of Batons depicts a corrupt bandit-officer of the Perón administration. The Ace of Cups shows military personnel greedily hoarding money and property intended for homeless victims of the 1944 earthquake. The 12 of Coins shows a grinning official loaded with gold. In this set of cards the authors create a commentary that acts as an alternative to the dominant narrative.

The two decks together show a remarkable visual dialogue, one aping the other to add extra weight to its message. The anti-Perón cards are an example of such a moment of integrity. Like the child in the story, the creators call out, but with humour and simple images, to reference stories the readers know. They use the visual element to do the work for them. In using parody they provoke a response and insight that lead to discussion.

Seeing, understanding and exploring corruption

Visual narratives, backed up by evidence, are increasingly being used in this way: to comment on, question and expose different types of corruption and to create this “Emperor’s New Clothes” effect.

In this report, nine different examples are explored, sharing just some of the ways in which artists, activists, NGOs and media from around the world are utilising visual and narrative techniques, often enabled by digital technologies, to call attention to corruption and to expose delusions of power. It moves from looking at how these techniques are being used to help us better see and question corruption, to how we can better understand it, and ultimately how we can directly explore evidence ourselves.

Seeing corruption: Beyond witnessing

New technologies have played a significant role in an increase in the number of exposés. They provide new opportunities and formats for combining data

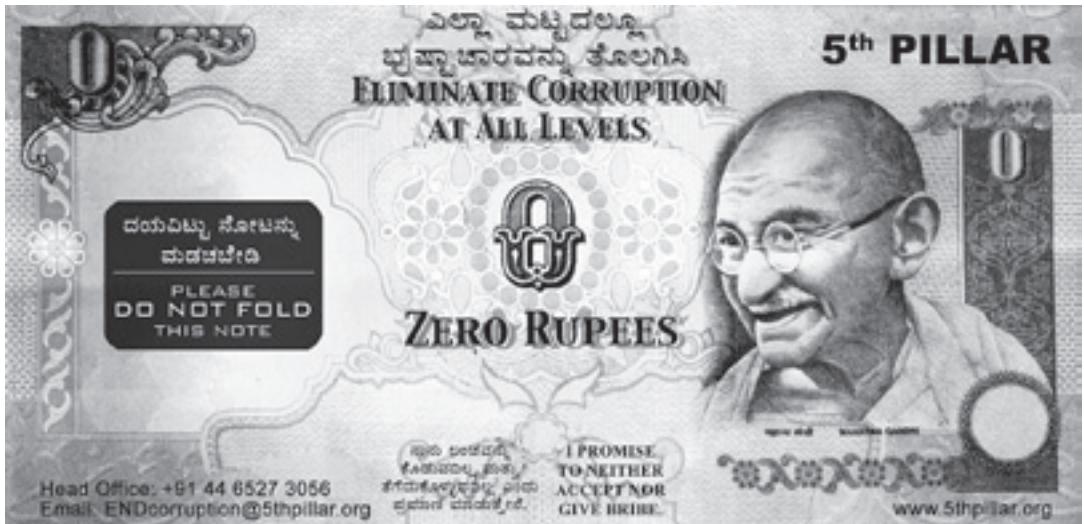


Payback, by Aman Mojadidi, Afghanistan

with visuals and are changing the dynamic of who can document corruption, how they do it, and who they can share it with. Over the last ten years, many activists and artists have used visual evidence to pinpoint and document the moment that corruption takes place. This is much easier with the types of corruption that can be witnessed: for example, the actual act of handing over money to pay a bribe or being directed on how to fill in a ballot sheet. The rise of video-sharing sites such as YouTube has been a significant factor in increasing the amount of citizen-led whistleblowing on such activities. Some artists and activists have gone further though, utilising the visibility and site of these events to make a spectacle of them and call them into question, directly challenging the act in ways that provoke discussion and debate.

Payback is a video installation by Afghan-American artist Aman Mojadidi from 2009² that questions the abuse of power for personal gain at

² www.wearyourrespirator.com/payback.html



Zero Rupee Note, 5th Pillar, India

the person-to-person level. The artist defines the project as a “commentary on corruption and the abuse of power”. Mojadidi, disguised as a fake policeman after purchasing a uniform in the local bazaar, “reversed” the bribes that motorists are regularly asked to pay by the Afghan National Police. Setting up fake check points on the streets of Kabul, he returned a symbolic amount of money to drivers apologising for the misbehaviour of his “colleagues”. The performance was filmed with a hidden camera and shows confused drivers refusing to take the money back. Taking a creative approach, Mojadidi uses a symbolic and provocative action; and by flipping the act, he points to how mundane and everyday this type of corruption is.

Creating a different kind of spectacle, Vijay Anand made the Zero Rupee Note, a campaigning tool created through his organisation in India, 5th Pillar. The Zero Rupee note is a visual aid that mobilises people to say “no” to corrupt officials and to expose where and when bribes are demanded. Designed to look like an Indian 50-rupee note, the note is printed with the messages “Eliminate corruption at all levels” and “I promise to neither accept nor give bribe” in English and Tamil. At the moment of being invited to pay a bribe, the Zero Rupee Note is handed over instead, challenging the expecting party. Even if only a small number of people are actually brave enough to use the note in response to a situation where they would be expected to pay a bribe, its existence provides a vehicle for directly challenging the act and a point of discussion that raises the question, “Should we be handing over any money at all?”

Visual devices can be used in many different ways. In both *Payback* and the Zero Rupee Note a visual artefact that is created is utilised as a central device within an act of confrontation; this then leads to broader discussion outside the actual incident, provoking a direct challenge to those abusing power and to our part in it.

While visual devices can be used to question cultural norms, visual evidence can be an effective way of challenging dominant narratives. Visual evidence works differently, in that it can be direct documentation of an event or a specific situation, as opposed to a created artefact, and this has the power to drive discussion at a deeper level. Visual evidence can be created through witnessing, monitoring or investigative work. Increasingly it is also being found within the masses of information and images circulated on the internet.

In 2006, when satellite maps of Bahrain became available through Google Earth, the service was consequently blocked in-country. Rumours quickly spread that the reason for the block was the evidence that the maps presented of the large tracts of land owned by the royal family, the ownership and use of which had previously been unclear to citizens. When the service was blocked, an anonymous activist then distributed a 45-page PDF document through email and the web that compiled annotated screenshots pointing out evidence of golf courses, islands, stables and palaces. The PDF documented and allowed the circulation of visual evidence showing the illegal private distribution of 95% of Bahrain’s total land area. Through using visual evidence it posed a direct challenge to the dominant

A second look at Al-Safriya mansion, a King's property...



That's right...
An island!
Look for the yacht...
And note the size of it...

This area can accommodate
at least 30,000 Bahrainis!!!

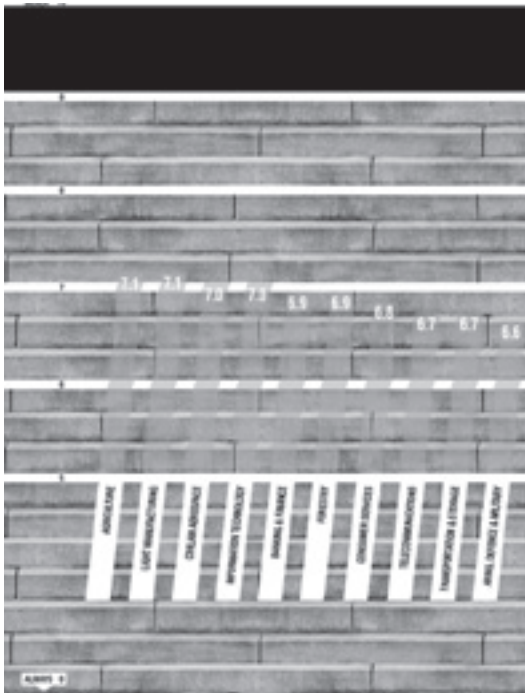
Google Earth PDF, Bahrain

narrative and posed a direct question related to the secretive nature of land ownership in Bahrain.

The different forms of visual storytelling outlined above trigger the audience through a brief interaction using different techniques – ranging from subversion to uncovering evidence – each provoking discussion and debate about different types of abuse of power.

Understanding corruption: Spelling it out

Combining visual storytelling and evidence, it is possible to take a debate further, beyond simply challenging common practices into understanding the issues at hand. This can make it possible to assert greater influence over the viewer, taking them deeper into exploring the issues themselves through the information presented to them. Here



Bribe Payers Index, Transparency International



XYZ Show, Kenya

the visual element is often more of a tool to invite and maintain engagement.

Using a combination of hard data and interactive infographics, the Bribe Payers Index developed by Transparency International³ presents itself to multiple users: it works at the level of information for those who are not fully aware of the problem of bribery and corruption in the private sector worldwide as well as a research tool for those who are interested in thoroughly investigating the subject. Through simple graphics, users can explore the index, which is based on interviews with more than 3,000 business executives, to understand “the likelihood of companies, from countries they have business dealings with, to engage in bribery when doing business in their country.” The data is presented on an interactive website giving the user different levels of engagement, from a general overview using data visualisations, to a more in-depth

understanding and access to the downloadable database, each allowing the user to understand how likely sectors are to engage in corruption for personal and/or corporate gain.

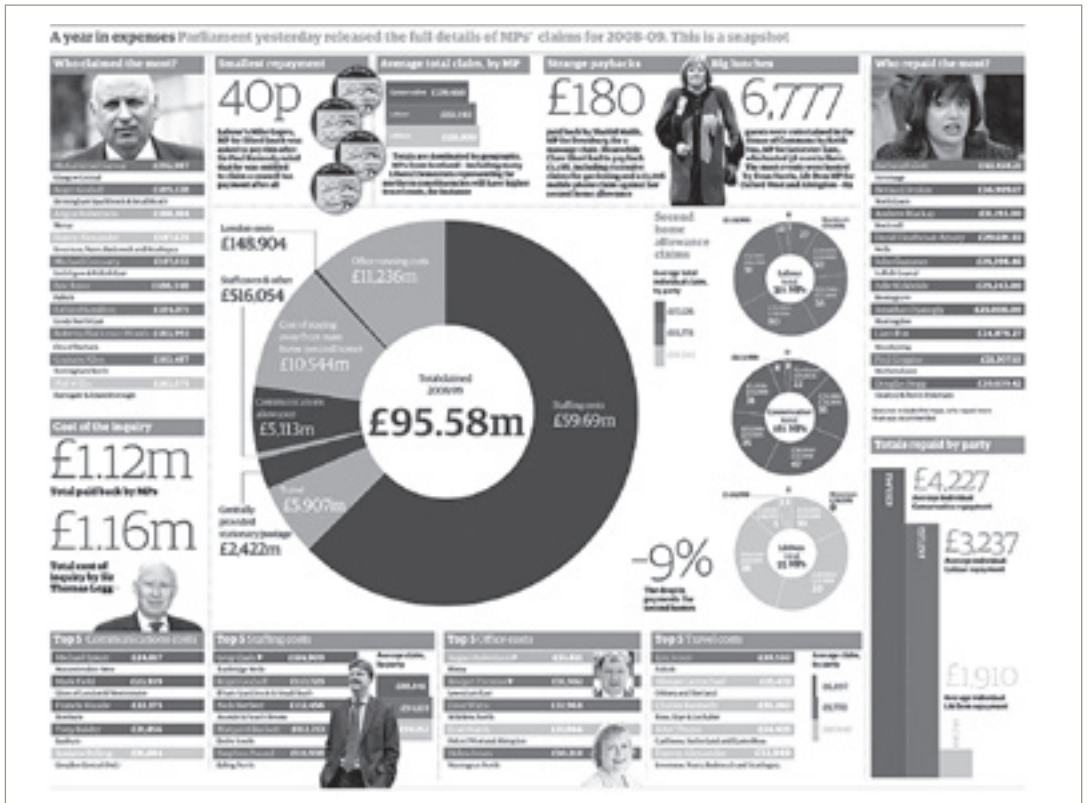
The XYZ Show⁴ in Kenya uses creative storytelling to challenge the dominant narrative promoted by politicians. The weekly spoof news show features latex puppets that portray local and international politicians and gives voice to people’s discontent towards rampant political corruption in Kenya through satire and irony. Using jokes and comedic sketches, XYZ has found a “safe” way to denounce dishonesty and reflect on the complexity of political life in Kenya and the extent of mismanagement of national wealth and resources. Now broadcasting the sixth series, the show is the brainchild of Gado, Kenya’s best-known cartoonist. It took him six years of research and effort before the first episode went on air in May 2009. In an



Sichuan Earthquake Names Project, Ai Wei Wei, China

3 bpi.transparency.org/bpi2011

4 www.xyzshow.com



MP Expenses, Guardian Datablog, UK

interview with the BBC, Gado stated that the struggle against corruption is “everybody’s duty... You can’t put that responsibility on one individual, as every Kenyan should contribute to expose what is happening and to expose corruption.”

After the Sichuan earthquake in 2008, widespread speculation and criticism spread across the internet and media about the way in which the casualties were counted and reported and how the disaster was handled by the Chinese government. In response, Ai Wei Wei – probably one of the most internationally renowned Chinese artists – along with over 50 volunteers started an investigative project to document the names of each of the children who died in the inadequately constructed schools, the so-called “tofu-skin schools”. Ai detailed the project’s methodology on his blog and in a one-year period collected over 5,800 names of children who died. The image on the previous page shows the artist in front of the lists that were gathered; these lists were then reused to create various art works drawing attention to the controversy. As a response, Ai’s blog was blocked and one of the activists involved in the project was imprisoned. The Chinese government, however, finally released

a statement and published an official number of the children who died. Ai then conducted his own investigation and in an open process documented on the web challenged the narrative promoted by the Chinese government.

Through spelling out the details with well-researched evidence, the viewer can start to directly explore specific stories, igniting consciousness and providing windows of information on which to start basing opinions.

Exploring corruption: Providing the details

The rise of new technologies combined with (and often creating the opportunity for) an increase in the amount of public information available is changing the dynamics of who has access to data about corruption and how it can be shared and viewed. The way in which information can be documented, analysed and shared has led to innovative forms of watching from the bottom up by individuals working together. In parallel, our increasing sophistication as users, combined with new formats for organising, displaying and delivering this information, means that our relationship with data is changing. Groundbreaking initiatives such as WikiLeaks, and

MP expenses claimed, 2008/09

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MP	Member	CONSTITUENCY	Cost of living (incl. home) (£000)	London costs (£000)	Office (incl. printing) (£000)	Staffing (£000)	Travel (£000)	Conspicuously provided (stationery) (£000)	Staff (allowance) (£000)	Others (allowance) (£000)	TOTAL CLAIMED (£000)	TOTAL CLAIMED (£1,000)	% change in claims since 2007/08	% of total claims
1	James Abbott	Walsley North & South	0	2,514	14,225	105,240	236	6,271	1,245	11,133	142,465	131,720	6	0
2	Sue Auld	West Bedford	0	19,798	96,879	3,768	0	0	0	0	116,685	107,948	8	13.1%
3	Adam Afriyie	Widener	0	0	18,640	100,205	0	3,365	0	0	124,210	104,610	19	0
4	Rob Amos	Consett	11,139	0	14,806	95,634	6,365	3,074	0	7,754	149,893	146,570	4	15.36%
5	Robert Anderson	Consett North East	26,294	0	21,140	96,619	5,548	3,203	0	14,379	146,929	134,515	9	23.86%
6	Peter Aspinall	Sutton East	10,233	0	11,862	94,892	2,241	1,804	0	6,711	126,743	128,418	0	12.36%
7	Spence Atkinson	Doncaster, North, South and St	21,980	0	22,878	98,952	12,949	4,181	0	15,084	161,823	168,478	11	25.96%
8	Bevyn Atkinson	Pudsey & Rothwell	10,243	0	15,006	67,267	11,675	3,900	0	8,487	118,733	134,127	11	17.18%
9	Geoffrey Ayles	Hull	23,133	0	25,712	95,486	16,262	6,242	4,291	16,176	183,497	171,130	7	22.34%
10	David Bacon	South West	19,468	0	7,648	82,792	6,762	3,562	0	19,796	129,268	107,748	19	25.83%
11	Richard Bacon	Devon	16,796	0	6,242	102,848	10,007	2,843	0	0	124,846	126,000	1	15.75%
12	David Baker	Doncaster	19,481	0	17,854	93,933	14,444	4,348	0	6,648	137,658	107,894	26	11.69%
13	Janet Bacon	North East	24,098	0	25,462	96,487	14,622	4,133	0	7,721	174,883	173,508	1	23.69%
14	James Balfour	North East	34,096	0	15,312	92,471	4,546	1,799	1,836	3,057	148,017	148,130	0	25.96%
15	Henry Baxendale	Doncaster North	6,476	0	13,615	89,613	17,262	6,868	0	1,838	140,044	137,410	2	11.71%
16	Charlotte Bebb	Staffordshire Moorlands	18,184	0	21,821	100,520	11,711	6,844	0	10,899	148,884	144,418	4	25.96%
17	Paul Bennett	Widener	24,098	0	19,609	98,888	13,090	1,809	0	3,113	134,899	130,370	4	23.86%
18	Ian Black	Pudsey North	23,242	0	22,329	91,867	10,700	6,209	0	11,917	146,454	151,143	7	24.42%
19	John Birt	Grimsby & Immingham	21,731	0	19,822	111,422	1,426	1,862	0	6,157	139,838	145,287	4	25.83%
20	Richard Boscawen	North South	34,096	0	26,813	94,767	6,848	2,345	0	7,141	148,114	147,498	13	26.88%

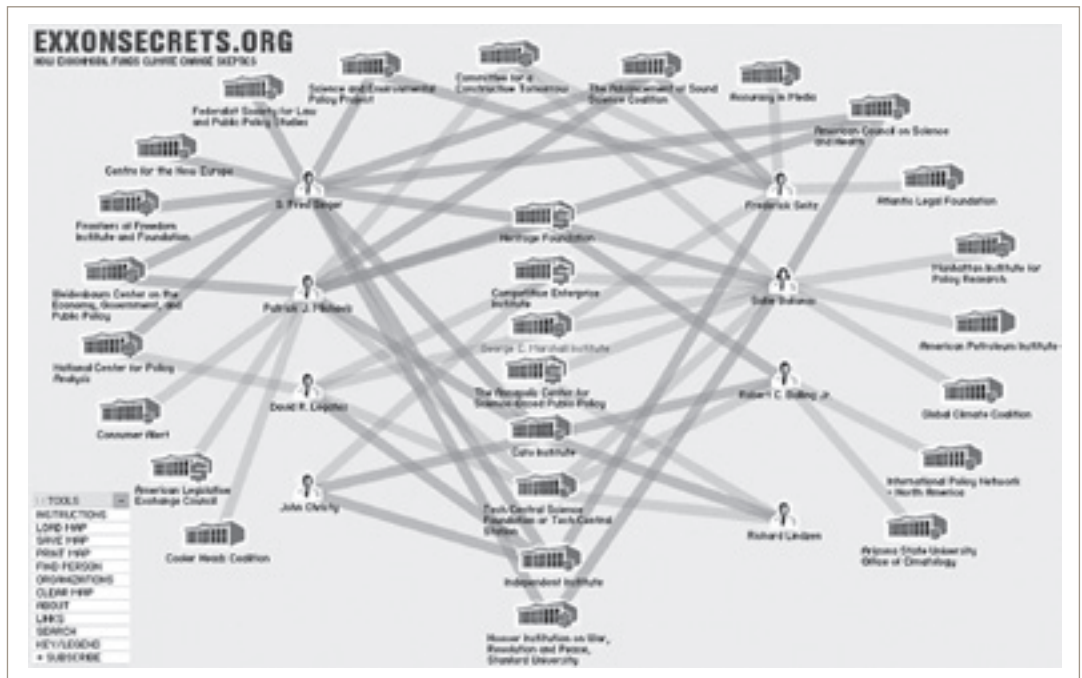
Table of "expenses claimed" organised by parliament member, constituency and exact details of what they claimed.

the popular rise of data journalism, have demonstrated that audiences are willing to look at a high level of detail and will utilise this in formulating opinions.

In the UK in 2009, a scandal around the expenses of members of parliament (MPs) and the amounts they claimed erupted. The controversy was covered extensively by media outlets in the UK. The Guardian Datablog created an infographic highlighting specific aspects of the scandal, simultaneously allowing readers to go beyond a visual executive

summary of the data and directly download the spreadsheet with the specific details of each of the categories of expense claims. This spreadsheet enabled them to go through the information and explore line-by-line how more than 600 politicians misused their power (or not) for personal gain.

Through making an executive infographic and allowing direct access to the data, the Guardian Datablog changed the dynamic between media producer and consumer. Not only did they frame the story with their editorial decisions, but by



Exxon Secrets, Greenpeace US



Inspector de Intereses, Chile

making the details available they put readers in the shoes of an investigative journalist. The scandal was followed by the media, campaigning organisations and activists and ultimately led to a number of embarrassed members of parliament paying expenses back. Some resigned from their posts, including the Speaker of the House, and criminal charges were laid against three members of parliament.

Exxon Secrets⁵ is a project by Greenpeace US that allows users a similar level of access to detail, but this time to investigate the use of funds by a specific corporation. The online interactive site uses the visual as a route into the data, allowing users to explore the true nature of Exxon's relationship with climate change sceptics. Exxon Secrets presents research on the extent of Exxon's efforts to influence the debate over climate change. It shows how Exxon – one of the largest oil companies in the world – invested over USD 22 million to fund organisations, research centres and think tanks to produce arguments and evidence against an international consensus on the extent and impact of global warming. Through the site users can reconstruct the flows of capital, interactions and connections between Exxon and organisations and individuals involved in the debate. The website offers the reader a number of maps of these connections; in addition, the site allows individuals to reconstruct Exxon's influence and provides sources to directly explore the details

themselves. The site creates a counterbalance and commentary on an important narrative – one controlled by Exxon – and reveals the large sums of money with which it floods a supposedly independent field of study.

In Chile the website Inspector de Intereses⁶ ("Interests Inspector"), produced by the Chilean organisation Fundación Ciudadano Inteligente, uses similar interactive features, providing audiences with detailed information that enables them to map money trails in politics. Chilean law requires that politicians declare their corporate interests and those of their families and that they refrain from voting on issues where they may have vested interests. The project analyses the data that is currently available from the government, identifies holes and raises red flags when there is a suspected conflict of interest. The project has been successful in raising awareness about the lack of adherence to the law and potential cases of conflict of interest, as well as in influencing the behaviour of elected officials, with about 20% offering information directly to the site about themselves. The project aims to keep a watch on the misuse of power for personal gain, but goes further than just awareness raising, engaging politicians directly. It also gathers and investigates evidence as to the extent of the problem. The evidence gathered is used for longer-term efforts to develop the case for stronger disclosure and to campaign for financing norms.

5 www.exxonsecrets.org/maps.php

6 www.inspectordeintereses.cl

While these examples use technology more extensively to facilitate interaction and engagement, this is not the most important aspect of the combination of visual and data presentation. It is the ability of users to see the information directly for themselves that changes the potential for critical and investigative engagement. This form of information visualisation is of course useful for professionals in the field who can then work to expand, adapt and reuse the data, but it also has the potential to allow for a much greater level of influence on end-users as they see the details of misused power clearly. When such projects are tied into longer-term initiatives that interact directly with the systems they are trying to change, they can be very effective as a point of transition or a way to extend the dialogue in the moment.

The need to take another look at “The Emperor’s New Clothes”

From seeing to understanding to exploring, the examples here demonstrate some of the many creative and innovative initiatives using a blend of visuals and data to question and raise the debate

around corruption. These efforts are critical in driving discussion towards specific kinds of corruption, such as the Sichuan earthquake in China or Exxon’s funding of climate change sceptics. It is important, however, that these efforts go beyond just creating visual spectacles or commonly recognised sites of evidence, and that they lead to action, not just to new forms of more “transparent corruption”.

These exposures of delusions of power and its misuse can create the “Emperor’s New Clothes” moment for those who already know and are convinced of what is happening, but need a moment of collective awareness to move them from observing to acting. As Clay Shirky states in his book *Here Comes Everyone*, there are three levels in social awareness and change: 1) when everybody knows something; 2) when everybody knows that everybody knows; 3) when everybody knows that everybody knows that everybody knows. It is this last stage that moves those who are already positioned for change into collective action; it allows us to force our legal structures to work for us and to begin to transform the systemic abuse of power. ■