

Real Estate 4 Ransom: Why Does Land Cost the Earth?

By Karl Fitzgerald



Documentary of the year? Karl Fitzgerald prepares to launch Prosper's first full length documentary to the Australian public.

The time is ripe for a film linking economics to reality in an age of monopoly. 'Real Estate 4 Ransom' is ready to hit the airwaves. Georgists have an embarrassment of riches in the wide range of examples available to describe the effects and costs of land monopoly. This was our challenge in assembling the script.

Bryan Kavanagh has long used the term 'blackmail' to describe how land-owners can hold real estate out of use until the little people submit to their asking price. Holding the market to ransom is not the sort of level playing field economics promises.

The ransom concept was adapted from our 2009 satirical campaign 'Real Estate 4 Ransom'. Thousands of street posters were placed throughout Melbourne to entice curious minds to consider the consequences of such selfish behaviour.

A fast paced film for the financially

literate, the 40 minute documentary asks whether genuine freedom has been delivered by the democratic system. Does the ability to vote fill our wallets with opportunity?

We consider the changing motivations behind property investment, how statistics have been sculpted to suit the national pastime of 'location, location, location' and asks: was excessive lending by the banks the genuine cause of the Global Financial Crisis?

Our narrator Rachel Maher responds: "This bubble would not have occurred if there was an automatic stabiliser. Bad tax laws caused the Global Financial Crisis."

Animations, special effects and modern music illustrate the heavy hitting material our experts deliver. As Georgists we are interested in community and its interaction with creativity. When looking at film, this lead us to focus on the grey area of licensing and

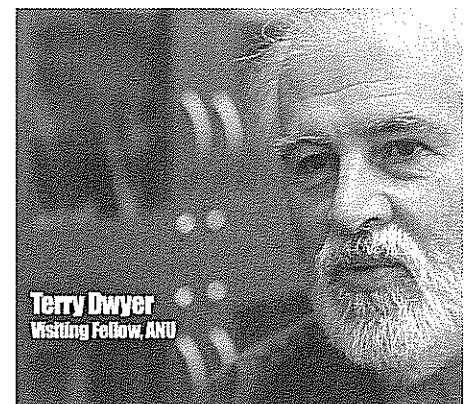
copyright. What footage can or can't we use in a digital era? What is 'Fair Use'?

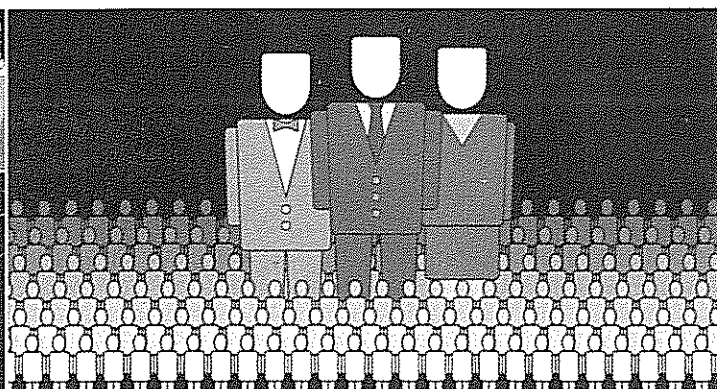
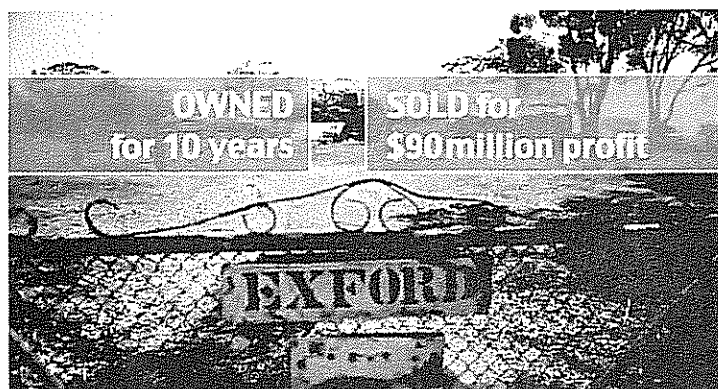
The Vimeo community came to the fore with a sea of creative output. Like flickr for photos, vimeo.com is a melting pot for emerging and established film makers to share content. We approached over 200 film makers and animators to provide content for the film. Some clips last barely a second, but all help to weave a rich tapestry of visual intrigue.

Making a documentary on such an important but complex topic stretched our thinking on how best to visually demonstrate issues like tax loopholes, derivatives and the holy grail of our storytelling challenge: clearly explaining economic rent.

Take for example: "If set at a significant rate, Land Tax drives property back onto the market, pushing land prices down. This additional supply provides much needed competition in the rental market. If a land owner tries to pass on the Land Tax, the tenant will move to a cheaper option."

What images prove and visually demonstrate this to those confused by the tough content? In that scene, we used a set of dominoes falling for the first sentence. Then a zoom out of what appeared to be a shot of Melbourne,





revealing the photo as part of a "For Sale" billboard. Video artist Phil Friend's 'lightbulb turning on' video finished the scene. We aimed to lead thinking toward the opportunities that emerge when more property becomes available at a cheaper price.

For the last 5 years we have been interviewing international visitors to Melbourne: Alanna Hartzok, Frank de Jong and Michael Hudson all play important parts in the film.

Hudson is hard hitting as always with: "A free market to Adam Smith and the Physiocrats and John Stuart Mill, was a market free of rentier income and today's neo-liberals say a free market is free for predators. It's free for monopolists, free for land speculators, free for bankers to extract as much income from wages and industry as possible."

Terry Dwyer heads the local contingent: "because they used their land revenues right through the nineteen seventies to keep tax rates on labour and capital low, Hong Kong moved from being a bankrupt port of four hundred and fifty

thousand people after World War 2, to a modern city of six and a half million with living standards that now rival Australia's."

David Collyer and Bryan Kavanagh also deliver in a manner that builds upon the central theme - land shouldn't cost the earth. Kavanagh's work in his groundbreaking 'Unlocking the Riches of Oz' report gives the film the statistical backing we need.

Co-Director Gavin Emmanuel is to be congratulated coming into the project half way and bringing some real clarity to the script. The introduction of his beloved Canon 5D Mk2 camera lifted our image quality. His studio could do everything from narration to building the film up with 17 animations (many of them his own).

I thank the Prosper Australia executive for their patience over 5 years as the film developed. In the last year they have seen at least half a dozen versions of the film and given useful feedback. The Henry George Foundation should also be thanked for their funding

contribution, the HGC for assisting on legal matters and Hugh Middendorp of Middendorp Electrical Co for making a significant donation toward the film's cost.

I invite you to visit the film's website: www.realestate4ransom.com, watch the three trailers and share them with your friends. Pencil in Wednesday the 10th of August for our premiere screening.

