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### Loose Change or Feeble Reconstruction?

The pivotal events of September 11, 2001 generated differing views on what exactly happened and why. Like many disasters, 9/11 spawned a wide range of conspiracy theorists, including Dylan Avery, a young filmmaker who set out to reveal the truth. His documentary, *Loose Change*, refutes the U.S. government's claim that Al-Qaeda planned and conducted the attacks. Instead, the film uses historical footage, still images, interviews, and third-person narration to allege that high-level U.S. officials conspired to bring about the events of 9/11. To explain these events, Avery employs several misleading tactics in attempting to manipulate the audience.

The film's 11-minute prologue suggests that a series of previous government conspiracies established a pattern of events illustrating what happened on 9/11. The opening scene depicts the Reichstag fire in Nazi Germany.



Reichstag Fire, Berlin, Germany 1933

The narrator reveals that Adolf Hitler instigated the fire to destroy the German parliament building for his own malevolent purposes. The film claims that Hitler took advantage of this destruction to silence his detractors, suspend civil liberties, and invade Poland. The prologue then presents allegations that the U.S. president along with high ranking U.S. officials successfully plotted, without

the public's knowledge, to engineer Pearl Harbor, the Manhattan Project, and U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War. In doing so, the film leads the audience through a sequence of ostensibly parallel events to suggest that President Bush conspired with others to carry out 9/11. Nonetheless, Avery cleverly avoids assertions likely to prompt viewers to dismiss his message entirely. For example, he never directly states that a U.S. president had similar conspiratorial motives to those of Adolf Hitler or that we cannot trust the U.S. government. Instead, Avery implies that U.S. leaders were able to hide their 9/11 plot, explaining that the government secretly developed an atom bomb during WWII by compartmentalizing the information provided to workers.

The film appears to present facts in a sequential, logical manner, but its goal is to inflame the audience, generate an emotional response, and elicit conclusions based on human predispositions. Avery presents alarming, sometimes iconic, images of flags, protest marches, atomic detonations, and scenes of devastation to evoke feelings of fear and anger. The frightening images, alarming ramifications, and rousing music grab the audience's attention. In asking "What could drive so many people to continue to question such a tragic event?" Avery blurs the line between emotion and logic by exploiting his flawed premise that many questions remain despite publication of the 9/11



*Hiroshima the day after the explosion (Photo: AP)*



*Destruction of World Trade Center, 2001*

Commission findings. (Avery, 10) Further, the film presents an unrelated series of historical events to support Avery's conspiratorial theme. These events do not actually prove his arguments, but Avery takes advantage of the audience's natural inclination to find patterns and manufacture information where none exists. (Rosenquist) Thus, he coaxes viewers to reach certain conclusions by exploiting the human tendency to assume cause and effect. This tendency occurs "especially when we feel that events are beyond our control", predisposing us to believe that major events result from equally major causes. (Buckley)

Another Avery tactic is to provide an incomplete assessment of the facts. In light of the narrator's declaration that, "If the details of the events are proven to be a lie, then the authenticity...

should be in question," these partial assessments are especially ironic. (Avery, 10) For example, the film questions the credibility of U.S. leaders by strongly implying that the Department of Defense mistranslated Bin Laden to support U.S. accusations that he orchestrated the 9/11 attacks. In stating that "a number of international figures question the United States' version of events", the film identifies only two such figures: Egyptian President Mubarak and General Hamid Gul. (Avery, 11) Yet, Avery fails to examine the motives of Mubarak, overthrown in 2011 during the Arab

Spring, or Gul, former head of the Pakistani intelligence service. Similarly, the film's descriptions of the Shanksville, Pennsylvania crash site partially conflict with the images shown. In one scene, the narrator states that responders found only ash and smoke, but no debris. However, the accompanying footage clearly shows small, scattered pieces of debris on the scarred, smoldering ground.

A third Avery tactic is to frame the evidence in ways that the typical viewer cannot immediately disprove. Avery presents technical information to support the notion that detonation of previously concealed explosives led to the collapse of the World Trade Center buildings and the Pentagon destruction. Avery takes advantage of the average viewer's lack of technical knowledge, making it difficult for the audience to critically examine the information presented in the film. After providing numerous details about building construction, the narrator suggests that the planes could not have caused the collapses. He states, "...We are told that these massive structures were destroyed by 10,000 gallons of jet fuel, a perfectly symmetrical collapse resulting from asymmetrical damage, with the collapse following the path of greatest resistance." (Avery, 38) The film offers further supporting information from physics professor, Dr. Steven Jones, and data from a report issued by NIST, the National Institute of Standards and Technology. After delivering this burst of relatively complex information, the narrator asks a leading question: "Do you still think that jet fuel brought down the Twin Towers?" (Avery, 44) If audience members cannot refute the film's claims or respond to its challenging queries, they may consider the possibility, if not fully accept the veracity, of the film's suggestions and allegations.

*Loose Change* manipulates the audience's perception of the truth about 9/11. In addition to disturbing imagery, alarming narratives, and evocative questions, the film presents repetitive descriptions of government conspiracies. This repetition primes the audience to see a pattern of government treachery, leading them to question official U.S. government accounts. Further, the well-constructed film takes advantage of human emotions and the innate human ability to create causal inferences. This approach may persuade uncritical or uninformed viewers. However, at the conclusion of the film, the narrator urges the audience to "Ask questions. Demand answers." Such encouragement may lead viewers to examine the evidence by finding other, more credible, sources that provide counterarguments to each of Avery's suggested conspiracies. Based on its limited credibility, *Loose Change* will ultimately fail to convince most viewers that 9/11 was an inside job.

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