



# Viewing guide for *Loose Change*

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Trinity University, December 2006

## *Loose Change* – Pre-Viewing Guide

Lizz Glomb, December 13, 2006  
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### 1. Overview / Introduction

The movie *Loose Change* (Rowe, 2005) is a documentary designed to expose “what really happened” on September 11, 2006. It is generally seen as controversial and has garnered much attention in the news media and online sources. Director and narrator Dylan Avery is the name most visibly associated with the project. Dylan Avery, Korey Rowe (producer), and Jason Bermans (producer and designer) are three undergraduate students who collaborated on the project. They consider themselves both the creators of the film and the founders of a movement. The main argument of *Loose Change* is the implication that sectors of the United States government had some degree of involvement in the attacks on the Twin Towers. The documentary proceeds by analyzing a quantity of events that appear inconsistent to the filmmakers. Among the questions raised are the reality of the crash of United Airlines Flight 93, the collapse of the Twin Towers and World Trade Center 7 due to an internal demolition. Additionally, they examine whether the damage to the Pentagon building was caused by an airplane crash, as well as other alternative “real” explanations. In posing these arguments, the film is seen as part of a larger discourse often referred to as the “9/11 Truth Movement.” Though not the first of these September 11th conspiracy theories, it is the most popular representation of these claims.

This film is widely available online, has been translated into several languages, and, to date, entering the phrase “*Loose Change*” into a search engine yields around 12,000,000 hits. The original version was created in 2004. The content of the second edition does not differ greatly from the first in its message, though it is edited in a slightly different format. A “final cut” is anticipated in the near future, and according to Internet

gossip it may reach local theaters. The film can be seen as an attempt to reconcile the feelings of citizens worldwide who still find themselves troubled by the events of 9/11. It offers people who see the film a direction from which to approach their concern about how the terrorist attacks were able to happen. *Loose Change* raises more questions than it answers, urging moviegoers to take a very active role in watching the documentary. It is a call to action by the filmmakers directed to the audience. Many viewers watch the documentary out of sheer curiosity, and to educate themselves about the event.

## **2. Questions to keep in mind before watching *Loose Change***

- In *Loose Change*, how does the filmmaker use the documents, articles, and statements from officials and experts to persuade the audience?
- Pay close attention to the arguments and claims that Avery makes throughout the film. Does he ever contradict himself with the evidence or information presented?
- Which other rhetorical strategies does the filmmaker use to persuade the audience to believe his argument?
- Do the pictures, animation, and newsfeed presented by the filmmaker add to his argument or detract from it?
- How does the theory presented in this film differ from other theories you may have heard regarding the events of September 11<sup>th</sup>?
- What is the underlying tone and message of the film?
- What are your expectations for this film?

## **3. Where to obtain copies of *Loose Change***

- **Best viewed online at [Google video](#)**
- **New and Used Copies sold on [eBay.com](#)**

## *Loose Change* – Post-Viewing Guide

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### 1. Overview

Now that you have viewed *Loose Change* let's discuss the content of the film. Avery and the creators of the documentary explore many controversial and potentially troubling questions about the events that took place on September 11<sup>th</sup>. Using eyewitness interviews, stock news footage, scientific analysis, historical documents, computer graphics, and many other resources, Avery weaves an intricate and engaging theory in front of viewers' eyes. The highly persuasive strategies and high skill level of editing and production Avery employs make it hard to refute many of the claims he makes in regards to a government conspiracy theory. The sobering television news coverage from September 11<sup>th</sup> coupled with a detailed examination of data, circumstance, and theory allow for the success in using a fast-paced presentation of a slightly-biased analysis and captivating images.

The film attempts to make the case that the attacks on the Pentagon, the World Trade Centers, and Flight 93 were something quite different - part of a complex plan organized from within our own government. One of the hardest parts about viewing *Loose Change*, however, is the fact that all of this information and theory is presented to us so quickly. Many of the "facts" presented and questions raised can be easily disagreed with or disproved. Avery's arguments include the possibility that the impact of the airplanes and burning jet fuel could not have led to the collapse of the World Trade Centers, eyewitness accounts obtain that explosions from within the building were heard as if from a controlled demolition, and the events leading up to September 11<sup>th</sup> are "unusual" and

“suspicious”. In the case of the Pentagon attack, Avery argues that the damage done to the building and the debris (of which we are not shown much - only three pieces are discussed in the film) left behind from the crash are “completely inconsistent” with a Boeing 747 crash; thus, the government must have launched a missile at its own Pentagon. Flight 93, Avery states, was not actually hijacked by Muslim terrorists but was also a government conspiracy plan and had landed safely in Cleveland. The filmmakers even suggest that the Osama bin Laden confession tape was a hoax, that the apparent suspects of the hijackings did not die in the planes but are still alive elsewhere.

Nevertheless, Avery, Bermas and Rowe do an impressive job on the creation and execution of *Loose Change 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition*. The farfetched nature of their theories is expertly arranged with hip techno music, startling and engaging images of the Pentagon and the World Trade Centers, a rather aggressively persuasive narrator (Avery himself), and a complete arsenal of photos to hopefully support their claims. However, as these are only theories and cannot technically be considered any more “fact” than the official government stories that *Loose Change* contests, this film remains a very influential and well-made piece of propaganda for the 9/11 Truth movement. Please read the post-viewing guide to learn more about the events of September 11<sup>th</sup>, and read reviews and scholarly articles in regards to the film *Loose Change*, conspiracy theories, and the documentary film genre.

## 2. Useful Resources

### a. Related Sources about September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001 and Conspiracy Theories

*The Scientific American* ( <http://www.public-action.com/911/jmcm/sciam/> )  
“When the Twin Towers Fell” - One month after the attack on the World Trade Center, structural engineers from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology offer their take on how and why the towers came down. This article provides a scientific standpoint on their theories behind the how the towers remained standing after the impact of the kamikaze airplane strikes, why the towers fell, how they fell, and the measures being discussed which will protect other buildings against potential future catastrophes.

*CNN.com* ( <http://archives.cnn.com/2001/US/09/11/chronology.attack/> )  
“September 11: A Chronology of Terror” – Posted online on September 12, 2001, this play by play of the day when commercial airliners were hijacked, the Twin Towers collapsed, the Pentagon was attacked, and thousands of people lost their lives is documented and recorded. Dylan Avery speeds through the events of that day so quickly and asynchronously that the provision of this timeline allows for a more comprehensive and objective view of the events that took place on September 11<sup>th</sup>.

*Rumors of Grace and Terror*

( <http://pascalfroissart.online.fr/3-cache/2002-oleary.pdf> )

Steven O'Leary writes for the USC Annenberg, an online journalism review, in regards to the events of September 11<sup>th</sup> and the ensuing conspiracy theories, making the argument that "the rapidity with which the conspiracy theories and stories has gained credibility among ordinary sensible folk indicates that the impact of the terrorist attacks is several orders of magnitude above that of any other news story since the birth of the worldwide computer network". O'Leary argues that these theories help people comes to grips with tragedy and historical change by bringing order out of chaos.

**b. Related Sources about the documentary film genre**

*Filmmaking in the Precinct House and the Genre of Documentary Film*

(<http://lsr.nellco.org/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1029&context=suffolk/fp>)

Jessica M. Silbey explores side-by-side two contemporary and related film trends: the recent popular enthusiasm over the previously arty documentary film and the mandatory filming of custodial interrogations and confessions, i.e. the "expository documentary". Silbey uses and agrees with many of Bill Nichols' views on documentary film, often alluding to the concept that "documentary film and video, therefore, display the same complexity and challenge, the same fascination and excitement as any of the genres of fiction film."

*Documentary Film/Video and Social Change: A Rhetorical Investigation of Dissent*

(<http://www.lib.utexas.edu/etd/d/2005/aguayoa11349/aguayoa11349.pdf> )

Angela Jean Aguayo, doctor of philosophy, and her dissertation committee explore the intersection of cultural texts and social change by investigating the history of contemporary activist documentary film. Using all the available means of persuasion and coercion at their disposal, social movements have collectively developed a diverse set of tactics and strategies to prompt social change, documentary films being one of the most understudied texts. The paper includes a multi-method approach that includes interviews with filmmakers and public officials, analysis of the movie text, interviews and email surveys of members in activist community organizations and analysis of historical materials.

*Introduction to Documentary*

(<http://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=E5bj1XDvRxUC&oi=fnd&pg=PA1&sig=SrWN3QbuCzTQTXZx9wADlni5Cxs&dq=bill+nichols+documentary+film&prev=http://scholar.google.com/scholar%3Fq%3Dbill%2Bnichols%2Bdocumentary%2Bfilm%26hl%3Den%26lr%3D%26sa%3DN#PPA21,M1> )

Bill Nichols gives an in-depth look into the world of the documentary film genre and documentary film production. The book covers topics such as the ethical issues behind making documentary films, how they differ from other types of film, the different subgenres of documentary film, and the content and framework of documentaries. Nichols provides a scholarly yet easy-to-understand synopsis of the makings and meanings of this widely underappreciated genre of film.

### c. Glossaries of Useful Film terms

*A Glossary of Film Terms*

([http://homepage.newschool.edu/~schlejoj/film\\_courses/glossary\\_of\\_film\\_terms/glossary.html](http://homepage.newschool.edu/~schlejoj/film_courses/glossary_of_film_terms/glossary.html))

This extensive glossary of A – Z film terms provides helpful definitions for some of the vocabulary and language a reader may come in contact with when reading about films or genres within the film medium.

*IMDb Film Glossary of Movie Terminology*

(<http://imdb.com/Glossary/>)

This glossary provides more widely-used film terms which differ slightly from the glossary above. These too may be helpful when reading about or viewing both contemporary documentary and fiction films.

*The Seventh Art: Art of Cinema Glossary of Film Terms*

(<http://www.geocities.com/the7thart/film-terms.html>)

Here is yet another glossary of film terms and their definitions. They are largely drawn from Bordwell & Thompson's *Film Art* or Monaco's *How to Read a Film*.

### d. Film Reviews

*Loose Change: An Analysis*

([http://911research.wtc7.net/essays/green/loose\\_change.html](http://911research.wtc7.net/essays/green/loose_change.html))

9-11 Research - Michael Green, Ph.D., a clinical psychologist and qualified medical examiner, gives an extensive and scholarly summarization of the strengths and weaknesses of *Loose Change 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition*. Green shows point by point the believed errors and inconsistencies that Dylan Avery, Corey Rowe, and Jason Bermas made in their film as well as providing his own personal critiques, theories and arguments (some extracted from scientific journals) in his essay.

*Why the 9/11 Conspiracies Won't Go Away*

(<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1531304,00.html>)

Time Magazine - Turns out, we need grand theories to make sense of grand events, or the world just seems too random. This article discusses the events of September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001 as well as the conspiracy theory embedded in the film *Loose Change*. Nancy Jo Sales discusses why these conspiracy theories are so captivating and how America uses them to deal with traumatic public events like September 11<sup>th</sup>.

*Loose Change 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition 2006* ( <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0831315/> )  
IMDb.com – The Internet Movie Database provides additional information about the film, the filmmakers, and viewer reactions and comments regarding the film and its content. Though not a scholarly critique of the film, the site combines objective information about the film with target audience viewers who reflect on *Loose Change*.

*Film Review: Loose Change 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition*  
([http://groups.google.com/group/alt.politics.british/browse\\_thread/thread/b3c644710fc9573b/970118c3bb6301eb?lnk=st&q=Loose+change+reviews&num=3#970118c3bb6301eb](http://groups.google.com/group/alt.politics.british/browse_thread/thread/b3c644710fc9573b/970118c3bb6301eb?lnk=st&q=Loose+change+reviews&num=3#970118c3bb6301eb) )

This article is much like the IMDb review above, in that the essay is a personal review of the film; however, this critic takes a much more objective approach and has an overall informative tone, breaking down each event of September 11<sup>th</sup> that Avery stresses in his film and summarizing the filmmakers' theories. This is a good source for an audience seeking to discover the overall message behind the film quickly, or if certain aspects were hazy upon an initial viewing of the film.

#### e. Scholarly Treatments of the Film

*“Examining Factors Contributing to the Popularity of the Loose Change Conspiracy”*  
(<http://www.trinity.edu/adelwich/documentary/e.cooper.2006.loose.change.pdf> )

Erin Cooper discusses the factors that cause the phenomenon that is *Loose Change* to be so powerful, inflammatory, thought-provoking, and intriguing. She dissects and critiques the aspects of the film that create this effect on the audience, including the music, images, interviews, Avery and Rowe's film style and editing choices, and the underlying message and motivation behind the movement they claim to have created with *Loose Change*.

*“Louder Than Words: The Manipulative Use of Mise-en-Scene in Loose Change”*  
(<http://www.trinity.edu/adelwich/documentary/n.nobel.2006.loose.change.pdf> )

Nick Nobel explores the use of framing and lighting, the juxtaposition of images to suggest association, shots that Avery chooses to emphasize his point, the use and misuse of citation and source authority, and color manipulation within *Loose Change*. Examining and critiquing these elements of mise-en-scene provides deeper insight into the mind of the filmmakers and what they hoped to achieve with the film in choosing and manipulating them.

“*Loose Change and the Emergence of the Living Documentary*”

(<http://www.trinity.edu/adelwich/documentary/p.regan.2006.loose.change.pdf>)

Pat Regan discusses the film as a new phenomenon known as a living documentary – one that can be adapted as the situation changes through the beauty of editing. Regan argues that Avery relies heavily on his ability to edit, and through this innovative feature, the filmmakers can re-vamp, adjust, and virtually re-think the entire film within a single editing session, thus giving *Loose Change* and its makers a great deal of cinematic license and power.

“*Loose Change: The Persuasion Techniques of Dylan Avery*”

(<http://www.trinity.edu/adelwich/documentary/l.glomb.loose.change.pdf>)

In this essay, I discuss how the creator of *Loose Change* uses persuasive rhetoric to form his own truths about the events of September 11th in the effort to force-feed the audience his argument. This essay delves into the major production and persuasive tactics Dylan and Rowe use and provides examples from the film itself to illustrate these tactics and shows how they fall short of their expectations.

### 3. Video Clip Analysis

#### a. Explanation and Set-up

The following video clip is taken from about 20 minutes into the film, *Loose Change*, and is approximately 3 minutes and 12 seconds in length. The clip dissects the attack on the Pentagon in point-by-point form, discussing the damage to the building, the debris around the site, the properties and characteristics of a Boeing 747 airplane, and the possibility that this attack was performed by the American government itself. Displaying many of Avery’s persuasive strategies and tactics used in supporting his argument, this clip also holds one of the most far-fetched and unsupported arguments in the film, in my opinion. As you watch the clip, pay attention to the questions that Avery asks the audience and try to answer them for yourself. (For a more comprehensive dissection of Avery’s rhetorical strategy throughout the film, read “*Loose Change: the Persuasion Techniques of Dylan Avery*” in the “Scholarly Treatments of the Film” section of this guide).

**b. The “Pentagon Crash” video clip from *Loose Change***



*(Press Control and click the image to access the YouTube web link)*

**c. Analysis**

The clip opens with a close-up of a piece of debris from the plane crash, and immediately, Avery is very quick to refute the “skeptics” (or non-conspiracy theorists) who say this piece is part of the plane’s fuselage and “proof that Flight 77 hit the Pentagon”. The strategy of presenting evidence and then contesting it is used throughout the film. Another consistent tactic Avery employs is the use of open-ended and inflammatory questions to further his argument. Avery asks, “Why is [this piece] not singed or scratched after a 500 mile an hour impact?” However, all the audience needs to do to disprove this part of Avery’s argument is look at the debris being shown to them – the piece is not only scratched but ripped apart! We see this again when Avery shows us an image of the gaping hole in the side of the Pentagon. He asks “Why are the windows next to the hole completely in tact?”, “Why are the cable spools in front of the hole unmoved?”, and “Why is there no damage to the outer wall where the engines would have hit?” Again, the audience can answer both for themselves – the windows are *not* in tact, the cable spools are covered in debris and soot, and the outer wall is completely demolished.

Another persuasive tactic that Avery employs is the “confuse them with numbers” strategy. In other words, about 2 minutes into the clip, Avery starts barraging the audience with facts regarding “the average Boeing 747”; it has a “124 foot wingspan, is 55 feet long, 44 feet high, weighs almost 100 tons” and “slammed into the Pentagon at 530 miles per hour and traveling 130 feet”. These are figures that we (as audience members, not aeronautical engineers), can only consider but not completely refute; thus, we are forced to believe that Avery is telling us the truth. In addition, we are shown what is presumed to be

the “diffuser case of a Boeing 757” and told to compare it to a drawing of the same piece, showing a “clear” difference in the two; however, the piece we are shown from the rubble is so charred and buried that a clear comparison cannot be made. You’ll notice that, throughout this clip, Avery also oscillates between using the words “Boeing 747” and “Boeing 757”, thus helping to create seams in his argument (which is, ironically, Avery’s own disappointment with the official government report).

The third strategy displayed in this clip is the comparisons Avery stretches to make. About one minute into the clip, Avery talks about a Boeing 737 en route to Greece that crashed into a hillside and left a large amount of debris complete with “fire, tail sections, wing sections, an engine, a cockpit, and bodies”; hence, making the damage to the Pentagon “completely inconsistent with that of a Boeing 757”. With this part of his argument, Avery makes a giant leap in assuming that all Boeing 700 models crash sites are congruent (one crashed into a hillside on accident and the other was deliberately flown into the side of a steel-reinforced government building). And as the cherry on top of Avery’s clever persuasion strategies and dialogue, he uses high-end graphics and computer simulations of the airplane and crash to give credence to his arguments. In my opinion, though the “facts”, images, and theories are highly engaging and interesting, Avery does not strengthen his overall message with the arguments in this clip.

#### **4. Post-viewing Discussion Questions**

- Now that you have viewed *Loose Change* and analyzed the overall message and motivation of the film, what are its strengths and weaknesses? What aspects, if any, would you change or improve on in the film?
- How well did the creators and *Loose Change* balance their arguments with fact? How well-rounded was their argument? Were there any seams or inconsistencies within their argument?
- Which aspects of mise-en-scene were most successful in the film?
- Was the speed at which information was presented overwhelming? Do you feel that this strategy served a purpose in the documentary?
- Which sequences, claims, or conclusions made do you feel did not help or strengthen the filmmakers’ argument?
- Did you have any expectations about the film that were lost after viewing it?
- What made *Loose Change* a popular, powerful and influential documentary?

#### **5. Closing Thoughts**

My hope for this viewing guide is that it heightens audience awareness of the objectives surrounding *Loose Change* the film and the conspiracy theory. I also hope that readers gain a better understanding of the documentary film genre through the film itself, the analyzed clip from within the film, and the alternative resources presented. Finally, in the analysis and discussion of the film (in the

discussion questions, relevant articles, and the scholarly treatments of the film), I hope a greater understanding of and reverence for the events of September 11<sup>th</sup> has been gained. However, my passion for this film has undoubtedly been revealed through my personal essay on the topic and my analysis of the film. I believe that much of the “evidence” and theory presented in *Loose Change* is far-fetched and should only be taken with a grain of salt, as they say. But, for whatever reason you may have watched this film, whether in curiosity or simply because you were asked to, I hope you discover *your own* truths and beliefs concerning the events of September 11<sup>th</sup>, and not just those fed to you.

## **6. About the Author of this Guide**

### **a. Biography**

My name is Lizz Aubrey Glomb and I am from Austin, Texas. I am currently in my junior year at Trinity University in San Antonio, Texas, and I am a Communication Major with minors in Film Studies and Studio Art.

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- c. A note to the teachers, students, and anyone who uses this material in a group setting:** The material and work presented in this guide may be used for class discussions, papers, etc. (high school, college level, or higher) as long as I am appropriately cited and personally contacted before their use. Furthermore, none of the information within this viewing guide which is not an outside internet source or website may not be used without contacting me beforehand. Learn and enjoy!