



# Americana

*Don DeLillo*

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## Americana Don DeLillo

At twenty-eight, David Bell is the American Dream come true. He has fought his way to the top, surviving office purges and scandals to become a top television executive. David's world is made up of the images that flicker across America's TV screens, the fantasies that enthrall America's imagination.

And the dream--and the dream-making--become a nightmare. At the height of his success, David sets out to rediscover reality. Camera in hand, he journeys across the country in a mad and moving attempt to capture, to impose a pattern on his own, and America's past, present, and future.

## Americana Details

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# From Reader Review Americana for online ebook

## Sentimental Surrealist says

It seems that this has only entered the pop culture discourse as a sort of proto-American Psycho, based around the idea that its first segment is about the shallow nature of corporate America and the personality-free drones that make their fortunes within the confines of that system. I don't quite agree with that, because I think it ignores two key interlocking facets of this novel. For one, the "office politics" segment only lasts about a hundred pages, before David Bell (who most would hold as this novel's Bateman) hits the road. Secondly, Bell *hits the fucking road*. Bateman is content to ride the wave, to keep up with his double-life as corporate executive and mass murderer. Bell wants more than Bateman, wants more than to be a shallow, personality-free drone, and I think that makes him a more complex and therefore interesting character than Bateman. Then again, I prefer DeLillo to Ellis by a long shot, so what're you gonna do.

Anyway, Americana is DeLillo's first novel, and it's astounding how much of his act he had figured out from the beginning. Like the man's more famous later works, it's haunted by the idea of death, features mass media heavily, and is full of deliberately awkward exchanges that might be off-putting to some but are hilarious and endearing to me. It's also more of a "concept novel," per se, than a "plot novel." DeLillo is that sort of author, after all. It also introduces his idea of using childhood events as motivators for later actions, a concept explored to its fullest in his two best novels, Libra and Underworld, and even has a bit of White Noise's suburban satire and Mao II's crowd dynamics. Granted, Ratner's Star also tried to do a lot of these things, but this book seems either more confident, more within DeLillo's early abilities, or both.

Of course, there are downsides. Bell still isn't as terrific of a character as some of the fascinating people DeLillo would go onto develop, the desert island subplot is sort of useless, and the whole last act could probably have been done without. Despite all that, it's still a fine first novel that deserves to be remembered on its own steam and not just in relation to another, more famous book. I'm now a little more excited about early DeLillo than I was when I read Ratner's Star.

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## Ian "Marvin" Graye says

### A Polished Set of Pieties

My first experience of the DeLillo-Rama was "*The Names*" and until now I had only read one of the earlier novels - "*Great Jones Street*" - though I was trying to keep up with the later novels.

Little did I realise what a gem was waiting for me in "*Americana*", DeLillo's first novel.

It's 377 pages long, divided into four parts and 12 chapters, but it reads as fluently as a novel two-thirds its size.

Its relative brevity doesn't detract from its ability to explore or dramatise profound concerns. As the narrator, David Bell says of his own writing in a film script:

*"Large issues will begin to manifest themselves out of the dull set of pieties I've been constructing here. This is not easy work for me."*

It took DeLillo four years to write this novel. I'd say his reservations must have been more formal than stylistic, because the quality of the sentences is never less than exemplary.

## **Four Parts**

While DeLillo is regarded as a Post-Modernist author, in this case it's more overtly because of his subject matter than his structural approach.

The four parts of the novel do however let in some scope for metafictional play:

Part One paints a self-portrait of David Bell as a vain (*"I was an extremely handsome young man"*) 28 year old producer for a New York based television network. There's plenty of corporate rivalry, sexual flirtation, prurient gossip and mutual suspicion. DeLillo totally nails the speech patterns of this subculture.

Part Two returns to Bell's childhood, and his relationship with his legendary advertising exec father, his socialite mother, and his two sisters, Mary and Jane.

In Part Three David absconds from work to make a semi-documentary, semi-autobiographical film in the Mid-West, which causes him to miss his engagement on a documentary project about the Navaho people in Arizona for his network.

Part Four sees David continue his road trip westward to California, after which much later (possibly 1999) he is living in isolation on an island (rather than the continent of North America) where he finishes an autobiographical novel (possibly this novel?).

## **Part Dream, Part Fiction, Part Movies**

The film script gives David an opportunity to write about himself in dialogue form. So DeLillo creates the narrator David Bell, who then uses fictional friends, colleagues and actors to dramatise his own life and elaborate on the issues that preoccupy both himself and DeLillo. It's a nice touch of metafiction that doesn't distract or detract from the psychological realism of the novel as a whole:

*"I'm thinking of making a long messy autobiographical-type film, part of which I'd like to do out here in the Midwest, if that's where we are - a long unmanageable movie full of fragments of everything that's part of my life, maybe ultimately taking two or three or more full days to screen and only a minutely small part of which I'd like to do out here. Pick out some sleepy town and shoot some film."*

After a while, the novel takes the form of the film, the movie's style influences the structure and style of the novel. Maybe the book is the real motion picture:

*"The illusion of motion was barely relevant. Perhaps it wasn't a movie I was making so much as a scroll, a delicate bit of papyrus that feared discovery...It takes centuries to invent the primitive."*

Bell describes the film in terms that apply equally to the novel:

*"What I'm doing is kind of hard to talk about. It's a sort of first-person thing but without me in it in any physical sense, except fleetingly. It'll be part dream, part fiction, part movies. An attempt to explore parts of my consciousness."*

## **The Rumble of Public Opinion**

The network places Bell at the heart of mass culture as at 1971. He regards television as *"an electronic form of packaging"* for the products that the network's sponsors are advertising. He and his colleagues depend on sponsorship and advertising sales for the continuity of their programs and their status within the organisation. They have *"orchestrated their lives to the rumble of public opinion,"* the emotional response of the crowd.

David's independent film is both an escape from the corporate crowd and a rebellion against mass culture, *"the larger madness"*. In contrast to television:

*"The film is a sort of sub-species of the underground."*

## **Modernist Literary and Filmic Precursors**

The novel is shot through with references to modernists like James Joyce, Antonioni, Samuel Beckett and Godard, especially *"Ulysses"*:

*"Mollycuddling my bloomless bride";* and

*"I've got the Stephen Dedalus Blues and it's a long way to Leopoldville."*

## **A Leap Too Far**

In Part Four, David encounters a community of hippies who are sharing accommodation with some self-exiled Apache Indians who have refused to embrace the life of ranchers.

Their leader believes in aliens and flying saucers, which proves to be a leap too far for David, and he moves on. He's not yet ready to surrender to all aspects of the American counter-culture. His is a more individual and personal journey. It's religious, almost sacred to him.

## **Westward to the Wilderness Dream**

It's hinted at the end of the novel that David returns to New York City to resume his participation in mainstream culture, even though his absence during the film project means that he has lost his job.

Only later does he end up on the island, where he wrote his book.

It's hard to tell just how ingrained the mainstream is in his consciousness. The individual is overwhelmed by the multifarious images and dreams of commercial culture and advertising:

*"...the mightiest of the visionaries [were] those strong enough to confront the larger madness. For the rest of us, the true sons of the dream, there was only complexity. The dream made no allowance for the truth beneath the symbols, for the interlinear notes, the presence of something black (and somehow very funny) at the mirror rim of one's awareness...but as a boy, and even later, all the impulses of all the media were fed into the circuitry of my dreams. One thinks of echoes. One thinks of an image made in the image and likeness of images. It was that complex."*

It was so complex that David had to escape from his reality by heading into the west, ironically a source of new and different dreams (*"westward to the wilderness dream... to match the shadows of my image and my self"*):

*"I'm trying to outrun myself."*

*"I've spent twenty-eight years in the movies..."*

*"It is so much simpler to bury reality than it is to dispose of dreams."*

DeLillo seems to be arguing that the dreams of the crowd cause the death of individuals, their reality and their possibilities. Society had become a *"death machine"* and television had become its *"festival of death"*, a *"death circus"*.

The world might remain a mystery, but DeLillo's fiction has become a guidebook of sorts that directs us to pockets of life and individuality, and just perhaps a mirror that reflects our own.

May 29, 2016

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## **Aprile says**

Mai più! Ho provato la stessa sensazione di insofferenza e claustrofobia di quando si è obbligati ad ascoltare qualcuno che vomita parole per te senza importanza

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## **Jeff Jackson says**

DeLillo's debut contains the seeds of his better future novels and the remnants of typical American fiction that he would forever leave behind. The first section is an absurdist office comedy that's eerily close to "Mad Men." The second section reads like a remix of Updike or Cheever. The third is an examination of stasis and begins DeLillo's ongoing fascination with artists, representations of reality, and extreme works of art. The final section reads like "Two Lane Blacktop" scripted by Robert Stone - i.e., a last hard look at the '60s. The story doesn't really hold together, but the finely tuned sentences and observations are already here in abundance.

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## **Kyle says**

Just really unbelievable that he can get away with so blatant and heavy a Freudian plot point. Along with the iron-fisted relationships drawn between flashback and present action. All of it. The disastrous last act, the disastrous bookend premise of the narrator's presence. And still, STILL, a book everyone should read, especially everyone who wants to write a novel, because here is a masterful author's uniquely unmasterful first stab, since esteemed as a masterpiece for its sheer unmasterfulness. It's. Wonderful. An opening sentence up there with Barth's "Funhouse" opening. I steal from this book almost every day of my life.

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## sologdin says

This novel initiates a number of standard DeLillo ideas insofar as it involves:

A) A producer of hyperreal fictions laments the “disturbingly elapsed quality” inherent in existing “only on videotape” (23); dude likes to review “schizograms from girls” such as “Hello from the scenic coast of Nebraska” (22); he’ll refer to someone as a “living schizogram” later (51); the term is defined as “an exercise in diametrics which attempts to unmake meaning” (347). He’ll refer at one point to how “the deceased bore a strong facial resemblance to a number of Hollywood stars known for their interchangeability” (93). The audience “is really no more than a fragment of the dark” (117). Some belief that “the true subject of film” is “space itself, how to arrange it and people it, time hung in a desert window” (240).

B) seeming fear of potential ochlocracy in “perhaps in this city the crowd was essential to the individual; without it, he had nothing against which to scrape his anger, no echo for grief, and not the slightest proof that there were others more lonely than he” (29).

C) A cocked up marriage (“my ex-wife lived in the same building. The arrangement wasn’t as strange as it may sound” (29)). We see how nasty this gets:

I was no longer content merely to make love to my wife. I had to seduce her first. These seductions often took their inspiration from cinema. I liked to get rough with her. I liked to be silent for long periods. The movies were giving difficult meanings to some of the private moments of my life. (35)

Pure DeLillo, mainlining Baudrillard. Otherwise, we learn that “intensity and suspense are fundamental to the maintenance of a successful affair” (38). Honeymoons at least herein appear to “be a veritable jubilee of ejaculatio praecox” (93), with someone who has “big pink Renoir tits” and whom fiancé will “pretend she’s Molly Bloom, the only woman I’ve ever really wanted to scissor with” (95). (Someone else notes that “when we split up he told me thanks for the mammaries” (104).)

D) And, of course, a setting on “the edge of a desert” (32). This setting fits another one of his concerns, delivered by an “old Sioux mystic”:

Things had hardly changed at all. Only materials had changed, technologies; we were still the same nation of ascetics, efficiency experts, haters of waste. We have been redesigning our landscape all these years to cut out unneeded objects such as tress, mountains, and all those buildings which do not make practical use of every inch of space. The ascetic hates waste. We plan the destruction of everything which does not serve the cause of efficiency. (118)

Very *Underworld*, but also *Point Omega*, *End Zone*, *Love Lies Bleeding*, *Falling Man*. It is “satisfying to help keep the city clean” (190). This descends even to the preclusion of “wearing of articles of clothing which might possibly dull the effect of the brutal truth of one’s immediate environment” (285).

Semiurgical overload more famous in *White Noise* appears here as how “there was no time for remembering things because something else was always coming along” (35).

Anyway, there’s a story and characters and whatnot, but no one reads DeLillo for any of that. The “exactly

ten reasons” for lying (58) is as good a theory of art as any that I’ve seen. Similarly, a cosmopolitan catalog of theological irrationalisms is a nice example of practical fictions (183 et seq.).

At times involves some ad agency losers, such as one who thinks that “when you get to be my age, [women] all look the same” (83). Another regarded it as “his purpose” “to find the common threads and nuances” of commercials that rated well (84)—something like Eliot’s objective correlative. It was not “how funny or pretty” but rather “it has to move the merch” (85)—a matter of the production of demand itself, the compliant consciousness as the ultimate product of postmodern consciousness industry—a standard DeLillo concern. Instead of commercials interrupting shows, “exactly the reverse its true” (270): “In this country there is a universal third person, the man we all want to be. Advertising has discovered this man” (id.). It is a dream, “but the time may not be far off when we tire of the dream” (272), which becomes agambenian insofar as slice-of-life commercials may develop into “slice-of-death” (id.). (In that last connection, the concern of *Zero K* appears here as “Put the body on ice in a plastic bag [...] Once we figure out how to thaw the sons of bitches, we’ll have mass resurrections” (301).)

Ultimately, it’s “much simpler to bury reality than it is to dispose of dreams” (334).

Recommended for those who have life without a future tense, readers wearied by others’ chronicles of infidelity, and readers stationed in Turkey tending an undisclosed number of tumescent missiles.

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## Vit Babenco says

*Americana* is a story of existential emptiness...

The war was on television every night but we all went to the movies. Soon most of the movies began to look alike and we went into dim rooms and turned on or off, or watched others turn on or off, or burned joss sticks and listened to tapes of near silence.

Emptiness is universal, it is all around and there are all modifications of it: spiritual, cultural, intellectual, societal... So one has nothing to do but to obey one’s basic instincts...

...the girls were hammering at their little oval keys. I went for a walk. Everybody was busy. All the phones seemed to be ringing. Some of the girls talked to themselves while typing, muttering shit whenever they made a mistake. I went around to the supply area. The cabinets were the same color as troops in the field. Hallie Lewin was in there, leaning over a bottom drawer. There is no place in the world more sexually exciting than a large office. It is like a fantasy of some elaborate woman-maze; wherever you go, around corners, into cubicles, up or down the stairwells, you are greeted by an almost lewd tableau. There are women standing, sitting, kneeling, crouching, all in attitudes that seem designed to stun you. It is like a dream of jubilant gardens in which every tree contains a milky nymph.

**Don DeLillo’s** visions of the present and the future are bleak and he is full of bitterness:

“What we really want to do, he said, deep in the secret recesses of our heart, all of us, is to destroy the forests, white saltbox houses, covered bridges, brownstones, azalea gardens, big red



barns, colonial inns, riverboats, whaling villages, cider mills, waterwheels, antebellum mansions, log cabins, lovely old churches and snug little railroad depots. All of us secretly favor this destruction, even conservationists, even those embattled individuals who make a career out of picketing graceful and historic old buildings to protest their demolition. It's what we are. Straight lines and right angles. We feel a private thrill, admit it, at the sight of beauty in flames. We wish to blast all the fine old things to oblivion and replace them with tasteless identical structures. Boxes of cancer cells. Neat gray chambers for meditation and the reading of advertisements. Imagine the fantastic prairie motels we could build if only we would give in completely to the demons of our true nature; imagine the automobiles that might take us from motel to motel; imagine the monolithic fifty-story machines for disposing of the victims of automobile accidents without the bother of funerals and the waste of tombstones or sepulchres. Let the police run wild. Let the mad leaders of our nation destroy whomever they choose..."

And the main character decides to run away and he embarks on his own existential journey... But there is nowhere to run.

Life seems to be full of events but it all is but froth... Just a light blow of the wind and there will be nothing left but emptiness... "We have learned not to be afraid of the dark but we've forgotten that darkness means death." And the yawning emptiness will devour you.

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## **Darwin8u says**

I've taken a bit of a break from reading books, but this one. This one was a great novel to plunge into, head first (not realling, I knew exactly what I was jumping). DeLillo is one of the first, great American, literary novelists who made me WANT to write. I still remember when I was 17 reading MAO II from a small, military library and being absolutely blown away by every paragraph. The novel practically pulsed in my hands. I felt something alive in the words and something that was both dangerous and almost explosive to the touch.

Now, almost 25-years later, DeLillo's first novel jumps from a quasi-normal narrative to almost a prose poem, from Mad Men to David Lynch. It is funky, infinitely quotable, and haunting in its strange awareness and paranoia. It is like Don DeLillo wanted to describe a documentary of America verbally, but grew unsatisfied in just telling you what he was seeing. Soon, he switched to describing what America was saying/singing. After that he was licking the Acetate off the Super 16 and describing the trip. Funky.

I'm taking a road trip with my brother (a writer), his friend (a documentary filmmaker and former CIA agent), and another freind (a literary American writer of both fiction and nonfiction) later this summer. I was teasing my brother that during the trip, I was going to literally EAT the author's book, page-by-page, while traveling with him on this road trip through the West. Perhaps, I need to switch books and eat 'Americana'. Our road trip is starting and ending in Dallas. Love Field. I feel like my Summer of 2017 started and will eventually end with the taste of 'Americana' in my mouth. ding in Dallas. Love Field. I feel like my Summer of 2017 started and will eventually end with the taste of 'Americana' in my mouth.

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## **Lisa says**

Americanal've had mixed success with award-winning American author Don DeLillo. I abandoned the first

one I tried (*The Body Artist*) but I was very impressed by *Falling Man* (see my review) even though it's a challenging book to read. I picked up *Americana* (1971) when I stumbled on it at the library because I have just bought a copy of award-winning Nigerian Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* from the Africa Book Club - and I wanted to see if she drew at all on DeLillo's novel with a similar sounding name...

DeLillo's *Americana* is his first novel, and it's one of those subversion of the 'American dream' novels. But it also subverts genre: in Part 1 it subverts the workplace satire, and in Part 2 the road novel genre. DeLillo says himself that it's a 'shaggy' novel - and it is, but it's still interesting to read.

It begins with a portrait of office life which presents the intensely competitive male employees endlessly trying to analyse office politics to identify the real hierarchy which lies beneath the veneer of equality. All things have significance in this hothouse: even the type and colour of office furniture and doors and other symbols which denote who's who. The men pump the secretaries for information about plots and counter-plots, and they all covertly watch each other at the drone-fests which achieve nothing at all.

The style of Part 1 is very familiar to 21st century readers but the sardonic wit still works. Through his narcissistic narrator David Bell, DeLillo captures the irony of opinion-makers in a TV network themselves having no idea about the current affairs docs that they're supposed to be producing. David's project about the Navaho Indians is predicated on breath-taking ignorance, and their stance on China shows that they are focussed only on the visuals and the logistics of producing it, not the content.

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## Greg says

Here is a song for this review. I like the original better, but this cover isn't too shabby either:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vX7QAn...>

I'm going to throw out an idea. Maybe it's not really a good one, or true or maybe it's something that's obvious, which all of the above are probably the case for most of my ideas but here it goes: when you get right down to it, America is a country without history. Instead we're a nation of stories and myths. We have the stories of the founding fathers that people like Glen Beck cry over, we're white-washers of what Manifest Destiny entailed a la Rush Limbaugh on his day before Thanksgiving show of his past year, we're glorifiers of larger than life figures like Big Bill Haywood and Alexander Berkman (I don't want to leave the radicals out of my theory here). As a general consensus we mythologize. This is nothing new, just looking at writers from the early part of the 20th Century like Sinclair Lewis and Sherwood Anderson we see the lie of middle America torn apart. We see the good moral backbone of our country exposed as being as vapid as the coasts (which we already knew to be cesspools, those immigrants soiling our soil). In our hearts I like to think we all know that there is no mythical 'America', that the heartland isn't pure, that westward path isn't an escape from anything. That the same hardships, the same bullshit, the same whatever you want to call it, is here and there and everywhere. Maybe it is just called something different. Not that things can't be better somewhere, but there is only another here.

I'm going to ignore those lost young souls of middle America who come East to populate places like Brooklyn and free themselves from the provincialism of wherever they are from. Maybe they do find something better, we all have the chance of finding somewhere better. Those people aren't looking for America anyway, they are looking for a city. America isn't the coastal cities.

At a certain point maybe most of us buy into the story of going West (which ever way West actually is). Maybe it's hardcoded into our DNA, since those of us of European descent are mostly all the descendants of people who packed it up and moved to the 'unknown' New World because they couldn't cut it where they were from for one reason or another. Happy successful people don't just pull up stakes and go to a totally foreign place to live the rest of their lives, severing ties, start afresh. Miscreants, dreamers, those unhappy with their lot in life, failures, the oppressed, people who have lives that are so awful that a big gamble on something new is better than what they are living in, rubes fooled by silly stories of streets paved with gold these are our forefathers. Not that I'm passing judgement. It makes me wonder if we aren't a nation of people that dissatisfaction is something we've inherited, and now we have no farther to really go. No more unchartered lands to explore.

But coupled with the dissatisfaction are the larger than life stories of America. The stories that some of us can't live up to. Comparing ourselves to the stories we learn as history our own lives can be seen as failures.

I don't know if any of this is making sense.

In the post-WWII times going West, leaving the confines of the rigid East Coast is in a way synonymous with finding one self, with finding something more authentic. It's the lure of that schmuck Kerouac, that the real life is somewhere out there on the open road, in the purer towns, or whatever you think is out there that is not here. As if there is someplace that the real you can be found, at some Burning Man hippie bullshit Rainbow Festival or whatever better city or more real experience there is out there.

*Americana* is an anti-*On The Road*.

It's a journey of a fairly despicable protagonist, who is an almost Patrick Bateman like vacuum of a person (minus the ultra-violence towards anyone) who takes a cross country trip to 'find' himself through a trip through small town America and making a movie about himself. That is the quick plot overview of the book.

I got to an impasse here. I had no idea what to write so I went to the grocery store. On the way I stepped on some black ice at the corner and fell. A man was behind me and instead of offering me a hand or even a word like, are you ok, or even walk around me he stepped right over me, lightly kicking. I stood up and called him a fucking asshole and he scurried across the street. I wanted him to slip on some ice himself and then maybe have a taxi or a bus run him over.

I was thinking then when I was in the grocery store that this is the kind of thing that people think of when they think of New York and the kind of scene in a movie where the guy would then say, that's it I'm through with rude assholes, were moving to the country. And I thought of a winter about 15 years ago (wow that just made me feel really old), when I was living at home and delivering pizza. My parents were away, driving my sister down to school in North Carolina and we had a shit ton of snow. Like over a foot, and I had no idea how to use the snow plower, or maybe it was broken, we always seemed to have broken snow plowers back in those days. And I had to go to work so I went outside to dig my way out of the driveway. The plow had come by fairly recently so there was a big wall of snow at the end of the driveway that was kind of packed and heavy. Across the street was our elderly neighbor out with his snow blower. I was shoveling and kind of hoping he'd offer to help me with his snow blower, but I wasn't expecting it. Now this isn't the kind of heartwarming story about the man who lived in the country / now suburbs his whole life doing something nice. Instead at one point started to clear off an area that it was close enough to send all of the snow shooting right on to me. He could have moved the shooting thing to aim another direction but he didn't. Instead over and over again he kept shooting snow right at me, oblivious like (or I think it was oblivious). Two incidents of people being inconsiderate assholes in two different locales (of course there are lots of incidents of people

being nice in both locales, but I'm in an annoyed / depressed mood right now so I won't talk about them).

Return to talking about the book Greg.

I'm not sure what to write about the book. Parts of it were really depressing to me, but not in any way I can put my finger easily on. The book is about 'finding yourself' but with the realization that finding yourself is always a pointless task since you're always right there with all the baggage and shit that comes with you. But that is cheapening the book, it's about much more than that.

I really really liked this book. There were parts I didn't care for too much, but overall it was a great read. It has the energy and immediacy of a great first novel, where it is like the author is trying to jam as many themes and ideas into the pages of his book as possible, because he might not ever get another chance to get everything out. But he's not too heavy handed with everything he is trying to get across, some of the great subtly that is in his later work is already present here. There is something about the work that feels like it fits in with his latest book *Point Omega*, but it's not nearly as sparse and feels more like a young man instead of an older man's novel.

I feel like there is a lot I want to say about this novel, but words are failing me and even the internal words that make up the never-ending inner-monologue in my head are faltering too. I want to read this book again at some point. I don't think I would recommend this to anyone though, there is too much of a chance that what I like about it so much is outside of the actual words on the page and that it's just the way the text touches on to my own thoughts that made me like it so much.

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## Nate D says

I once saw this book referenced (I no longer recall by who) as an example of the First Novels Are Most Quintessential principle. Not necessarily best, but just the most like the body of work they open. The idea has some merit, especially in this case: DeLillo has always grappled with the meaning of modernity in American life, through any number of lenses, but only in this first and aptly named version did he just plunge in head-on, laying out thematic territory we would return to again and again. As with a lot of DeLillo, the opening chapter hits a level of precision and refinement the rest can't quite keep up with but that's more due to the surpassing excellent of the beginning rather than any failing of the rest, though the novel loses some momentum in the long, dreamlike middle-third memory montage.

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## Gabriele says

Inizia come se il protagonista fosse uscito direttamente da "*American Psycho*", poi arrivi a un terzo del libro e, a ricordarti che chi scrive non è Easton Ellis, interviene il DeLillo delle opere più mature.

"*Americana*", che è il primissimo romanzo scritto dall'autore di "*Underworld*", non ha certo il peso né le pretese dei suoi grandi lavori successivi, a volte si perde anzi in una trama che sembra non avere una direzione precisa. Ma è proprio con questa sua indecisione che DeLillo, ancora una volta, è riuscito a colpirmi: "*Americana*" parla di tutto ciò che l'America, negli anni '70 così come oggi, rappresenta. Si parla tantissimo di televisione e di pubblicità nelle sue pagine, ma anche di famiglia e di lavoro, è una critica al mondo delle imprese e alle nuove tecnologie, ma anche un inno alla ricerca personale (e in maniera artistica)

della propria strada.

Tutto passa attraverso gli occhi del protagonista, David Bell, giovanissimo ventottenne con già un posto di rilievo in una grande rete televisiva, una sorta di *yuppie* ante litteram. Al suo successo personale, costellato da importanti traguardi nel lavoro quanto da una vita privata all'insegna di innumerevoli conquiste, si contrappone però una ricerca sempre più spasmodica del proprio essere. È così che, approfittando di un impegno di lavoro, David Bell si troverà a girare in camper per l'America registrando il suo personale film, un lungometraggio autobiografico in cui riprese amatoriali e attori improvvisati rappresentano il "sogno americano" del giovane ventottenne, interpretandone, spesso accentuandone i comportamenti, ciò che nei suoi primi 28 anni di vita è stato. Ma non solo: nella lente della sua cinepresa vengono catturati dialoghi che esprimono tutto il malessere del popolo americano, tutti i sogni e le paure, i successi e gli imprevisti, la rabbia e le relazioni, i tradimenti e le scoperte.

Ne esce fuori quella trama imprecisa di cui parlavo: "*Americana*" è un libro che predilige a una storia lineare una "raccolta" di momenti, sempre più slegati fra loro man mano che si procede con la lettura. L'ossessione e la ricerca del protagonista coincidono con la "rarefazione" del romanzo, fino a un finale in cui del protagonista sembra quasi perdersi traccia.

"*Americana*" non è un libro per tutti, e non è assolutamente il DeLillo che consiglierei a chi ancora non ha letto altro di suo. È un romanzo però che apre la strada a molti altri: i temi trattati in questo libro diventeranno fondamentali per il postmodernismo americano, e in particolare per tutti quegli autori della generazione immediatamente successiva — David Foster Wallace su tutti — che si troveranno a dover affrontare tematiche connesse al sogno americano e alla sua rappresentazione (spesso distorta) tramite i *media*.

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## Alexandra says

Americana von Don de Lillo - eine Enttäuschung Leider ein typisch amerikanscher episch breiter "Roman", komplett ohne Aussage, Tiefgang, Verstand, voll mit Gedankensprüngen und sinnlosen Hintergrundgeschichten, eines nach dem anderen. So wie die freundliche klischeehafte oberflächliche amerikanische Lady, die völlig geistlos aber höflich permanent vor sich hinplappert, nur um die Stille, vor der sie sich so fürchtet, mit sinnfreien Phrasen und Gschichtln zu füllen. Und das nennen die Kritiker dann ein großes Werk mit einzigartiger Handschrift, ein fesselndes Stück amerikanischer Zeitgeschichte? Je blöder, unverständlicher und pseudointellektueller, desto besser? Also ich verstehe das gar nicht. Ein Roman sollte doch eine Aussage vermitteln! Ach ja - was auf fast 500 Seiten passiert, ist in ein paar Sätzen erzählt: Typen in einer Fernsehanstalt spielen blöde Machtspielchen und tun die meiste Zeit nur so, als ob sie arbeiten würden. Mann fährt herum filmt ein bisschen und brät mit Vorliebe Frauen mit Freund an, um sein kleines Ego etwas mit Selbstbewußtsein aufzuwerten. Mann hat Sex, Filmcrew erzählt so nebenbei kryptische Familiengeschichtln, sinnloser Film wird fertiggedreht. Basta! Wenn Ihr noch irgendwo ein bisschen mehr Substanz aus diesem grauvollen Machwerk herauszuzeln könnt, seid bitte so lieb schreibt und erklärt es mir, denn ich habe wirklich nicht mehr gefunden. Bedauerlicherweise habe ich noch einen ganzen Stapel wichtiger amerikanischer Literatur zu Hause herumliegen, den ich Zug um Zug abarbeiten möchte, und ich fürchte mich jetzt mittlerweile schon sehr davor ;-)

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## **LunaBel says**

Americana is DeLillo's first novel, but i cant say that it seems to be the first he wrote. it's as if he never really advanced in his writing. It's as if he chose a way of writing and stuck to it until now. Americana deals with a man, David Bell, who leaves his job in order to 'live,' but he goes on an adventure from which he never recovers...

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## **Violet wells says**

I've now completed the set, read all DeLillo's books. This is his first novel and though impressive as a first novel doesn't really have much to recommend it in my eyes. It's narrated by an obnoxious filmmaker who heads West to find his creative soul, sort of like a literary road movie. We get lots of snapshots of American life; we also get quite a lot of overwriting and a fair smattering of pretentiousness.

A fascinating feature of his books is that they often begin on a more inspired plane than they end. DeLillo loves writing; but he loves writing sentences rather than stories. He's like Nabokov in the delight he takes in crafting individual sentences. I don't think any living writer is better at individual sentence writing. I can think of at least four of his novels that begin with stunningly beautiful prose but eventually peter out as if he runs out of that magic elixir, inspiration. At the point where he tries to forge into shape what he's previously written. DeLillo doesn't do plots. You could say plot is the discipline at the heart of any novel. It's probably frustrating at times, like the rules of any game. And it seems to curb DeLillo's flow. The alternative to plotting a novel is to theme it. Which is what he does but has a tendency to become a bit too esoteric and ambitious, to lose focus. Zero K was probably better unified in terms of theme than some of his earlier novels but the inspired writing was missing. The Names has the inspired writing but the theme becomes ever more oblique and elusive.

To be honest I can't think of much to say about Americana except if you fancy reading him make sure you avoid this one. It was a bit like listening to an early demo recorded in a garage by a band you love.

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