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## [The Unseen Cinema Seven DVD Set and the Book You Can \(and Should\) Order](#)

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Okay. A commercial plug, I know, but trust me on this one. As all good video store vultures know, the legendary [Anthology Film Archives](#) in NYC recently released the astonishing 7 DVD collection, [Unseen Cinema: Early American Avant-Garde Film 1894-1941](#). Some 155 amazing films are anthologized in volumes with a general theme. Almost even more impressive, sixty of the world's greatest film archives contributed to the the box set's 17 hour total running time, including MOMA, George Eastman House, Library of Congress, the Blackhawk Collection, BFI, the Deutsches Filmmuseum in Frankfurt, the Douris Collection, and of course the aforementioned Anthology Film Archives, among many others at least as impressive.

To call Unseen Cinema an essential release, a cultural landmark, one to skimp on the light bill for, is obviously an understatement. Fortunately, the whole thing is also an utter delight. I'd even hold it to the Anthology of American Folk Music. Early DW Griffith "primitives" and Edison trick films sit side-by-side with well-known Dada and 1960s experimental films, more obscure delicacies and underground legends and, best of all, a sizable percentage of "amateur" films like the highly advanced collage films of Joseph Cornell.

A densely-typeset 16-page overarching essay by the anthology's curator Bruce Posner is included, but otherwise the packaging is minimal — titles, years when available, filmmakers' names, composers, some administrivia.

Turns out there's an Unseen Cinema companion book you can order, which I've not seen around nor heard of until I bought the set. At a measley \$15 (sale price) I strongly encourage anyone with an interest in this sort of stuff to stop by the official [Unseen Cinema web site](#) and get one. Beats buying it for 35 in few years. Having received my copy, I can say it not only stands on its own with or without the amazing multi-DVD set, it's one of the very best books published on the history of experimental film, period.

The [Unseen Cinema series catalog](#) is a dense 160 pages, softbound, illustrated, and in their words...

...features 30 essays, articles, and documents and 65 annotated photographs. Authors are scholars, critics, and filmmakers whose knowledge of the early avant-garde derives from either direct experience as a participant or years of scholarly research. Many hard-to-find photographs and sources detail the first decades of American experimental cinema in the United States and abroad.

See? I'm sayin'. I mean it includes an essay on "The Artistic Process" by Alexander Alexeieff and Claire Parker, for crying out loud.

What's unusual is the sales site offers two pricing tiers for the book — the slightly more expensive one (the price I just quoted) which includes a small bump for Anthology Film Archives' continuing preservation work, or a cheaper one 35% off retail but minus the 25% donation to support film preservation.

So mind you: if any one of youse stoops to paying the cheaper price, you'll burn in hell for it.