OBSCENE

A Double O Films Production

“I feel personally there hasn’t been a word written or uttered that shouldn’t be published.”
-- Barney Rosset

A film by Neil Ortenberg and Daniel O'Connor

RELEASE DATE: Sept. 26 at Cinema Village in NYC, Oct. 3 at Laemmle Sunset in LA
RUNNING TIME: 97 minutes
RATING: Unrated

**Art is Available at www.arthousefilmsonline.com**

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FILMMAKERS

Directed by NEIL ORTENBERG & DANIEL O’CONNOR

Produced by NEIL ORTENBERG
      DANIEL O’CONNOR
      TANYA AGER MEILLIER
      ALEXANDER MEILLIER

Original Music Composed by ASKOLD BUK

Cinematography by ALEXANDER MEILLIER

Editing by TANYA AGER MEILLIER

Alexander Meillier, Tanya Ager Meillier, Neil Ortenberg and Daniel O’Connor
FEATURING

BARNEY ROSSET

with

Amiri Baraka  Michael McClure
Jim Carroll  Claudia Menza
Kent Carroll  Jeffrey Potter
Betty Dodson  Priscilla Potter
Elsa Dorfman  John Rechy
E. Morgan Entrekin, Jr.  Peter Rosset
Jason Epstein  Floyd Salas
Lawrence Ferlinghetti  Ed Sanders
Al Goldstein  John Sayles
Herman Graf  Richard Seaver
John Jonas Gruen  Ira Silverberg
Erica Jong  Nat Sobel
Fred Jordan  David Stiles
Ken Jordan  Joseph Strick
Julius Lester  Howard Turner
Ray Manzarek  Gore Vidal
Peter Mayer  John Waters
Astrid Myers

ALSO FEATURING

Allen Ginsberg
Lenny Bruce
William S. Burroughs
Henry Miller
Karen Lillis, Words Like Kudzu Press
Margarita Shalina, St. Mark's Bookshop
Anna Moschovakis, Ugly Duckling Presse
Richard Nash, Soft Skull Press
Matvei Yankelevich, Ugly Duckling Presse
SYNOPSIS

OBSCENE is the definitive film biography of Barney Rosset, the influential publisher of Grove Press and the Evergreen Review. He acquired the then fledgling Grove Press in 1951 and soon embarked on a tumultuous career of publishing and political engagement that continues to inspire today’s defenders of free expression. Not only was he the first American publisher of acclaimed authors Samuel Beckett, Kenzaburo Oe, Tom Stoppard, Che Guevara, and Malcolm X, but he also battled the government in the highest courts to overrule the obscenity ban on groundbreaking works of fiction such as *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, *Tropic of Cancer* and *Naked Lunch*. Ultimately he won and altered the course of history, but not without first enduring lawsuits, death-threats, grenade attacks, government surveillance, and the occupation of his premises by enraged feminists.

But the same unyielding and reckless energy Rosset used to publish and distribute controversial works such as Allen Ginsberg’s *Howl*, the Swedish film *I AM CURIOUS (YELLOW)*, and the provocative Evergreen Review, also brought him perilously close to destruction. Featuring music by Bob Dylan, The Doors, Warren Zevon, and Patti Smith, and never-before-seen footage, OBSCENE is directed by first time filmmakers Neil Ortenberg and Daniel O’Connor.
DIRECTORS’ STATEMENT

“I'm one of a generation of publishers and readers that are the beneficiaries of Barney Rosset's tireless fight for freedom of expression. I think it's important that we remember and celebrate one of the architects of the freedoms that we take for granted today, while he and those freedoms are still alive.” - Neil Ortenberg

“Barney is not only a heroic opponent of censorship, bigotry, and all manner of small-mindedness, he is also a champion of curiosity, risk-taking, and generosity of spirit. He encouraged Americans to live larger lives. We want to let people know that when they say 'they hate us for our freedoms' -- it's the freedoms that Barney Rosset fought for that they're talking about.” - Daniel O'Connor

Our relationship with Barney goes back twenty years. In 1986, our publishing house sold the paperback rights to Saturday Night at San Marcos by William Packard to Barney at Grove Press – a book that Senator Jesse Helms would call “one of the top ten most obscene books ever funded by the National Endowment for the Arts.” After Barney sold Grove Press to Anne Getty and Lord Weidenfeld and was then dismissed, we were part of a small group of publishers and investors that offered $10 million to regain the press and re-install Barney as publisher. We were ignored. We bought Blue Moon Books, comprising Grove’s Victorian Library and many later additions, from Barney, and made it profitable again, providing him with a small stream of revenue. And we gave Barney the initial contract and advance for his autobiography, now complete and soon to be published.

We also spent hundreds of hours at Barney’s apartment and in bars and strip clubs listening to Barney tell stories of his life before, during, and after Grove. This intimate proximity to the man who inspired our own approach to publishing was the reason we made this film. We had unusual access and the passionate desire to bring the man responsible for so many changes in our culture, out of obscurity. One publishing colleague commented after watching an early screening of the film that it reminded him of why he got into publishing in the first place: to make a difference. That’s the other reason we made the film: even in the slick, hyper-technologically sophisticated culture that we live in, we yearn to do something that gives meaning, not just financial reward or social status. OBSCENE is a portrait of a man who believes in something and is willing to put everything on the line for that belief.

-- Neil Ortenberg and Daniel O’Connor
ABOUT THE FILM

Barney Rosset is the greatest American publisher of the twentieth century and the most influential cultural figure that you never heard of.

Under Rosset, Grove Press and Evergreen Review fought decisive battles, including many before the state and federal supreme courts, defeated legal censorship, and opened Americans to new and dangerous currents of freedom. But even in current printings of his most successful censorship battles like *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*, there is no mention of Rosset’s unwavering dedication to freedom of expression. As poet Ed Sanders says, “without Barney Rosset there is no Sopranos, no HBO.” But Rosset's public fight against hypocrisy and injustice is inextricable from his tumultuous personal life. In fact, the same energy that upended centuries of law also brought Rosset perilously close to self-destruction and exacted a cost from friends, colleagues, and family.

Grove Press brought to national prominence the art and artists of the counter-culture: the San Francisco and New York poets, the New York "action" painters, the French Surrealists, the Pataphysicians, the German Expressionists, the dramatists of the Absurd and the practitioners of the Nouveau roman. Grove also acted as midwife to nascent Black, ethnic, and third world literature, supported the politics of the New Left, and became part of the country’s ongoing debate over the legacy of the “Sixties” as an era dominated by anti-authoritarian rebellion, egalitarianism, and sexual experimentation.

In 1985 Rosset sold Grove Press and was then dismissed from the publishing firm he brought to national prominence. In November of 1988, Barney Rosset received the PEN American Center’s Publisher Citation, “for distinction and continuous service to international letters, to the freedom and dignity of writers, and to the free transmission of the printed word across the barriers of poverty, ignorance, censorship and repression.”

*OBSCENE* premiered at the Toronto International Film Festival in their Real to Reel Program in 2007. It also played SXSW in 2008.

Allen Ginsberg, Gregory Corso, and Barney Rosset
FILMMAKER BIOGRAPHIES

Neil Ortenberg, Director

Neil Ortenberg is the founder and former publisher of Thunder's Mouth Press, where he published Gregory Corso, Hubert Selby Jr., Melvin Van Peebles, Nelson Algren, Gore Vidal, Dee Dee Ramone, John Sayles, Chester Himes and many other notable authors. In 1988 Thunder's Mouth Press was awarded the distinguished Carey-Thomas Award for "Best Example of Creative Publishing." Newsweek called him "A Gonzo Publisher." He is the co-founder of Adrenaline Books and, with Nation magazine, co-founder of NationBooks. He was Executive Vice-President of the Avalon Publishing Group and director of its New York Office. With Barney Rosset he is editor of The Outlaw Bible of American Literature, which was reviewed on the front cover of the New York Times Book Review, and was called "Baddasss 101" by Time Out Magazine. Ortenberg is a partner in Double O Film Productions. The New York Times called him "A Publisher with a Rock and Roll Heart". OBSCENE is Mr. Ortenberg's first documentary film.

Daniel O'Connor, Director

During his ten years with Thunder's Mouth Press, Daniel O'Connor served variously as Managing Editor, Senior Editor, and Associate Publisher. He was the director of Blue Moon Books, acquired by Avalon from Barney Rosset in 1998. In 2002 he created The Best American Political Writing series with editor Royce Flippin. He is the editor of Iron Mike: A Mike Tyson Reader (2002) and Best American Sex Writing 2004. O'Connor is a partner in Double O Film Productions. He was born in Chicago and attended school at St. Tarcissus, St. Norbert, St. Sabina, Our Lady of the Wayside, and St. Viator. He divides his time between Brooklyn and Manhattan. OBSCENE is Mr. O'Connor's first documentary film.
INTERVIEW SUBJECTS BIOGRAPHIES

Amiri Baraka, also known as LeRoi Jones and Imamu Amiri Baraka, founded the influential Beat literary journal Yugen with his first wife, Hettie Cohen. Baraka won the Obie for his play Dutchman in 1964. He has been a prolific writer and controversial political figure for more than forty years. Of his books, those published by Grove Press include The Dead Lecturer (1964), The System of Dante's Hell (1965), and Tales (1967).

Jim Carroll The first full-length article about Jim Carroll appeared in 1969, when he was 19. He was featured in Rolling Stone as early as 1973, the same year, it was rumored, that he was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize at age 22. He can be heard between songs on the Velvet Underground's legendary Live at Max's Kansas City album asking for tuinals – he was holding the microphone. The 1980 release of Catholic Boy, along with the re-publication of his book The Basketball Diaries, shot Jim and his band into the international spotlight. His recordings include “I Write Your Name,” “Praying Mantis,” and “Pools of Mercury.” His books include Living at the Movies, Forced Entries, the Book of Nods, and Void of Course.

Kent Carroll was the editorial director of Grove Press from 1975 to 1981. In 1982 together with Herman Graf, he founded the Carroll & Graf, where he was both publisher and Editor-in-Chief. Since 2004 he has been Editor-in-Chief at Europa Editions.

Betty Dodson Ph.D. is an educator, author, graphic artist, and pioneer in women's sexual liberation. Her books include Sex for One: The Joy of Self-Loving and Orgasms for Two: the Joy of Partnersex. She has also produced three videos: Selfloving: Portrait of a Sexual Seminar, Celebrating Orgasm: Women's Private Selfloving Sessions, and Viva la Vulva: Women's Sex Organs Revealed.

Elsa Dorfman is a portrait photographer working in Cambridge, MA. She has published two books, Elsa’s Housebook: A Woman’s Photojournal and No Hair Day. She collaborated with poet Robert Creeley to create En Famille, a book length poem accompanied by family portraits.

Morgan Entrekin is the publisher of Grove/Atlantic.

Jason Epstein is widely credited with creating the "paperback revolution" with the inception of Anchor Books in 1953. For many years the editorial director of Random House, Epstein was the first recipient of the National Book Award for Distinguished Service to American Letters and was given the Curtis Benjamin Award by the Association of American Publishers for "inventing new kinds of publishing and editing." He is the author of Book Business: Publishing Past Present and Future (2001).

Lawrence Ferlinghetti is the co-owner of City Lights Bookstore and City Lights Books. Their publication of Allen Ginsberg's Howl in 1956 was impounded by the police and subject of a precedent-setting censorship trial. Ferlinghetti's A Coney Island of the Mind continues to be the most popular poetry book in the U.S. with nearly 1,000,000 copies in print. His most recent books are A Far Rockaway of the Heart (1997), How to Paint Sunlight (2001), and Americus Book I (2004). Ferlinghetti has been the recipient of the Los Angeles Times' Robert Kirsch Award, the National Book Critics Circle Ivan Sandrof
Award for Contribution to American Arts and Letters, and the American Civil Liberties Union's Earl Warren Civil Liberties Award. Ferlinghetti was named San Francisco's Poet Laureate in August 1998. In 2003 he was awarded the Robert Frost Memorial Medal, the Author's Guild Lifetime Achievement Award, and was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Letters.

**Al Goldstein** The key distinction between Al Goldstein and Hugh Hefner is that the last thing on earth Al would be caught doing is taking himself seriously. Otherwise, given the amount of trouble Al has seen, his autobiography reads more like a tragedy than the absurd, uproarious comedy it is. Recently, after finally succeeding in cannibalizing his entire fortune, Goldstein toughed his way through a full year homeless on the streets of New York — merely his latest accomplishment. Al's list of priors involve two dozen arrests, four ex-wives, Mafia hit contracts, thousands of death threats, innumerable medical procedures, and constant legal attack throughout his 34 years publishing Screw. Al's blood enemies include politicians, D.A.'s, CEO's and religious officials. When Goldstein was acquitted on pornography charges in Wichita, Kansas in 1978, he flew the entire jury to New York to celebrate at Plato's Retreat, and took them all out to dinner on the anniversary of his acquittal. This landmark victory thereafter insured the right of Americans to view buck-ass naked sex with or without redeeming social value. His memoir, *I, Goldstein: My Screwed Life*, was published in 2006 by Thunder's Mouth Press. Al lives in Ozone Park, Queens.

**Herman Graf** is the former director of sales for Grove Press. In 1982 he formed the independent publisher Carroll & Graf with partner Kent Carroll.

**John Jonas Gruen** was Grove Press's first Director of Publicity. He introduced Barney Rosset to his second wife, Hannelore. Gruen has been the art, music, and dance critic for the New York Herald Tribune, the New York Times, Vogue, ARTnews, and has been a Senior Editor of Dance magazine. His photographs have been exhibited throughout the world.


**Fred Jordan** was the Editor of Evergreen Review and later Editorial Director of Grove Press, and considered to be one of Barney Rosset's “Holy Trinity” with Richard Seaver and Donald Allen. Jordan was the self-effacing presence behind the discovery and publication of some of Evergreen Review's and Grove Press's most distinguished authors including Kathy Acker, Jakov Lind, Che Guevara, and Bertolt Brecht. In 1989 Jordan became publisher of Pantheon. After retiring he served for five years as executive director of Fromm International Publishing.

**Ken Jordan** is the son of Fred Jordan. Ken Jordan is one of the pioneers of Web-based multimedia. In 1995 he led the development and served as founding editorial director of SonicNet.com, the first multimedia music zine and digital music store. He is the publisher of the online magazine Reality Sandwich. Mr. Jordan is co-editor of *Multimedia: From Wagner to Virtual Reality* (W.W. Norton, 2001), an anthology of seminal articles that trace the "secret" history of digital multimedia; the book is widely taught at colleges and universities around the world. Outside the digital realm, he collaborated with the

**Julius Lester** was a member of Evergreen Review's editorial board. Since 1968 he has published more than thirty-five books -- among them twenty-five children's books -- and has received the Newberry Honor Medal, National Book Award Finalist, National Jewish Book Award Finalist, National Book Critics Circle Award Finalist, and Boston Globe/Horn Book Award. As a professor in the Judaic and Near Eastern Studies Department at the University of Massachusetts, and adjunct professor of History, Lester has been honored with the university's Distinguished Teacher's Award, the Faculty Fellowship Award for Distinguished Research and Scholarship, and the Chancellor's Medal, the university's highest honor. Now retired, Lester was selected by The Council for Advancement and Support of Education as the Massachusetts State Professor of the Year in 1988.

**Ray Manzarek** is the co-founder and keyboardist for the Doors with whom he recorded much of the soundtrack for the 1960s. He has recorded several solo records and has acted as producer for groups like Echo and the Bunnymen and X; and he has recorded an adaptation of *Carmina Burana* with composer Philip Glass. Manzarek has directed the digital feature film *Love Her Madly*; a documentary of his collaboration with poet Michael McClure, *The Third Mind*; and three long-form music videos: *Dance On Fire, The Doors Live At The Hollywood Bowl*, and *The Soft Parade*. He is the composer of the music for the film *Summerhill*, forthcoming from director William Tyler Smith. He is the author of *Light My Fire: My Life with the Doors*, and *Poet in Exile*, published by Thunder's Mouth Press.

**Peter Mayer**, President and Publisher of Overlook Press/Peter Mayer Publishers, has been honored with the Chevalier and Officer of the Ordre des Arts et Lettres by the French Ministry of Culture and the Literary Marketplace Person of the Year Award as the Most Distinguished Publisher of 1996. Mr. Mayer is on the board of directors of Scholastic, the publisher of *Harry Potter*. He has held editorial and executive positions at Avon Books and Pocket Books, and from 1978 to 1996, was Chief Executive of Penguin.

**Michael McClure**, novelist, essayist, and playwright, was one of five poets (including Allen Ginsberg) who read at the famous San Francisco Six Gallery reading in 1955. His poetry was included in the epoch-making Evergreen Review #2, San Francisco Scene and included in Donald M. Allen’s seminal New American Poetry 1945-1960 (Grove Press, 1960). He published his first book, *Passage*, in 1956. He has produced more than 16 books of poetry, including *The New Book/A Book of Torture* (Grove Press, 1961) and *Star* (Grove Press, 1970), six collections of essays, two novels, and ten plays, including the Obie-winning *Josephine the Mouse Singer* and the notorious *The Beard*, shut down by police fourteen consecutive nights in Los Angeles and then produced by Grove's Evergreen Theatre in New York City (Grove Press, 1965). He is also co-writer, with Janis Joplin, of "*Mercedes Benz.*" Since 1988, McClure has performed with Ray Manzarek in coffeehouses, in bars, on college campuses, and on national television.

**Claudia Menza**, a former Grove Press and Evergreen Review Editor and Managing Editor, is Director of the Menza-Barron Literary Agency.

**Astrid Myers** is the long-time companion of Barney Rosset. She and Barney married in 2007.
In 2006 John Rechy's first novel, the international bestseller City of Night, published, as many of his fourteen books have been, by Grove Press, was named as one of the 25 all time "best gay novels" by the Publishing Triangle in New York. The Sexual Outlaw: A Documentary was included by the San Francisco Chronicle Book Review as one of the “100 Best Non-Fiction Books” of the century. In a recent issue of the Los Angeles Times Book Review devoted to "L.A. Literature," Rechy was repeatedly named by other writers, including Mike Davis (City of Quartz), as among the five most important writers to have written about Southern California. Rechy is the first novelist to receive PEN-USA-West's prestigious Lifetime Achievement Award.

Peter Rosset was the executive director of the Institute for Food and Development Policy. He is a researcher at the Center for the Study of Change in the Mexican Countryside, a non-profit organization supporting the peasant movement in Mexico. He is also the co-coordinator of the Land Research Action Network. His books include A Cautionary Tale: Failed U.S. Development Policy in Central America, The Greening of the Revolution: Cuba's Experiment with Organic Agriculture, and Agroecology. He is the son of Barney Rosset.

Floyd Salas is the author of Tattoo the Wicked Cross (Grove Press, 1967), What Now My Love (Grove Press, 1969) and three other novels. He is the author of a collection of poetry, Color of My Living Heart, and the editor of an anthology of San Francisco Bay area writers, Close to Home. Salas is past president of PEN Oakland and recipient of its 1997 Censorship Award. He lives in Oakland.


John Sayles is a screenwriter, novelist, actor, and director, twice nominated for an Academy Award for best screenplay. His films include Silver City, Lone Star, Eight Men Out, Matewan, The Brother from Another Planet, and Return of the Secaucus 7. He is the author of three novels: Pride of the Bimbos, Union Dues, and Los Gusanos.

Richard Seaver has translated more than forty books from the French including Andre Breton’s Manifestoes of Surrealism, Marguerite Duras' Hiroshima, Mon Amour, Jean-Claude Forest’s Barberella, Memoirs by Francois Mitterand, and the first American publication of Justine, Philosophy in the Bedroom, 120 Days of Sodom, and Letters from Prison by the Marquis de Sade. As an Editor at Merlin in post-war Paris he was among the first to publish work by Samuel Beckett in English and collaborated with Beckett in the translation of several early works. Seaver became Editor-In-Chief at Grove Press. In 1971 he joined Viking and published writers under his Seaver Books imprint, including William S. Burroughs, Eugene Ionesco, Flann O'Brien, and Octavio Paz. Seaver is a
past executive board member of PEN American Center. Since 1988 he and his wife, Jeannette Seaver, have directed Arcade Publishing, the American publishers of Ismail Kadare, recipient of the first Man Booker International Prize in 2005.

Ira Silverberg is a literary agent with Donadio & Olson. Among his clients are Adam Haslett, Gabe Hudson, Kate Spade, Neil Strauss, J.T. Leroy and Peter Kurth. Prior to becoming an agent, he worked in publishing in a variety of capacities, including Editor in Chief of Grove Press; Publisher of Serpent's Tail/High Risk Books; and Director of Publicity at Grove/Weidenfeld. He chairs the Board of Directors of The Council of Literary Magazines and Presses as well as serving on the boards of The New School MFA Program, BOMB magazine and the American Committee of the Jerusalem International Book Fair.


American director, producer, and screenwriter Joseph Strick served as a cameraman with the U.S. Air Force during WWII. After his discharge, he made the documentary Muscle Beach (1948) with co-director Irving Lerner, and the groundbreaking docudrama The Savage Eye (1959), which garnered international recognition, in conjunction with Ben Maddow and Sidney Meyers. Strick's fiction directorial debut, Jean Genet's The Balcony, was nominated for Best Black and White Cinematography by the Academy in 1963. His adaptation of James Joyce's novel Ulysses (1967) was nominated the Best Adapted Screenplay. In 1970 he directed an adaptation of Henry Miller's Tropic of Cancer starring Rip Torn. That same year his documentary Interviews With My Lai Veterans won an Academy award. He is the former chairman of the board of Grove Press.


BOOKS PUBLISHED BY BARNEY ROSSET and GROVE PRESS

“If you want to know who I am, look at the books I published.” -- Barney Rosset

A Confederacy of Dunces by John Kennedy Toole
A Personal Matter by Kenzaburo Oe (Nobel Prize 1994)
Baal by Bertolt Brecht
Blood and Guts in High School by Kathy Acker
City of Night by John Rechy
Ficcones by Jorge Luis Borges
Hiroshima, Mon Amour by Marguerite Duras
Justine, Philosophy in the Bedroom and Other Writings by Marquis de Sade
Lady Chatterley’s Lover by D.H. Lawrence
Last Exit to Brooklyn by Hubert Selby, Jr.
Manual of Zen Buddhism by D.T. Suzuki
Naked Lunch by William S. Burroughs
Poems of Five Decades by Pablo Neruda (Nobel Prize 1971)
Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead by Tom Stoppard
Sexual Perversity in Chicago; by David Mamet
Steal This Book by Abbie Hoffman
The Americans by Robert Frank
The Autobiography of Malcolm X
The Homecoming by Harold Pinter (Nobel Prize 2005)
The Labyrinth of Solitude by Octavio Paz (Nobel Prize 1990)
The New American Poetry 1945-1960 edited by Don Allen
The Story of O by Pauline Reage
The Subterraneans by Jack Kerouac
The Theatre and its Double by Antonin Artaud
The Thief’s Journal by Jean Genet
The Voyeur by Alain Robbe-Grillet
The Wretched of the Earth by Franz Fanon;
Tropic of Cancer by Henry Miller;
Waiting for Godot by Samuel Beckett (Nobel Prize 1969)
And thousands of others…