

# Commune Editions

written by Entropy | July 26, 2016



**EDITIONS**

[Website](#)

Submission Guidelines: N/A

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## *Interview with Jasper Bernes, Joshua Clover, and Juliana Spahr*

*How did Commune Editions start?*

We had been kicking around the idea of doing some poetry editing—originally, as a series for another press—and trying to cultivate some of the work that moved us. At the same time, we we looked around and saw, in the years after the crisis of 2008 and especially in 2011 and 2012, an increasing radicalization of US poetry, or at least a radicalization of the poetic circles in which we found ourselves. Part of this involved the convergence of the previously separate Bay Area anarchist and communist milieus that we hung out in and the poetic milieus where we also found each other. Occupy Oakland solidified this process, as it allowed a lot of people who were on the edges of political work but curious and maybe a little skeptical and worried a chance to get involved in ways they were comfortable with and in ways that, eventually, changed them. At that point, we realized that starting our own press made the most sense, since there was so much good, fiercely anticapitalist work being written that a poetry press devoted to anticapitalism and antistate poetry could sustain itself publishing a few terrific volumes per year and incorporating some important translations. Also, we're friends and we like each other. We've been engaged in various collective projects over the years, and this is an extension of those projects. We enjoy doing things together and this is one of the things that it makes sense to do right now.

*Tell us a bit about Commune Editions. What are your influences, your*

*aesthetic, your mission?*

Our influences are probably too various to list. Baudelaire speaks ambivalently about “the beautiful language of my century.” The phrase and its ambiguity became a sort of anarcho-communist hymn for Guy Debord. This attraction/repulsion to beautiful language is near the heart of things: how that language seems magical, potential, and how it comes from and belongs to the things we want to be done with. Abolition is our aesthetic: of gender, of class, of culture. These are also our mission, plus publishing a few good books by writers we admire.

*Can you give us a preview of what's current and/or forthcoming from your catalog, as well as what you're hoping to publish in the future?*

This year's full books are by Cheena Marie Lo's already very well-reviewed [A Series of Un/Natural/Disasters](#); David Lau, *Still Dirty: Poems 2009-2015*, a really visionary and weird and hilarious collection of work from within the crisis; and Ida Börjel, *Miximum Ca' Canny the Sabotage Manuals*, a completed version of her chapbook we published last year, which is filled with useful information. We've also recently published a chapbook by Wendy Trevino, [Brazilian Is Not A Race](#) which has been downloaded more than anything else on our site where there is lots of free stuff. Next year we are looking to publish work by the great novelist of Italy's volatile seventies, Nanni Balestrini, with his first collection of poetry translated into English; and also some Heriberto Yépez, the brilliant and acidic revolutionary poet from Mexico. And lots of other stuff planned! So many plans!

*What about small/independent press publishing is particularly exciting to you right now?*

I think the barriers to entry have fallen over the last decade. It's cheaper to publish and distribute books and chapbooks—especially if you go digital—and it's easier to learn the skills you need to do so. As a result, much of the stigma around self-publishing (which was always the norm with small presses) has fallen away. People are less likely to wait until they can get a foot in the door at an established press, and more likely to start a press with some friends and publish the work they care about, up to and including their own. We suppose people worry that this compromises the quality of poetry, but we don't see it. Most poetry is pretty bad. This holds true for the poetry published by long-standing ventures with rigorous selection criteria. We think there's a lot of exciting work being published now that might have gone overlooked previously. Some of us have written about the ineluctable whiteness of the Anglo-American poetry scene and that seems to be changing somewhat in small press poetry, though perhaps not quickly enough. This probably has something to do with lower barriers to entry though we can't be sure.

*How do you cope? There's been a lot of conversation lately about charging reading fees, printing costs, rising book costs, who should pay for what, etc. Do you have any opinions on this, and would you be willing to share any insights about the numbers at Commune Editions?*

We pay for it. We take our salaries and we pay a percent of the expenses based on amount earned. It isn't the best system. But it isn't the worse one either.

We are unlikely to ever charge reading fees. Or we can't imagine a good reason to do this right now.

Our overhead is low. We do our own typesetting. Our designers and illustrators have been gracious in offering their time. Our only costs more or less are printing and mailing. We hope at some point to be donating less money because of sales on the back list.

We have an insane, slightly jokey, contract. Most authors haven't bothered to sign it. But instead of paying royalties, we are splitting the money earned among all the authors. It goes like this:

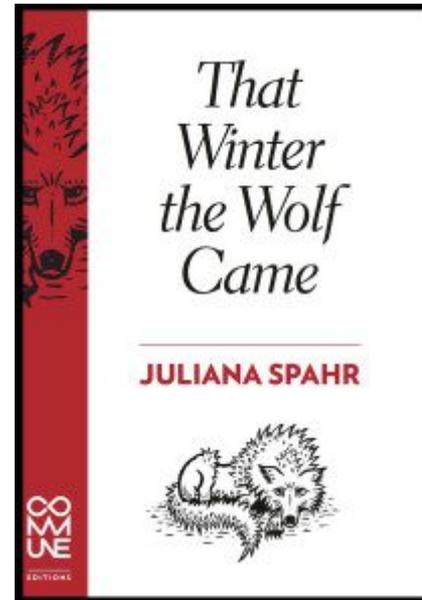
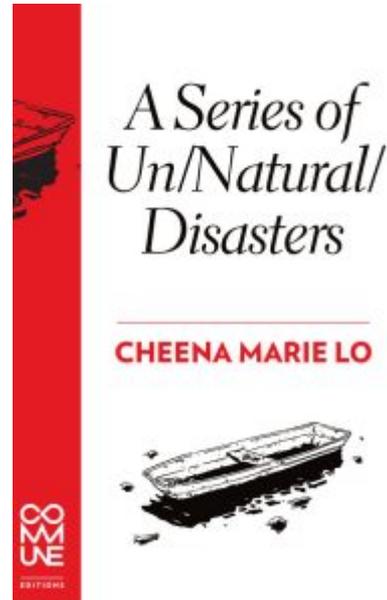
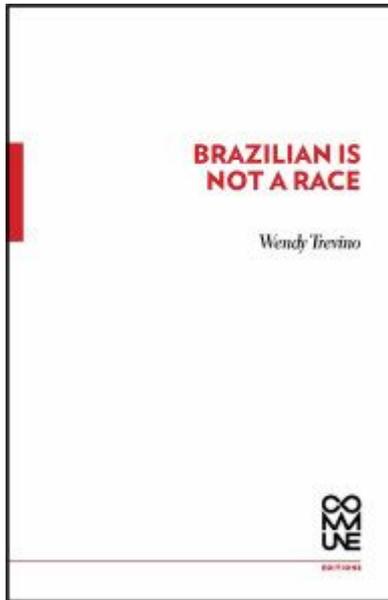
After Publisher has two years of Direct Costs (determined by average of prior production costs) in reserve, they will notify all authors. If revenues above two years of Direct Costs are less than \$10,000 US, the revenues will be split equally among all authors. If revenues exceed \$10,000 US, it will be divided equally, with half going to the Bay Area Antirepression Committee or other organization devoted to antirepression and antiprison work, while the other half will be split equally among all authors. If revenues exceed \$50,000, then \$25,000 will be used to write LOL in the sky above as many financial and political centers of the capitalist system as possible, while the rest will be split equally among all authors. If revenues exceed \$100,000, then \$50,000 will be used to purchase all black clothing and facial coverings to be donated for entirely aesthetic purposes to a political mobilization of the authors' choice, while the rest will be split equally among all authors. If revenues exceed \$250,000, then \$125,000 will be rained down on a location in the city of Oakland to be decided upon by the authors, while the rest will be split equally among all authors. Revenues in excess of \$500,000 will be destroyed by fire. This payment will happen once a year.

*You're published in partnership with AK Press. What exactly does that mean for you?*

We are an imprint of AK. Basically we pay for all our expenses and then on the copies that AK sells, they take a cut. We have been super grateful for this. We wanted to partner with a less literary press. We wanted to see if there can be a wider audience for poetry than just poets.

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***Recent releases from Commune Editions:***



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*Commune Editions on Entropy:*

[Review of \*Beauty is our Spiritual Guernica\* by Mario Santiago Papasquiaro, Translated by Cole Heinowitz](#)

[Interview with Julia Spahr, author of \*That Winter the Wolf Came\*](#)