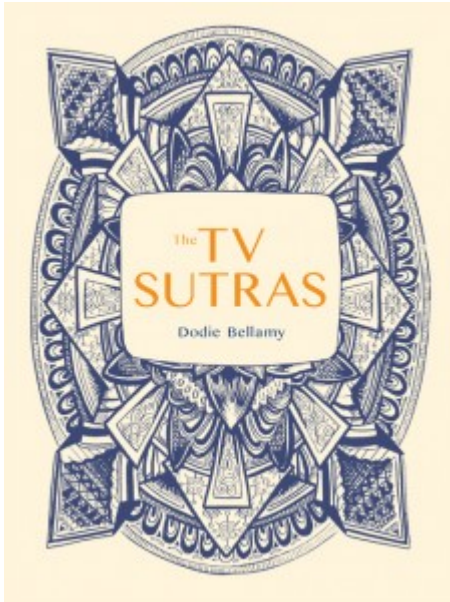


# [Tender This Marvel: Dodie Bellamy's The TV Sutras](#)

written by Alex Kalamaroff | June 20, 2014



*The TV Sutras*

by Dodie Bellamy

Ugly Duckling Presse, 2014

240 pages / [UDP](#) / [Amazon](#)

Look into the living room overcrowded with stuff and see her seated there, a middle-aged woman who has just completed thirty minutes of yoga and is pressing the power button, ready to receive wisdom from on high. The TV blinks on; wisdom arrives.

What appears in an instant took a lifetime to get here. Dodie Bellamy's insights are pithy, clicking with clarity and certainty; they could've been cribbed from a well-written self-help book: "Savor each moment in this festival of evanescence" (from commentary to Sutra 9).

*The TV Sutras*, published earlier this year by Ugly Duckling Presse, contains 78 sutras—these found-object aphorisms sown together and interwoven with commentary—followed by 138 pages of prose, which are a mix of memoir, reflection, and invention. One wonders how precisely this mix breaks down, percentage-wise. How much is fact? Faked? Fiction?

One also wonders from where does inspiration spring and who can judge it. There's Joseph Smith and his magic hat, Moses with his burning bush, so why not Dodie Bellamy and her TV screen? Let revelation appear to her amidst "this crisis of urban bombardment." Let us perceive the knowledge of the screen. "The simplest things are glorious—no need to search—look at what's right in front of you" (from commentary to Sutra 30).

But then there is the cult and the Master and Bellamy's decade-long engagement with them. This, you might say, is the backstory, a story worth inspecting, exploring, questioning—tracing this tentacle of belief that ends up protruding from the TV screen. “When I joined the cult,” Bellamy tells us in the prose section, “I no longer needed a dream world, no longer needed a glamorous avatar, for I was Soul and Soul is most beautiful.” Cults were all the rage back in the day, back in the 1972 when Bellamy was in college and got caught up with the divine, with all its promises and lies.

The Master and the cult, they offered comfort, community, connectivity. Certainly, it might've been a sham, a scam, but this is much more complicated than it sounds:

When you enter a new belief system, tiny lines are crossed and crossed and crossed—it may look from the outside that you've made a huge leap—but from the inside there are all these incremental ... steps .. and you have no idea how you went from sociologist sent to study an extraterrestrial cult ... to standing outside in the snow with your fellow believers, clad only in plastic and polyester, eager for Ro of Varna to appear from the sky.

Bellamy is talking about the invisible journeys each of us makes every day, about how you can be attending Indiana University in 1972 and only a few years later hanging-out at a national convention in Jackson, Florida, where the Master sings, “Oh Golden Spirit, I will always love you.”

Beliefs, even at their most rancid or frivolous, are affirmations—they guarantee that something, anything really, is true. Wisdom exists; in fact, it's here waiting for you, ready to be plucked or perceived. Just turn on your TV. “We all need to create order, to make sense out of the world” (from commentary to Sutra 50).

*The TV Sutras* is a study in belief, in this pursuit of affirmation, which does not only lead to Jacksonville, Florida, or to cults led by creepy yet charismatic older men. “I took on New Narrative's tenets with the same uncritical zeal as I did the cult's,” Bellamy writes. Art, after all, offers its own promises and lies.

Along the pathways of this pursuit, Bellamy acquires lovers. There's Nance, Ned, and Dietmar, to name the first three; together they “carv[e] out pleasure.” They seek to fill the world with meaning. They fuck. They believe. “Luxuriate in the moment, the full is-ness of the present, as if there were no other moment” (from commentary to Sutra 72).

Sex is its own affirmation, an assurance of this exact second cresting before you as you come. It's undoubtedly worth pursuing. “We were not bigger than life,” writes Bellamy after one particularly fantastic fuck-a-thon, “we were not higher initiatives or incarnated beings from a more advanced planet—we were little people having ordinary Earthling sex.”

Eventually, however, we are severed, left to progress without our assuring

affirmations. The horribleness of the Master's singing becomes too loud to ignore. One's lovers leave; the fantastic fucking ceases. Bellamy finally quits the cult. "When your world falls apart, pain opens to a marvel so tender, beautiful and ugly merge," she writes. There is honesty in the possibilities offered up by emptiness, of not knowing what's next, which is where we find ourselves every so often—left without the validation of these verities, without the quick fix of being keyed into a master plan, any master plan will do. So how to begin again? This is the question Bellamy asks before sitting down in front of her TV. Sutra 51 is the "[Silent sutra]". So sit quietly for a moment. Wait. Wisdom is almost here. Almost almost.