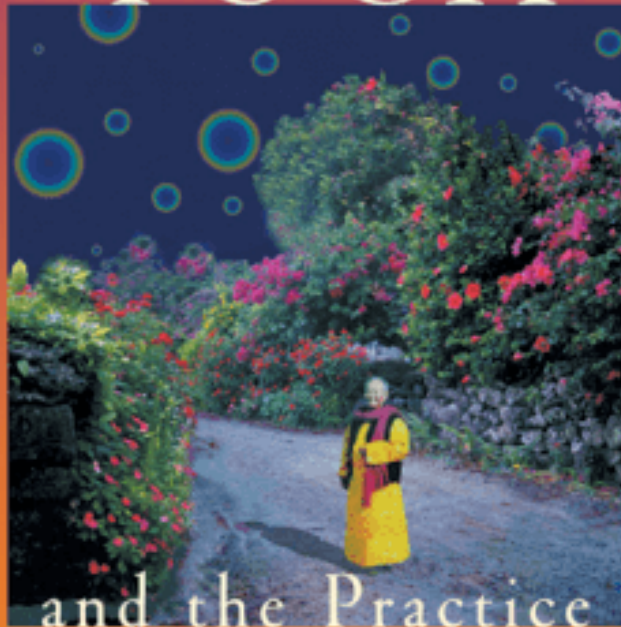


*Making Invisible Friends*  
*Tulpamancy, Prayer and the Fluidity of Self*



Michael Lifshitz, PhD  
Division of Social and Transcultural Psychiatry  
McGill University / Jewish General Hospital

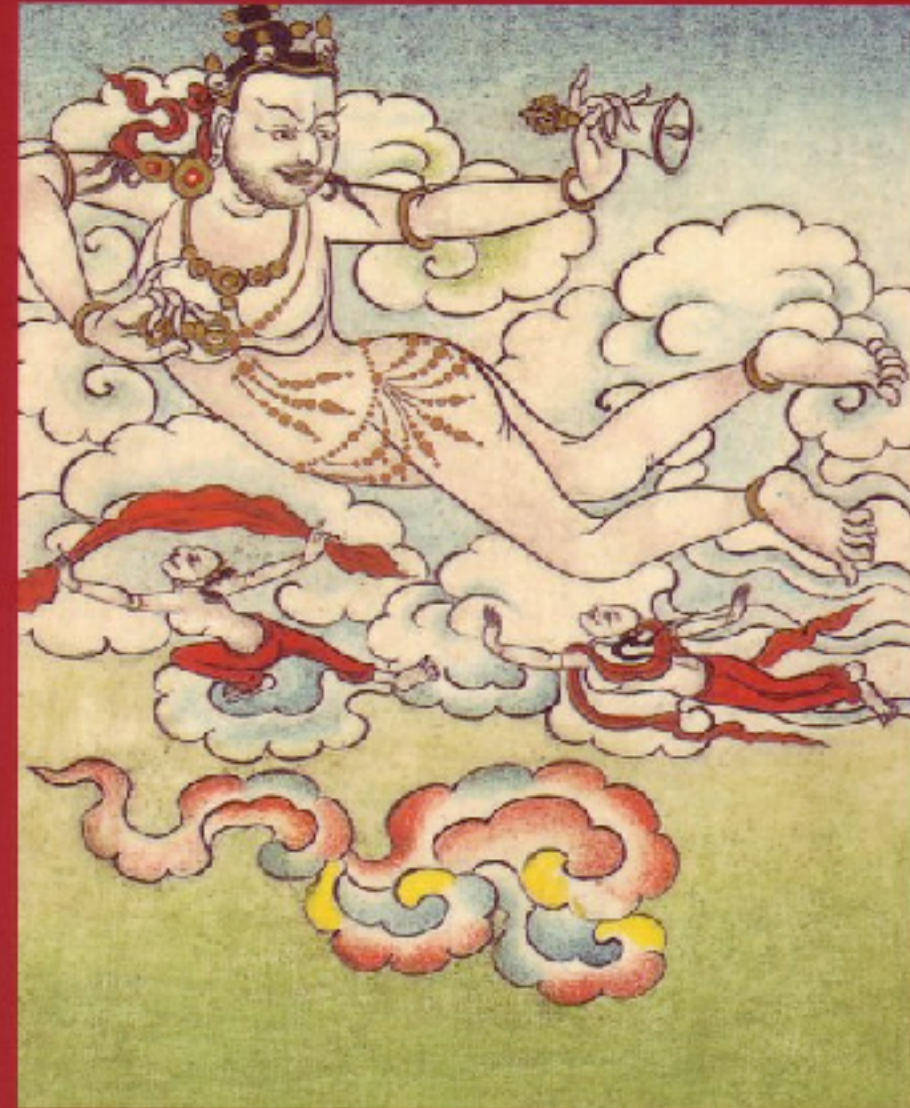
# DREAM YOGA



and the Practice  
of Natural Light

CHOGYAL  
NAMKHAI NORBU

Edited and Introduced by Michael Katz



ཁྱུང་ཐོབ་དུ་རི་ཀམ། 達利嘎巴祖師

“Your brain hallucinates your conscious reality”

-Anil Seth



# Tulpamancy



***tulpa*** from the Tibetan, *sprul-pa*, ལྷུང་པ།, ‘*emanation*’, ‘*apparition*’, ‘*manifestation*’

***mancy*** from the Greek, *manteía*, μαντεία, ‘*conjuring*’, ‘*divination*’, ‘*sorcery*’,

"Once the tulpa is endowed with enough vitality to be capable of playing the part of a real being, it tends to free itself from its maker's control".

-Alexandra David-Néel





## Hypnoponies

Ever felt like being the pony? That's what this forum is here for! NOTE: Hypnosis is not a toy. Consider risks and consequences before committing.

## FAQ Man's Guide on How to Create a Tulpa

By FAQ man ([tulpa.faq@gmail.com](mailto:tulpa.faq@gmail.com))

### Introduction

So, you want to make a tulpa, is that right? In this guide I will discuss how to make this psychological phenomenon. This guide is firmly rooted in the psychological school of thought. I hold the opinion that people should not follow guides perfectly. You should take this as a guideline, and then find your own way. This is just based off my experience, and the experiences of people I have talked to. We are not all the same. This all took me a total of 130 hours: over the course of 2.5 months, 2-3 hours a day 5 days a week.



## Techniques of *creation*:

Actively developing the tulpa's form and personality

vs.

Speaking to the tulpa as if it were already real

## Techniques of *discernment*:

The crucial experience of **involuntary response**

Tulpas do things that are **surprising**

Tulpas have **strong personalities**

Fully auditory/visual experiences are rare



**I**MAGINARY  
COMPANIONS  
*and the* CHILDREN  
WHO CREATE *them*



MARJORIE TAYLOR

"The most insightful study of evangelical religion in many years."  
—*The New York Times Book Review*

# When God Talks Back

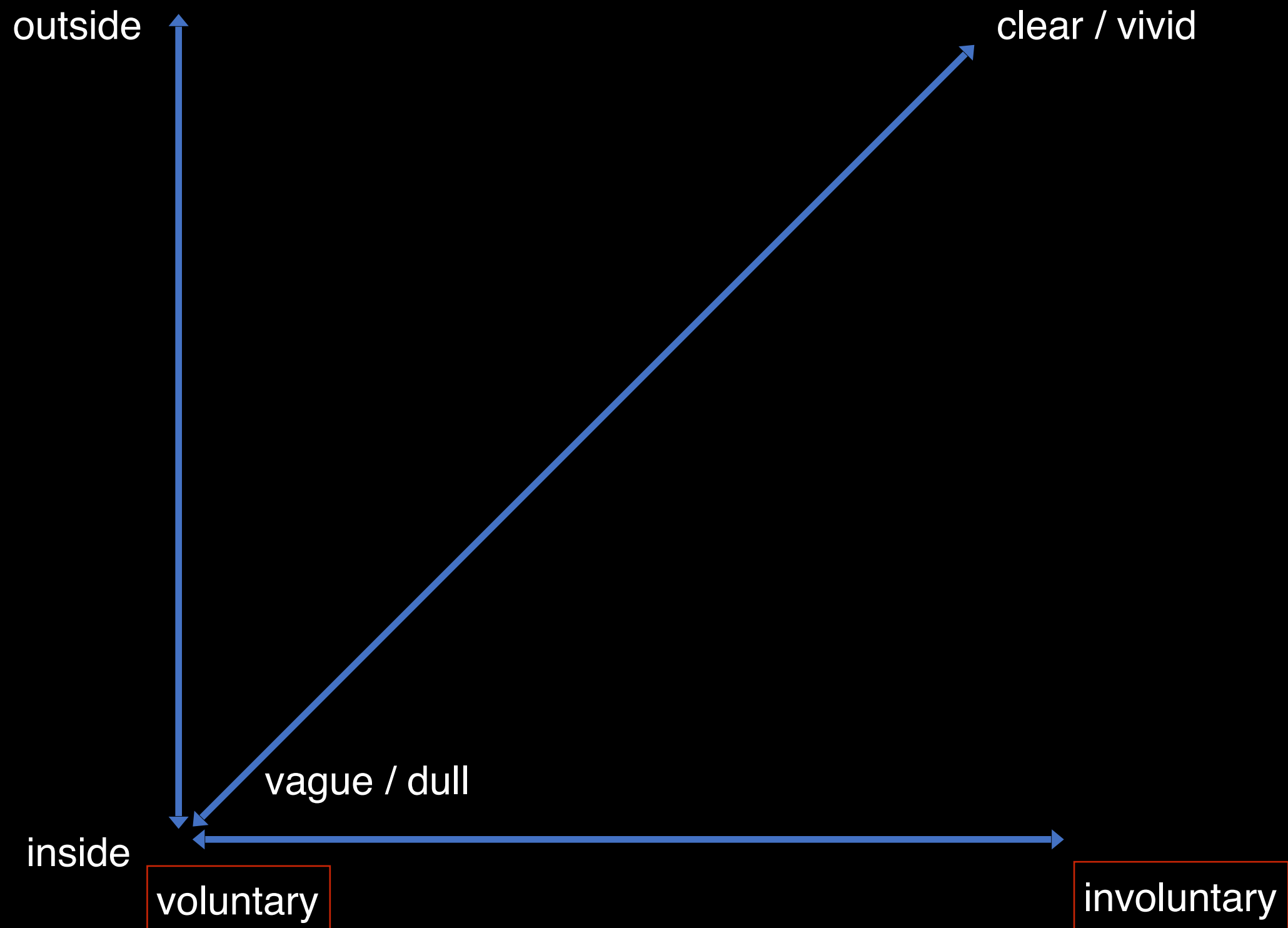
UNDERSTANDING THE  
AMERICAN EVANGELICAL  
RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

T. M. LUHRMANN

*Author of Of Two Minds*



## What makes the tulpa's voice feel *real*?





## Learning to Discern the Voices of Gods, Spirits, Tulpas, and the Dead

We compared interviews from five social groups in which people deliberately practice to hear invisible voices:

**Tulpamancers** in the US

**Charismatic christians** in the US

**Okomfu**, traditional healers in Ghana

**Spirit mediums** in the US and UK

**Ayahuasca drinkers** in Peru

**Features to discern which thoughts originate from the invisible other:**

1. The thought is more sudden/spontaneous than ordinary thoughts
2. The thought feels more autonomous/not created by the self
3. The thought is stronger/louder than ordinary thoughts (not for tulpamancers)
4. The thought feels vivid (not for tulpamancers)
5. The thought feels intentional, as if something is communicated



# Dissociative Identity Disorder in the DSM-V

Switching between two or more distinct identities

Recurrent **amnesia between identities**

Symptoms **cause distress or dysfunction**

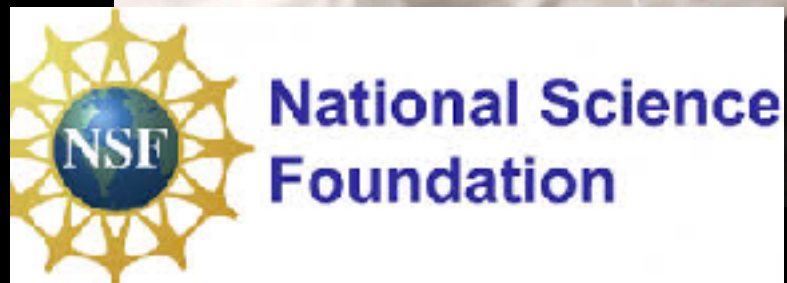
Symptoms **not due to culture or religion**

Symptoms not due to substance use or another condition

Painting by Rachel Elise



# Self-modulating the neural correlates of agency



## First group: Charismatic Christians

25 expert prayer practitioners

- Christian belief framework
- psychiatric screening

1-2 hour phenomenological interview

Three common types of prayer in the fMRI scanner:

1. **Lord's prayer**  
high agency, *rehearsed*
2. **Worship prayer**  
medium agency, *improvised*
3. **Speaking in tongues**  
low agency, *channeled*

Self-report ratings of agency after each block



# Self-modulating the neural correlates of agency



## Second group: **Tulpamancers**

22 expert tulpamancers

- secular belief framework
- psychiatric screening

3-4 hr phenomenological interview

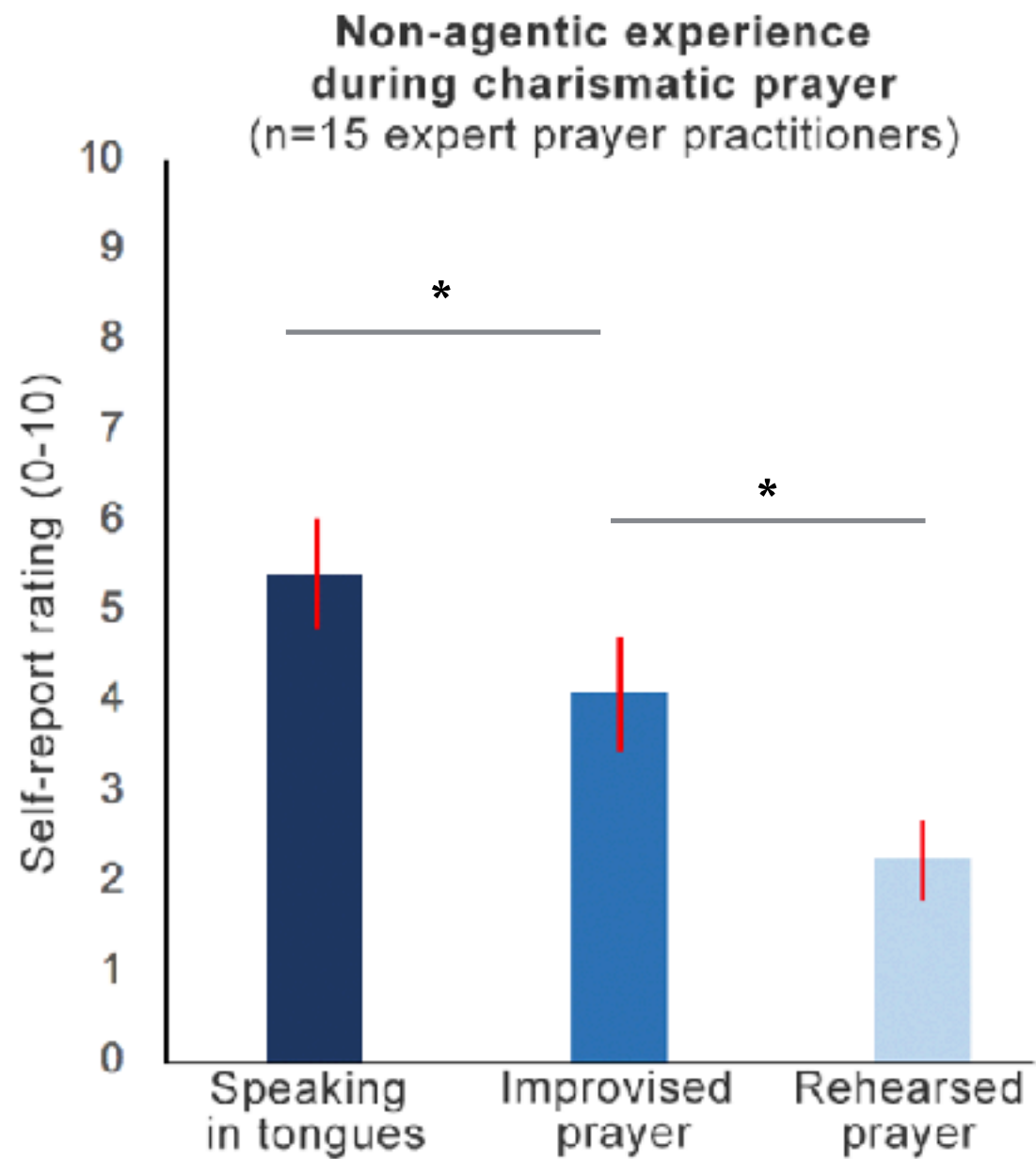
fMRI tasks:

1. **Self mind-voice (inner speech)**  
high agency, *voluntary*
2. **Tulpa mind-voice**  
low agency, *involuntary*
3. **Imagining a friend's voice**  
medium agency, *pretending*

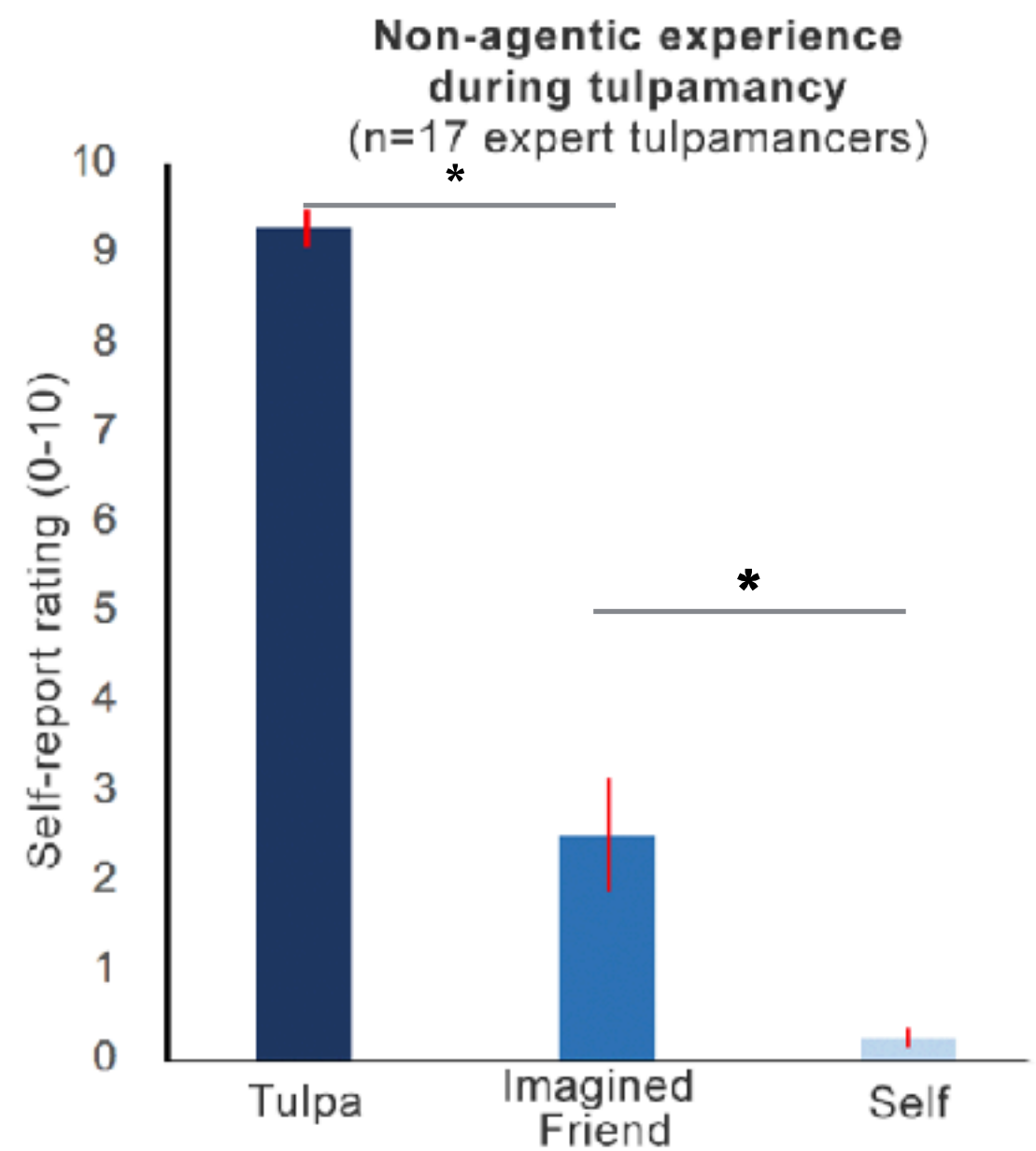
Self-report ratings of agency after each block



## Group 1: Charismatic christians

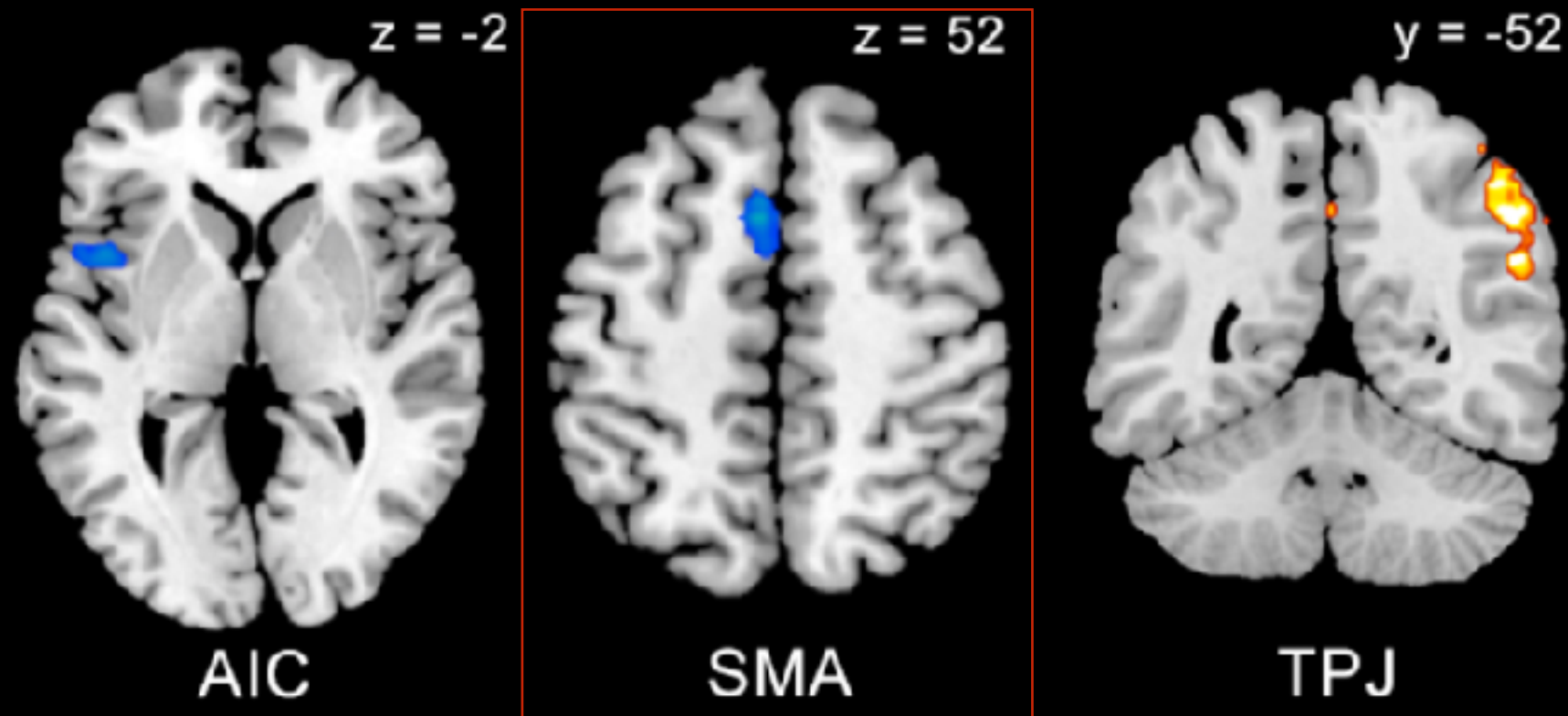


## Group 2: Tulpamancers



# Preliminary results

Charismatic prayer > Improvised spoken prayer



## Supplementary Motor Area (SMA)

### Activation:

Unconscious preparation of movement (Soon et al., *Nat Neurosci*, 2008)

Paying attention to the intention to move (Lau et al., *Science*, 2004)

### Deactivation:

Hallucinating vs. imagining a voice (Raij et al., *Neuroimage: Clin*, 2012)

Hypnotic alien control and thought insertion (Walsh et al., *Cortex*, 2015)



# Some oft-reported benefits of tulpamancy

Social connection

Alleviates loneliness, depression, anxiety

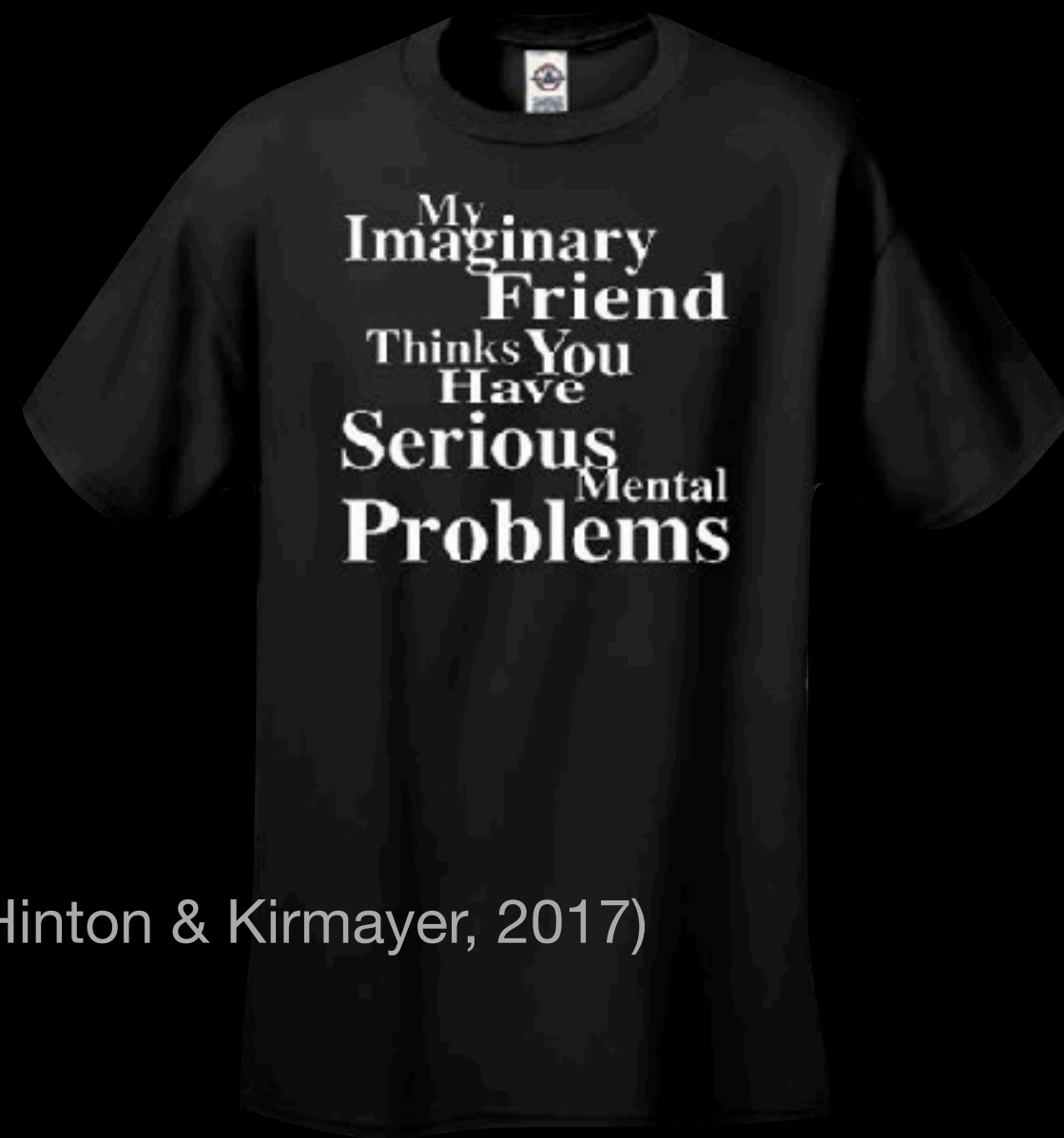
Guidance, help with making decisions

Creativity, thinking outside the box

Breaking bad habits

Confidence and social skills

A sense of the plasticity of the self? (see Hinton & Kirmayer, 2017)



## *Seeing Oneself Being Seen*

### *Chapter 1 of Into the Loop, by Samuele Collu*

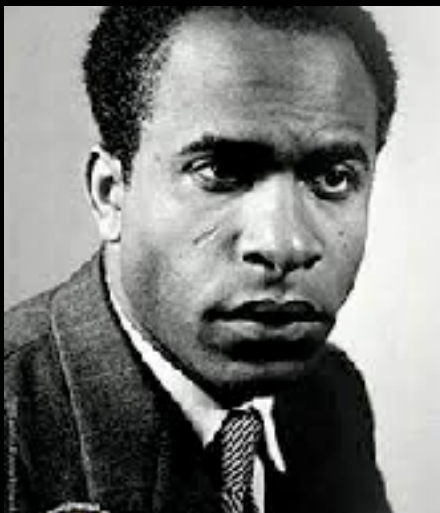
“Sometimes I start writing and I feel this punch in the stomach... The imagined audience gets to me, it gets hold of my stomach and it paralyzes me... I imagine the scoffing face of that person who said this is not anthropology, that I am too self-referential, and that this is not rigorous scholarship. Then the smiling face of a friend takes shape in front of me. They like how I write and what I am saying. I start feeling their loving gaze and slowly my typing gains speed, precision, and intention... I get excited, I feel that this project is fun, and I love every aspect of it. Sentences start flowing, things make sense again. But that’s because I am writing for that friend, the friend with the loving gaze that makes me flourish.”

-Collu, unpublished draft

# Tulpamancy as a therapeutic technology of the gaze



**Lacan:** Our sense of self is formed through seeing our reflection in the eyes of the Other, especially our early caregivers



**Fanon and Mulvey:** We internalize the (often oppressive) gazes of our cultural worlds into our sense of self—i.e., white gaze, male gaze



**Foucault:** We can respond with “technologies of the self”, practices and operations to deliberately modify our minds and bodies in line with our ethical values and desires

See also Veissière et al, 2020  
on Thinking Through Other Minds



# Thank you!

Be in touch...

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Thanks for help on this project:

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Jewish General Hospital

