

INTRODUCTION



The known is finite, the unknown infinite; spiritually we find ourselves on a tiny island in the middle of a boundless ocean of the inexplicable. It is our task, from generation to generation, to drain a small amount of additional land.

— Thomas Henry Huxley, 1887

A shaman is someone who is already dead and thus has no fear of death or life.

—Don Eduardo Calderon (Peruvian shaman)

Shamanism: Origins and Key Features

Shamans and the phenomena associated with shamanism have intrigued Westerners ever since the Europeans began returning from their exploratory voyages of the 'New World' (America) five centuries ago. They were telling shocking but fascinating tales about individuals performing peculiar rites and communicating with spirits. Considering the dominant role of the Catholic Church in shaping people's views at that time, those individuals were labelled as servants of Satan (Narby and Huxley 2001). When Russians began colonising the 'wild east' of Siberia during the seventeenth century, they too encountered people who were allegedly summoning ancestral spirits by entering a trance, through

singing, dancing and drumming. Those individuals, who were among the Evenki people of the Tungus language family, were called *saman*.¹

Although the word 'shaman' and its anthropological derivative 'shamanism' was originally a culture-specific term confined to northern and central Asia, it nonetheless became a transcultural category designating a similar set of practices and understandings concerning the cosmos, spirits and human needs that occur in various parts of the world, more frequently in small-scale hunter-gatherer societies (DuBois 2009: 6). However, the original, ethnographically specific meaning of the term 'shaman' has been to a large extent lost. Known through Russian and deriving from the Tungusic term *saman*, it signifies someone who is 'excited, moved, raised'. This is descriptive of shaking – one of shamans' fundamental characteristics (Lewis 1971: 51; Casanowicz, cited in Peters and Price-Williams 1980: 408). The term shaman has been applied so generally and indiscriminately that it eventually became a label for any kind of similar magico-religious practitioners and mystics from other parts of the world (Sullivan 1994: 29; Furst 1994: 5). Shamanism became a broad category, taking many forms and definitions. Consequently, the problem of defining what is a shaman and shamanism and what is not has been a point of a long-standing debate and controversy.

Shamanism has existed throughout time in almost all societies and continents from Australia to South America. It has been eclipsed by dominant religions and political systems while in some places it virtually became extinct and pertinent knowledge was lost due to encroaching modernity. In many parts of the world shamans have been persecuted and brutally killed. Nevertheless, as Vitebsky (2003: 278) commented, shamanism 'is characterised by a chameleon-like elusiveness' and has survived in one form or another until the present day. In many traditional societies shamanic practices are being revitalised and reinvented. Shamanism has not only survived, it continues to arouse academic interest and general curiosity, taking new forms and meanings, especially in the last sixty years. The upsurge of interest in shamanism and shamanic healing in the West took place during a period of major social and political change worldwide and within the context of an increased interest in nature religions and neopaganism of the New Age movement. Shamanism became a spiritual attitude and a prominent approach to self-discovery in a trendy New Age fashion among the Western urban middle classes. In this newly emerging, entirely positive interpretation, shamanism is 'rediscovered' as a way of finding 'our lost' connections with nature, and provides a path of self-realisation, healing and empowerment. Within this framework, certain elements of shamanism, namely its

positive aspects, are emphasised and selectively stripped of their cultural contexts, while other, more negative and destructive components were intentionally left out. There is a widespread opinion that great shamans no longer exist. Truly, nowadays it is difficult to encounter shamanism in the way it was practised by the ancestors of various peoples of the Siberian tundra and taiga, North American savannas and deserts or African and Amazonian rainforests.

In Siberia, the sort of grand shamans that existed a few centuries ago are now almost extinct due to severe persecution by the Soviet state. The neo-shamanistic revival during the 1990s influenced by the New Age paradigm and globalisation is an entirely different phenomenon (Vitebsky 2005; see also Jokic 2008b). In South America, Indigenous peoples suffered great population losses from epidemics triggered by European colonisers. Some ethnic groups lost their traditional shamanic knowledge and contacts with their ancestral shamans, while in some parts of Amazonia shamanism took new syncretic forms (Chaumeil 1992; Homan 2011; Luzar and Fragoso 2013).

The Yanomami are one of the last and largest remaining Amazonian groups where traditional shamanism is still widely practised relatively free from outside influences, as it has been practised from time immemorial. Yanomami shamanism is by no means exempt from the peril of disappearing. On the contrary, as this book will show, the living and dead shamans (ancestral spirits) are in danger of vanishing due to an encroaching danger of cosmic proportions. Despite many problems and culture changes that the Yanomami people have been facing ever since their sustained contact with national society in the last sixty years, the vast majority of their population relies on shamans for protection and healing. This book is about them and their practices.

Yanomami Shamanism: A Cross-cultural Perspective

Archaeological evidence suggests that shamans have existed since the earliest Palaeolithic times. Some scholars have speculated that certain Upper Palaeolithic cave paintings related to hunting magic are depicting shamanic visions in trance (Lewis-Williams 2002; Whitley 2009). Shamanism is certainly an ancient and near-universal phenomenon with various culture-specific forms and manifestations. Furst (1994: 2) considers an archaic '*shamanistic worldview* as originally the common property of humankind' whose main components include: feminine earth and masculine sky; reciprocal relationships between human beings and spirits; and animals and plants each having their spirit

masters or 'owners'. The shamanistic outlook assumes all components of a phenomenal world – including human beings, plants, animals, rivers, mountains, wind and celestial bodies – have their animate soul essences and a certain kind of intentionality of consciousness akin to humans. From those intangible essences of phenomenal appearances the material components of the world originated. Shamans are specific individuals capable of not only perceiving but also manipulating those intangible essences of things. They are the mediators '... between the visible and invisible, the generally known and largely unknown' (DuBois 2009: 82). A shaman's vocation is not only deemed the oldest human profession (Basilov 1997) but shamans are also considered to be 'the world's most versatile specialists' (Dow 1986: 6). Some authors (Furst 1994; Riches 1994) claim that shamanism is the origin and the key to all of the world's religions and all cosmologies; while others (e.g., Gilberg 1984) proposed that shamanism is as old as the human society itself. Verily, in diverse mythopoeic traditions the true origins of shamans derive from a distant, pre-cosmic realm of the original ancestors (Sullivan 1988). Primordial shamans were beings with mixed human and animal qualities, able to change their outer form at will. They are the bringers of knowledge and the founders of culture, providing the model for later human shamans (Kalweit 2000: 9). These original ancestors lost their primordial condition of immortality and transformed into material components of the universe, including human beings, plants and animals. The end of primordium and the emergence of a permanently open cut of human existence resulted in everlasting bifurcation of the masculine sky from the feminine earth. However, the legacy of the primordial epoch became an exclusive property of human shamans. Through various methods of accomplishing trances, shamans have been able to partake in the ever-present primordial condition, undergoing multiple transformations and accessing different cosmic regions (Eliade 1989 [1951]).

There have been many different definitions and interpretations of what a shaman is, but it has been widely agreed that the ability to control spirits and accomplish trances through socially recognised rituals is one of shamans' pivotal characteristics. They are communally acknowledged professionals who have a personal relationship with their spirit helpers, which they employ when dealing with various problems of their clients and communities at large (DuBois 2009). Thus, for shamans, entering a trance is not the goal in itself but a means to an end. Only entranced shamans are able to communicate with spirits or metamorphose into one of them, negotiate or effect cures and undertake trans-corporeal journeys to different cosmic locales in search for missing souls, etc. They are

custodians of mythical lore, which they pass on to generations. They are diviners, weather manipulators, psychopomps, healers and harm-doers. But also, they are often skilled hunters and political negotiators. The shaman is a multifunctional being.

Shamans can enter a trance by various means, including meditation, drumming, dancing, chanting, sensory deprivation, fasting and the ingestion of hallucinogenic substances, etc. While the vast majority of scholars agree that an ability to master trance and control the spirits is one of the most prominent aspects of shamanism, they ascribe different interpretations to what constitutes a genuine shamanistic trance. The terms 'trance' and 'ecstasy' have been employed inconsistently and interchangeably to describe shamanistic trance, but they are, as Rouget (1985: 6) argues, two distinctive states in opposition and by no means synonyms. A state of ecstasy, for Rouget, involves a profound, mystical religious experience characterised by sensory deprivation, immobility, silence and solitude. A trance state is the opposite: it is noisy, public, active, frenzied and hyper sensory. Rouget associates trance primarily with possession, dissociation and post-trance amnesia, while ecstasy, for him, is an entirely conscious experience. In the end, he admits that the difference between the two states is not always clear-cut. Therefore, they are regarded as 'constituting the opposite poles of a continuum, which are linked by an uninterrupted series of possible intermediate states, so that it is sometimes difficult to determine which of the two is involved' (Rouget 1985: 11).

For Shirokogoroff (1935: 271), spirit possession is a principal constitutive element of (Tungusian) shamanistic trance, while for others (De Heusch 2007 [1971]; Eliade 1989 [1951]) the main aspect of shamanistic trance (which they call ecstasy) is an extra-corporeal journey into different cosmic regions. Yet Lewis (1971: 49) argues that shamanistic ecstasy may involve both spirit possession and an out-of-body journey; the two phenomena can coexist or exist separately. While Lewis does not differentiate between shamanism and possession, Rouget (1985: 20) argues that there is a fundamental difference between spirit incorporation in shamanism and possession. The main difference between shamanic and possession trance, according to Rouget, is that in shamanic trance shamans gain total control over the spirits they incorporate and consciously journey with the help of those spirits, while in possession trance it is the possessing deity or spirit who completely controls the body of the shaman, dominating the subject, and in the majority of cases the shaman has no memory of what has taken place during the possession period. However, the boundary between the two states is often blurry and both types of experience may occur in one and the same person (Rouget 1985: 23).

The Yanomami equivalent of a shaman is a *shapori* or *hekura*. The latter term also denotes the shaman's auxiliary spirits. All *hekura* are shamans and all shamans have *hekura* powers. Both shamans and *hekura* are of the same nature. The Yanomami shamanistic complex or the sum of *shapori* activities involving *hekura* spirits is known as *shaporimou* or *hekuramou*. The common archaic motifs that the Yanomami shamans and others across Amazonia share with their counterparts from other parts of the world include (to mention but a few): fasting, sexual abstinence, initiatory sickness, symbolic death through dismemberment, ecstatic trance, involvement of helping spirits, metamorphosis into animals, soul loss and retrieval, lodgement of pathogenic objects and their extraction through sucking and blowing, a stratified cosmos and cosmic axis, secret languages, great ancestral proto-shamans and culture heroes, divination, telepathy, weather shamanism and assurance of game in hunting (Crocker 1985; Eliade 1989 [1951]; Furst 1987; Wilbert 1972).

Yanomami *shapori* are predominantly, if not exclusively, men. Save for several reported cases of female *shapori* in the past, women are largely excluded from shamanistic activities. The ancestral spirits are customarily passed down from father to son or sometimes from uncles to their nephews. In some instances, the spirits are inherited after a *shapori*'s death, when his soul essence fuses with the multiplicity of his personal spirits. Disembodied anew, these spirits wait to become reincarnated into new candidates. Reincarnation of *hekura* spirits is thus one of the most important aspects of Yanomami shamanism. Caroline Humphrey (1996) similarly observes that the Daur *yadgan* (shaman) after their death fuse with their tutelary spirits, waiting to become re-embodied into some future candidate.

To become a *shapori* and receive his² father's spirits, the Yanomami candidate must endure intense experiences of successive aggressive acts by the ancestral *hekura* spirits, culminating in death and subsequent renewal. They scorch him with fire, devour him, pierce him with an arrow, cut his body with a machete then reassemble it to form a new person with extraordinary properties. Concurrently, the candidate undergoes self-metamorphosis, implying a radical rupture of consciousness and self-dissolution through ritual death and subsequent holistic renewal. In the words of Kalweit (2000: 1), 'Their [shaman's] nature is bent, broken, reduced to worthlessness, and then immaculately fashioned afresh'. As the future shaman sacrifices himself to *hekura*, they subsequently become his personal allies imbuing him with a broad variety of powers and capabilities, such as the ability to observe from great distances or look inside others' bodies; to enter jaguars and snakes and direct their movements or transform into an eagle and fly.

Akin to other, similar types of professionals from around the world, the ability to enter a trance and control spirits is one of the key abilities of a Yanomami shapori, and this book, especially Chapter Four, deals at length with this phenomenon. Shamanistic performances, especially the trances of the Yanomami shamans, are very lively, hyper sensory communal events, involving intersubjectively shared experiences. In this regard, they would fit well into Rouget's above mentioned definition of what constitutes a trance, albeit the entranced Yanomami shamans are entirely conscious of their experiences, which for Rouget is the main characteristic of mystical and religious ecstatic states. Mindful of Rouget's differentiation between trance and ecstasy, I do not use these two terms in my study as synonyms. However, I do use the term ecstasy in the more general sense of an emotion of a thrill, excitement, elevation and movement of the shaman's soul that is strongly present in Yanomami shamanistic practices, as will become evident in the book. The shaman's ecstasy, understood in this sense, is also their spirit helpers' ecstasy, for when he is intoxicated his spirits are also intoxicated. They dance and sing together with their host in ecstasy, a movement that stirs up the shaman's soul until he reaches the threshold of death, a gateway to a trance state. We will see how being in a trance is not only a specific state of consciousness equivalent to death but also a 'gateway' for shapori, to the primordial sphere of free transformations. Regarding the subject of spirit possession, Butt Colson's depiction of the Akawaio shaman and his spirit helpers resembles the Yanomami shapori and his hekura helpers. She writes that the spirits dwell in the Akawaio shaman's body permanently, thus he is in a state of 'constant latent possession but only occasionally, at séances, in full trance' (Butt Colson, cited in Lewis 1971: 47).

The Yanomami employ two terms when referring to the effects of *epena* snuff and shamanism: *shi wāri* and *nomai*. The first is a general phrase meaning 'being under the influence of *epena* snuff' (frequently involving shaking), while the second, more specific term means 'to die', referring to the peak moment when the shaman enters a trance. Therefore, the Yanomami equivalent for trance is consistent with the original meaning of the word. Etymologically, the word 'trance' comes from the old French *transir* ('to go over' or 'to die'), which is similar to the English 'to pass away' (Sansone 1994: 24). Each time a shapori enters a trance he relives his death, as we will see later. The initiatory death experience or a shapori's first trance opens up his intentionality of consciousness towards new horizons of perception. During this time, they experience themselves journeying to the sky, encountering various hekura beings and receiving knowledge from them. However, during their subsequent activities, the entranced shapori may only metamorphose into various hekura without

necessarily departing their bodies. They undertake journeys to different cosmic strata (ascending to the sky or descending to the underworld) to recover missing souls or accompany souls of the deceased to their resting place. But they also frequently travel in spirit to other terrestrial locale (i.e., to enemy villages) to inflict harm or death, as we will see in various examples throughout the book. Therefore, as DuBois (2009: 51) rightfully claims, shamans' journeys are not only vertical movements upward and downward (as they have been frequently described), but also horizontal in a seen, terrestrial world.

Shamanism as a technique of consciousness par excellence has been frequently associated with the term 'altered states of consciousness' (ASC). Ludwig defines ASC as:

any mental state(s) induced by various physiological, psychological or pharmacological manoeuvres or agents, which can be recognised subjectively by the individual himself (or by an objective observer of the individual) as representing a sufficient deviation in subjective experience or psychological functioning from certain general norms for that individual during alert, waking consciousness. (1966: 225–26)

He identifies the following general characteristics of ASC: alterations in thinking; disturbed sense of time; loss of control; emotional change; change in body image; perceptual distortions (visual and auditory hallucinations); change in what is perceived as meaningful or significant; inability to communicate experience; feelings of rejuvenation; and hyper suggestibility (1966: 229–34). Evidently, for him, 'altered' equals pathological deviance from 'normal', ordinary waking consciousness.³ Atkinson (1992: 310) writes that in their interpretations of shamanism behavioural scientists '... sceptical about the ontological basis of spirit worlds, have found epistemological bedrock in the concept of altered psychological states'. Crapanzano (1977: 11) warns against such a tendency to reduce and consequently distort the spirit idiom into a secondary, more officially acceptable 'psychological' idiom. Consequently, the entire phenomenon of shamanism, in all its complexity, together with the accompanying cosmological systems and their denizens, has often been reduced to a mere psychophysical functioning. For example, an American psychiatrist Roger Walsh in his book *The Spirit of Shamanism* (1990) provided a thorough analysis of shamanistic states of consciousness, contrasting them with those experienced in some Eastern traditions, namely yoga and meditation. However, he reduced shamanism to a mere psychological state, denying ontological status to anything existing outside of the mind, and regarding, for example, the cosmic layers as

mere mental constructions while ‘spirits are mind-creations’ (ibid.: 43). For Walsh (and indeed many others) to assume that there may exist something outside of the mind it would be ‘an enormous philosophical leap’ (1990: 11). Thus he prefers to stay on safer ground and avoid such a consideration when defining shamanism. Almost twenty years later, he wrote another book, *The World of Shamanism* (2007), admitting that he never conducted fieldwork or had any direct experiences with shamanism, except in Michael Harner’s ‘core shamanism’ workshops. He is still not sure how to treat the ontological status of spirits (among other things) and introduces the term ‘incommensurability’ when referring to the problem of interpreting differing worldviews. Thus he writes:

Ontological indeterminacy implies that we may be unable to determine the precise nature or the ontological status of something: because the available data may be interpreted in many ways (undetermination of theory by data), and we have no absolute method by which to decide which interpretations are best (incommensurability). (Walsh 2007: 148)

Rather than deciding which interpretations are best suited for us, a good starting point is to employ Husserl’s method of transcendental phenomenological reduction or epoché, which he laid out in his monumental work *Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology* (1960 [1906]). In a nutshell, epoché is a mental manoeuvre of bracketing or temporarily suspending the whole self-given objectified world together with an accompanying naturalistic and positivistic attitude to explore the reality of human consciousness and recover the world as a phenomenon. In other words, reduction in a phenomenological sense is a systematic process leading back to the epistemological origin, which, for Husserl, is a concrete transcendental subjectivity that constitutes the world. Bracketing involves ‘putting aside’, temporarily, questions concerning the rational, objective and ontological status of ideas and beliefs to grasp better the way in which they appear in consciousness. Husserl envisioned transcendental phenomenology as ontology of lifeworlds. The guiding principle employed in regional lifeworld ontologies is the world of a priori structure (Steinbock 1994). This a priori world is the lifeworld – that is, the original, intuitable world of immediate and shared experience existing independently and a priori to any theoretical reflection or objectification. As opposed to the scientific objective world, the lifeworld is given in direct evidence. With such an approach, spirits, dreams, cosmic layers and all other phenomena related to shamanism are treated as empirical realities of human consciousness rather than shamans’ interpretations, phantasies or mind inventions.

The Book's Subject Matter and its Guiding Principles

The main focus of my field study has been the systematic inquiry of the nature of consciousness involved in Yanomami shamanism and indigenous responses to cultural changes brought about through prolonged contact with criollos.⁴ The subsequent subject matter of this book is centred upon experiential and phenomenological aspects of Yanomami shamanism, shamans' roles, activities, their socio-cosmic position and their shifting roles in the context of culture change. Particular emphasis has been placed on the shamanistic initiation, the gradual mastery of trance, shamans' metamorphic abilities and methods they use for augmenting personal powers through the acquisition of additional spirits. The book also examines the nature of shamanistic engagement with spirits in both ritual and non-ritual contexts and at both the intracommunal level (defensive and protective activities) and intercommunal level (offensive acts). The dialectic between offensive and defensive shamanism forms a significant part of my broader interpretive objectives.

The analysis of shamans' social position on the intra- and intercommunal levels is broadened through examination of their activities and manifest powers within the overall cosmological matrix. The book focuses here on knowledge, in its broadest sense, generated through shamans' personal experiences and their hekura spirit helpers. One of my research objectives was to explore the full extent of sources of shamanistic manifest powers and forms of knowledge, which become accessible to shamans by means of a psychotropic snuff known as *yopo* or *epeña*. The book focuses on a symbiotic, interface relationship between shamans and their embodied hekura assistants as sources of a shaman's knowledge, and how this knowledge is further articulated between shamans and members of their community and across various other communities. The knowledge transmission beyond a shapori and his hekura spirits takes place within the context of collective rituals involving interactions between shamans and other co-participants on the level of intersubjectively shared experiences.

Another vital aspect that the book investigates is Yanomami understanding of multiple soul components that together constitute a person, and how they relate to each other as well as to different aspects of the Yanomami stratified cosmos. This is then linked with shamanism and broadened with the analysis of various modalities of the shaman's consciousness and its intentional structure, as well as the nature of the worlds in which shamans operate. Too often shamans are depicted as mediators between the natural and supernatural worlds, as a consequence of the Christian Aristotelian legacy. Therefore, one of the objectives of my field project has been to investigate one tacit ontological premise of

the Yanomami cosmos and its spirit denizens. The book subsequently explores the nature of the 'other-worldliness'; other-worldly dimensions are treated as empirical realities of human consciousness and not as 'mental constructions and mind creations'.

In this regard, one of the guiding principles for this study has been the concept of intentionality as the essence of consciousness – one of Husserl's central insights. Intentionality signifies the directedness of consciousness towards the world through intentional acts (perception, imagination, signification) directed at intentional objects (Husserl 1960 [1906]). Consciousness is always conscious of something, and this something is an intentional object. The term 'object' is understood in the widest possible, all-inclusive sense (Gurwitsch 1974 [1967]). There are four main characteristics of Husserl's intentionality. Firstly, consciousness is a continuous flow or a stream containing a raw data in the form of appearances. When intended as objects, such appearances form a straightforward meaning, as they follow one another in sequential order, thus building up the experience of an object and presenting it to our consciousness in its fullness. The pre-given object in this sense is a point of reference from which raw data from the stream of consciousness interprets its meaning (Spiegelberg 1969: 110). Secondly, intentionality works on establishing the identity of, and integration between, different modes of intentional acts intended at various aspects of an object as it appears to consciousness. The third attribute of intentionality is intuitive fulfilment whereby each aspect of an object refers to related aspects of modes of consciousness. This in turn generates a horizon of meaning. Lastly, constitutive intention aims at self-constitution and object constitution. The constituted object from a phenomenological perspective loses its pre-given originality and instead becomes something originating in the act of constituting itself as *eidos* or essence (Husserl 1985: XXV). Intentionality of consciousness discloses its horizontal structure. Consciousness is not a thing in itself but a process constituted through engagement of human beings in the world. In other words, there is no meaning in ego itself isolated from its surrounding environment. The world in its totality is experienced as unity and wholeness. Therefore, the intentional structure of the world is signified by infinity, in a sense of endlessness and openness of our experience towards the world (*ibid.*: XXXVIII).

One of the key objectives in my field research was to capture the raw data of the continuous flow of the candidate's perceptive consciousness unfolding during shamanistic initiation. In this regard, large segments of Chapter Four are based on the transcription of the initiate's direct experiences as revealed in his chants. This information is presented in the 'ethnographic present'. We will see how the candidate's stream

of consciousness unfolding during initiation is directed towards the intended objects of perception; in this case the incoming hekura spirits. Merleau-Ponty (1962: 303), in his study of perception, gives primacy to the experience of perceiving objects; there can be no object without perceiving it first. Things exist only because we can perceive them in the first place. Perception starts with or in the body rather than in objects (or from an objective point of view). Merleau-Ponty calls this pre-objective. Perception is open-ended and indeterminate; there is no limit to what we can perceive.

If our perception “ends in objects”, the goal of phenomenological anthropology of perception is to capture that moment of transcendence in which perception begins, and, in the midst of its arbitrariness and indeterminacy, constitutes and is constituted by culture. (Csordas 1990: 9)

To the extent that my approach to dealing with the essential aspects of Yanomami shamanism is phenomenological, this perspective also applies to the shamanistic activities in an historical and a political context of culture contact and change. The book accordingly explores issues such as the shamans’ perception of and responses to introduced diseases, the dynamics of relationships between doctors, shamans and Yanomami patients, and Yanomami attitudes towards biomedicine in a pluralistic setting, such as the rural health post in Platanal. Finally, the last section of the book deals with general crises brought about through epidemics of introduced diseases and shamans’ responses thereof, including their changing role in a context of culture change.

The book’s central idea is based on a holographic principle,⁵ which is implicitly embedded in the nature of the Yanomami macrocosm, the *shapono* (collective house), the human body and shamanism, namely within the shapori-hekura relationship. The term ‘hologram’ derives from the Greek *holos* meaning ‘whole’. The basic premise of a holographic paradigm is that the whole is contained within each of its constitutive parts or that each part is equal to the whole. This is the opposite from the conventional view that the whole is the sum of its parts and therefore greater than each part. Thus, the key focus of the book is the tension between the one and the many; the totality and its fractions or the micro and macro dimensions of existence. The Yanomami perceive cosmos as a stratified totality enclosed within the abdomen of a giant cosmic snake (boa), which is a widespread notion in Amazonian cosmologies throughout the continent. I will argue that the entire Yanomami cosmos is implicitly holographic in its nature, which is explicitly reflected in the name of each cosmic stratum. Specifically, each cosmic layer superimposed on top

of the other is a distinct world, albeit interrelated with all other strata. All together, they form different structural parts or changing conditions of the cosmic whole as a set of different stages from new to old and from male to female. In other words, each cosmic stratum represents a state of the cosmos or condition of the totality of a fragmented cosmic boa's abdomen. The topmost layer is cosmos in the making, perceived as the young abdomen akin to a small child's, while the lowest layer is described as an old woman's abdomen. Together, all strata constitute the primal cosmic totality of the 'world body', which is a term for the classical idea of the macrocosm. It is an image of a primordial snake as a holographic whole bounded by the snake's skin, and encapsulating the totality of existence in the past, present and future. It is through the earth level that the male and female cosmic principles converge at the moment of the regeneration, transformation, and death and rebirth of the universe. The earth disc, where the Yanomami live, is a central place of manifestation of cosmic order. The book will show how this mythic image of a cosmic boa becomes fully manifested through the medium of a shaman's body during shamanistic initiation. The shaman's body thus becomes a microcosmic totality bounded by the skin, which is accordingly dotted in the manner that resembles the pattern on the snake. Therefore, the book aims to show how explicit knowledge of the cosmos is generated implicitly through the lived experience of the shamanistic initiation or what I term the cosmogenesis and the construction of the cosmic body, or the shaman's corporeal microcosm, which itself is a replica of the Yanomami cosmos and a template of its full manifestation. The shaman's cosmic body here is not treated as an object upon which culture is inscribed. Nor is the body a source of symbols whose cultural meaning and social significance can be explained in terms of various discourses. Shamans' bodily experiences described and analysed throughout the book are not 'symbolic acts' of something outside themselves. Body is the subjective source and an intersubjective ground of shared cultural experiences. In the words of Csordas (1990: 5), 'The body is not an object to be studied in relation to culture, but is to be considered as the subject of culture or as the existential ground of culture'.

During initiation, the candidate embodies a number of hekura or spirits of the ancestral shamans who enact ritual death and subsequently become his allies and future assistants. In the process, the candidate himself becomes hekura, which is a synonym for shapori (shaman). I argue that the relationship between a shapori and his embodied hekura is implicitly holographic as the book aims to demonstrate. Through initiation, a shapori becomes a unified multiplicity of all his embodied hekura but also one of the hekura. He is simultaneously one and many; a part of the whole

but also the whole in itself containing other wholes – all other incarnated hekura. My argument is based on the prevailing evidence of the nature of a shapori's implicitly holographic post-mortem consciousness. A shapori's initiatory death experience involves self-dissolution and the subsequent emergence of a new being reconstituted as a multiplicity of various hekura selves. After his biological death, disembodied hekura disperse into various directions and his soul accordingly multiplies as each hekura retains an imprint of the shapori's persona, thus becoming a carrier of his soul image.

The holographic principle is moreover embedded in the nature of shapono or the Yanomami communal dwelling. More specifically, each shapono is a micro replica of the Yanomami macrocosm and a site of its full manifestation, which becomes fully evident during shamanistic rituals. The multiplicity of shaponos across the Yanomami territory (and hence on top of earth's cosmic stratum) represents a multiplicity of macrocosmic manifestations of a cosmic order. The whole (of the cosmos) replicated in the structure of each shapono is simultaneously manifested as many. The part is equal to the whole. I will also argue that the holographic principle is implicitly evident in Yanomami knowledge of the human self-constitution, namely in some of its immaterial soul essences, as revealed through shamanism. More specifically, each physical body part and internal organ contains a certain amount of its own immaterial vital essence called *pei puhi* and *pei mi āmo*. Each amount of these soul essences is part of the whole body, but at the same time it is in itself whole – both the parts and the whole share the same substance akin to a drop of ocean and the whole ocean. When shapori treat a sick person with their hekura assistants, they repeatedly take 'samples' of vital essence of the whole body to determine which of its parts is affected. The whole is contained in each of its parts. The same principle of part determining or affecting the whole is also evident in so-called 'footprint sorcery'. Here, the sorcerer takes earth with someone's footprint in order to inflict harm and death. The footprint contains an essence or part of that person open to manipulation. The part stands for the whole. Finally, the damaging effect of increased contacts with Westerners has resulted in crises of cosmic proportions, which threaten to bring the Yanomami world to an end. This is articulated as a looming threat of the collapse of the sky and the resulting disintegration of the cosmic order equalling the end of the world. Yanomami shapori claim it is only they who are capable of holding the sky up and maintaining its distance from the earth. If we take into consideration that each shapori is a self-sustained cosmic unit and a micro replica of the Yanomami macrocosm, I argue that the death of each shaman is simultaneously the death of the world. Multiple deaths

of shapori and the failure to continue with the process of incarnation of ancestral hekura would eventually result in an overall sky collapse, which only shapori are able to maintain.

Fieldwork Setting and Methodology

Yanomami (or Yanomamö) is the name commonly used to refer to members of an entire ethnic group of 25,000 people living in approximately 350 villages in the border region of Brazil and Venezuela. But, in fact, they are one of four culturally and linguistically related subgroups (the others are Yanomam, Ninam and Sanema), together forming a unique linguistic family. The Yanomami (including to a lesser extent Sanema), numbering somewhere around 13,500, is the most numerous subgroup in Venezuela, living in the Upper Orinoco and Rio Negro municipalities of Amazonas State. Their territory stretches from the Parima Mountains in the east down to the Brazilian border, including the adjacent areas of the Brazilian state of Amazonas. On the northern side, the Yanomami border with their Sanema neighbours around headwaters of the Padamo, Metacuni and Ocamo rivers. The southernmost part of the Yanomami territory in Venezuela (where this research was conducted) incorporates the upper reaches of the Orinoco, Mavaca and Siapa rivers. The majority of their territory is situated within Parima Tapirapecó National Park, in the far south-east corner of Amazonas State, Venezuela, a large section of which was declared the Upper Orinoco-Casiquiare Biosphere Reserve in 1991. In this ecologically rich region, the predominant types of vegetation are dense evergreen lowland, submontane and montane forests and forested mountain ranges, including some secondary savannas in the southern parts of the Parima highlands.

All in all, I spent just over a year living in the two Yanomami communities of the Mahekoto-theri and Sheroana-theri (see Figure 0.1). The first is situated in Platanal, a Salesian Mission established on the riverbank, approximately six to eight hours by boat upriver from the municipal capital La Esmeralda. The mission site was founded in 1950 after the Mahekoto-theri people settled on the left bank of the Orinoco River, where they have remained ever since. Nowadays, Platanal is a meeting place for many Yanomami coming to exchange trade items and visit their relatives. There is a bilingual school for children, a rural health clinic with a doctor in charge and an adjacent hospital building. During the second part of my fieldwork, I lived in a small inland community of Sheroana-theri linked through kinship ties with some Yanomami from the Mahekoto-theri. To get to their shapono from Platanal, one has to

travel upriver by boat (for approximately three hours) to the confluence of the Shanishani River and Orinoco where the forest trail begins, then walk for about six to eight hours. Sheroana-theri and other neighbouring communities belong to the area of influence of the Platanal health post. From the point of view of the health system, these communities are considered intermediary by being situated midway between riverine villages with frequent contact with national society and those from the Siapa River Valley to the south with little or no contact.⁶ However, during the time of my fieldwork, medical visits to those intermediary communities south of the Orinoco were virtually non-existent. The main reason for this was the strenuous commitment to Platanal and a lack of personnel and logistics to undertake demanding hikes through the forest. The main reason for choosing these two communities for my research was to compare attitudes and responses to health problems among those Yanomami exposed to a permanent medical presence and those with sporadic or non-existent medical intervention. While I was living with the Sheroana-theri, I had a few opportunities to briefly visit the more remote communities of the Toritha-theri and Kayurewë-theri (now called Hyomitha), a one and two day walk respectively to the south of the Sheroana-theri. I gathered some information from their shapori and other Yanomami regarding their attitudes and responses to health problems and participated in a few shamanistic sessions.

I arrived in Platanal for the first time in June 1999, armed with all the necessary government permits, personal equipment, food supplies and obligatory trade items and gifts. To get to Platanal, I first had to catch a two-hour flight in a small commercial aircraft from the capital of Amazonas State, Puerto Ayacucho, to the capital of the municipality of the Upper Orinoco, La Esmeralda. Beyond La Esmeralda, further up the Orinoco River where the Yanomami territory begins, is a restricted area with no organised public transport. I did not have any prearranged transport for the trip from La Esmeralda to Platanal. Before I left Puerto Ayacucho, I went to the Salesian headquarters to meet up with a missionary, Father Jose Bortolli, who spent twenty years living in Platanal. During our brief meeting, he gave me some useful advice and told me that upon arriving in Platanal I should look for Jacinto Serowë – an influential newly emerging Yanomami leader. After a two-hour flight above ‘the green ocean’, the plane finally touched La Esmeralda airstrip. As soon as I got out, I spotted a Yanomami man standing nearby and introduced myself. It was Jacinto. He did not know I was coming, and commented how he was waiting to pick up some supplies for the Platanal mission site and was returning to Platanal that same afternoon. He agreed to take me with him and offered me a place to stay. Eight hours later we finally reached the Platanal dock

and it was already pitch dark. When Jacinto pulled out his flashlight, we saw a group of Yanomami standing on the shore watching us. They helped us unload the boat and then we went to Jacinto's house. Jacinto then took me to the missionary residence where I met Howard and Olga – the couple running the mission. I also met Jacinto's older brother, Alfredo Aherowë – the Mahekoto-theri headman – and a few other Yanomami men. I explained briefly the reason for my visit and showed them my permits. Howard and Alfredo did not object and welcomed me to Platanal; however Alfredo said that he would have to call a village meeting the next day and let the community decide if I should stay or not. 'It is ultimately they who decide, regardless of your government's permits', Howard told me quietly. 'If they reject you, nothing can be done!' The following morning, all Yanomami gathered in the shapono's open area. Jacinto told them how he had found me in La Esmeralda and that I could stay at his house. Alfredo then talked about my interests in shamanism and my intended research objectives; he did not have any objections to my stay in Platanal and asked if anyone was against it. A few men spoke and Alfredo translated to my relief that they all agreed with him. But, before I could get the final green light for my project, Alfredo had to address the shapori, who were sitting together in one corner, watching the meeting. One of them got up and spoke. It was Alfredo's father-in-law, Enano, the most prominent shapori in Platanal. He wanted to know if I only intended to observe their activities or participate as well. I replied that I was interested in both and the meeting ended in my favour.

Jacinto became my host, my translator and a very good friend throughout my stay in Platanal. Over the ensuing days and weeks, I gradually became acquainted with the place, its inhabitants and the dynamics of their quotidian life. From the beginning I noticed certain animosity and competitiveness between Jacinto and Alfredo, which sometimes turned into an open quarrel. The Platanal Yanomami were accordingly divided. At one point, Jacinto and his kinsfolk left the mainstream community after a heated dispute and constructed separate houses nearby. They have been living there ever since. From the outset, this schizoid situation had put me in a delicate situation because both brothers were competing for my attention, food and material goods; I was always trying to keep a balanced relationship between the two. After some time, I got to know all Yanomami personally by their (Spanish) names. Since most of them could speak Spanish we had no trouble communicating with each other. Nevertheless, one of my first priorities was to learn some basics of the Yanomami language before attempting the second stage of my field research in one of the more remote communities.⁷ Dr Helen Rodriguez was in charge of the health post, accompanied by two

medical students coming from Caracas every two months as part of the government's rotating programme. On a few occasions, I accompanied health teams to upriver communities where I met many other Yanomami. In Platanal, I was able to observe the dynamics of the relationship between the shapori, Yanomami patients and medical personnel, and their attitudes towards each other. Not long after my arrival, I had my first unforgettable experience with epena snuff. Initially I was cautious, taking small quantities and only in a non-ritual context. In time, as I became more confident, I began increasing my epena intake and participating in shamanistic rituals. A few months later, I co-participated in an unsuccessful shamanistic initiation of Enano's nephew, who was from the community of Karohi-theri. Five days into the initiation he suddenly got afraid and disoriented and refused to continue. Enano was very angry and sent him back to his community.

One day, a group of Jacinto's relatives from the inland community of Sheroana-theri arrived for a visit and subsequently stayed for a few days. One of them spoke a bit of Spanish and we befriended each other. Jacinto suggested that I could live in Sheroana-theri the following year and I wholeheartedly agreed. They proposed that I go back with them at once and stay for a few days to get to know the place and its inhabitants. If they could agree to have me there the following year, I could then come back again. It seemed like a good idea so I went and stayed in Sheroana for two weeks. For me it was a big change from Platanal, as Sheroana had only twenty-nine inhabitants. I met their headman Maruwë and the principal shapori Ruweweriwë. After this brief visit, I returned to Platanal but only for a month. One day, a messenger arrived from Sheroana-theri to inform Jacinto that one of my new friends, Arawë, was to be initiated as a shaman. Ruweweriwë knew about my interests in shamanism and thus he invited me to participate. Jacinto recommended that I not miss such an opportunity and he took me upriver to the beginning of the forest trail leading to Sheroana. I waved him goodbye and disappeared into the forest with the messenger. Arawë's initiation (described in Chapter Four) commenced a week later. He temporarily moved out of his house and suspended his hammock next to Ruweweriwë's and mine. To my surprise and delight, the master shapori allowed me to assist Arawë throughout the whole three-week long ordeal. I felt privileged because, apart from Ruweweriwë and his shapori assistant Taramawë from Toritha-theri, I was the only person allowed to be in Arawë's proximity. Not long after Arawë became a shapori and started practising, his progress was interrupted one day after an enemy shapori from a distant community attacked him via his hekura. This near-fatal blow nearly cost Arawë his life, scattering the whole structure of his fragile cosmic body and causing his recently

embodied hekura to flee to the nearby mountaintop where they had come from in the first place. This unfortunate event provided me with a unique opportunity to monitor on a daily basis the loss of his abilities, the ensuing bodily sickness and his slow and painful recovery, which extended well into the following year. As my permit to stay in the Upper Orinoco was slowly coming to an end, I was obliged to go to Caracas and renew it.

Upon returning to Sheroana-theri, the Yanomami suggested building me a house adjacent to their shapono. I politely refused their offer, telling them that I would rather stay inside the shapono; they were surprised by my response, but Ruweweriwë immediately 'adopted me', inviting me to join his family and put up my hammock in a corner of his house. Within the overall kin network he became my classificatory father. Arawë fully recovered from the hekura attack and recommenced practising hekuramou. I continued to observe his progress, and participated in shamanistic rituals, becoming more experienced and confident each day. One afternoon, it was my turn to experience a hekura attack and I almost lost my life. The intruding hekura, however, stayed inside my body and Ruweweriwë decided to initiate me, which he did a month later. This spirit intrusion, which the Yanomami initially perceived as an illness, for me was a point of serious entry into the hekura world. I followed Ruweweriwë's instructions, assisted by a Spanish-speaking informant. Due to my limited knowledge of the Yanomami language, I recorded the words of initiatory chants on a piece of paper and memorised them. To be sure, I had the text in front of me for back up during the entire process. Thus I fulfilled one of my most important research objectives of gaining personal experience of transformation of consciousness in shamanistic initiation and subsequent practices. Correspondingly, an experiential, full-participatory approach with emphasis on dialogue with multiple informants became my main methodological fieldwork strategy. However, like other anthropologists, I had a few key informants.

The conventional method of data gathering in anthropological fieldwork has hitherto been 'participant observation'. The legacy of this technique, at least at the level of textual presentation, is grounded in a scientific and positivist attitude emphasising the neutrality of detached observation with minimal interference in the studied culture. Thus ethnographic analysis involves certain positivist expectations, such as being able to generate data that can be interpreted empirically. Without compromising a critical perspective, my ethnographic engagement with the Yanomami was inspired by Reichel-Dolmatoff's (1975) *The Shaman and the Jaguar*, containing a balanced presentation of both Desana experiences and the author's own attempts to get an inside perspective.

A similar fieldwork orientation was undertaken by a group of scholars favouring an experiential, full-participatory approach rather than detached observation (Young and Goulet 1994, and more recently Goulet and Miller 2007). Other authors discuss the relevance of the ethnographer's personal experience and emotions (Davies and Spencer 2010; McLean and Leibling 2007). The advocates of an experiential approach to fieldwork emphasise the importance of first-hand experience of rituals and associated changes in consciousness. The resulting methodological shift involves a change in attitude from traditional 'participant observation' to what Laughlin (1994: 102) identifies as 'transpersonal participant-comprehension'. The focus of data gathering thus shifts from passive observation and interviews to active participation in dialogue and ritual activities. In my view, this kind of methodology is not radically different from the classical notion of 'participant observation'. However, I agree with Jackson's argument that personal experience can be (and should be) used as 'a mode of experimentation, of testing and exploring the ways in which our experiences conjoin or connect us with others, rather than the ways they set us apart' (Jackson 1989: 4). In other words, the new scientific scrutiny, which echoes the Husserlian plea for rigorous scientific philosophy (Husserl 1960 [1906]), would not take informants' information for granted. Rather, it would test its validity (if possible) through intersubjective involvement and experience. Therefore, I do not treat my own experiences as subjective, isolated events of my own intentionality of consciousness but as an intersubjective dialogic product arising within the interpersonal field of social relations. Shamanism for me was a point of intersubjective entry into the Yanomami lifeworld, and the resulting personal experiences are windows providing my own subjective insights into that world. I was careful to separate my own experiences from the rest of the text, based primarily on observation and dialogue, and use them as valid supplementary data that can only be obtained through personal involvement. Some may object that the incorporation of ethnographers' subjective experiences into analysis could tell us more about how foreigners react to rituals and little about the nature of Yanomami experiences. Although this may be true to a certain extent, I follow Goulet and Miller (2007), arguing that these subjective experiences should not be dismissed a priori as irrelevant or biased but treated as viable research tools. In other words, ethnographers' subjective field experiences can reveal certain information about the general nature of human consciousness beyond a particular ethnographic instance. Laughlin, McManus and d'Aquili (1992) in their multidisciplinary analysis of the nature of the human brain and consciousness also used

their own as well as other people's subjective experiences mediated by behaviour and cultural meanings as the primary data of consciousness.

The incorporation of anthropologists' subjective experiences into ethnographic analysis is what Goulet and Young (1994: 305) (advocating Husserl, and especially William James) refer to as a 'radically empirical method'. The personal data can then be compared to others' experiences in order to explore our similarities and differences within the intersubjective field of inter-experience (Jackson 1998: 5–16; Merleau-Ponty 1973: 56). Full participation in the lives of others without any preconceived prejudices requires the bracketing of all personal beliefs and suspension of disbelief to open up a part of ourselves to the experience, blocked off from our own cultural assumptions (Young and Goulet 1994). However, opening up to the experience of other lifeworlds involves more than simply the intellect. It is a holistic endeavour involving immersion and engagement through all the bodily senses. An important part of this process is the ethnographer's self-examination and his or her engagement in self-reflexivity, which is best summarised in the following words:

When I reflect upon myself and my cultural universe ... I cannot delude myself by thinking that everything that my culture is, in some direct way, is also myself ... [I]kewise, as an ethnographer I encounter and begin to understand that radical other through his or her and my concreteness in which the transcendent cultural meanings are entirely incarnated in each of us. And only in that synthesis the understanding is engendered and objectified. In this process I am appropriating the other just as he is appropriating me. Each ethnographer senses the limits of this process, for it requires the opening of him or herself, and as a consequence there ensues an inevitable sense of alienation. The initial step – the opening up ... – is the crucial momentum ...[i]n the momentum of opening one recognizes that every other is the possibility of oneself, which in effect shapes further assessment of both. (Mimica 1988: 159–60)

Once the fieldworker allows others to teach him or her their culture through experience and involvement, they can claim 'a new organ of understanding ... [and] regained possession of that untamed region of themselves, unincorporated in their own culture, through which they communicate with other cultures' (Merleau-Ponty 1964a: 120).

Throughout my fieldwork, I taped all major parts of shamanistic initiation as well as numerous shamanistic seances carried out by different shamans and for different purposes. The last few weeks in Platanal I spent transcribing this copious material with Makowé's help then translating with Jacinto transcripts of songs and chants from the Yanomami language

into Spanish and finally into English. I also took a series of photographs of Arawë's initiation, some of which are included in this book. All data was recorded in a field diary, using different coloured pens for different kinds of information. For example, observations of daily activities and events, including the shamanistic sessions, were recorded with blue pen. Black pen was used for personal experiences, red for dreams, and lead pencil for 'thinking and reflecting' sections of my diary.

The Outline of the Book

The book is divided into eight chapters. Chapter One provides some background information on the Yanomami people; their habitat, the main features of their culture and a brief summary of historical migratory movements. The emphasis is placed on the Yanomami dwelling and their social organisation as well as sociocultural changes brought about by the Salesian Mission and Western medical personnel and their consequences. The chapter also introduces the ethnographic locale of two Yanomami communities (Mahekoto-theri and Sheroana-theri) and the main characters that appear in the book, as well as the local history of contact and regional micro movements of each community respectively, as told by field informants.

To understand the Yanomami lived reality of their cosmos, especially as articulated in shamanistic initiation and later practices, which is the book's central theme, it is necessary to begin with the depiction of the Yanomami cosmos and its origins. Chapter Two accordingly consists of the two main sections. Drawing mainly on different literary sources as well as on my field data, the first part depicts the composite image of the Yanomami cosmos as a holographic, multilayered totality and the relationship between its various components. Particular focus is on the motif of the fallen sky, a significant primordial event marking the end of an epoch. The second part of Chapter Two explores various transformative cosmogonic processes embedded in mythical accounts of multiple creations, contributing to the establishment of ontological order. The prevailing theme of these myths of origin is the multiplicity of transformations of ancestral beings through death and the emergence of different world components, including human beings. Here, I introduce the concept of primordial time or a pre-cosmic dimension in constant flux, which is particularly important for it also manifests itself as a specific state of primordial consciousness associated with death and shamanism.

The process of separation of material from non-material components of the Yanomami cosmos resulted in the bifurcation of the original ancestors

into finite, disease-prone human beings on the one hand, and immortal hekura spirits on the other. Chapter Three accordingly analyses the nature and phenomenological manifestation of the ancestral hekura spirits and their relation to shapori, particularly focusing on shamanism in myths and in the contemporary context and the relationship between the shaman and the jaguar. The first part of the chapter explores the holographic relation between the shaman and his personal hekura assistants. This is followed by an analysis of the various entheogenic transformative substances commonly known as epena or yopo; the method of their preparation, ritual use, mythical origins and their experiential aspects. The remaining section of Chapter Three deals with the Yanomami conception of a person, including visible or physical aspects of the body and its invisible components of the multiple soul, as well as their relation to causes of various illnesses.

Chapter Four is a central part of the book. It is a detailed ethnographic description and systematic exploration and analysis of the entire process of body transformation during shamanistic initiation, which I term the corporeal cosmogenesis or metamorphosis of the human body into a cosmic body. The chapter follows the initiation of a young candidate, Arawë, which took place in Sheroana-theri. His ordeal involved an intense experience of multiple deaths through dismemberment by the hekura spirits, and subsequent rebirth as a 'living hekura'. But he also became a multiplicity of embodied hekura, which are his future personal assistants and sources of power, who imbue his post-mortem ego with certain holographic properties. Arawë received into his body the hekura path, their shapono and a corporeal (cosmic) mountain. His body thus became a micro replica of the Yanomami macrocosm. The last section of the chapter explores the concept of the shaman's cosmic body as the 'centre of the universe' and a site of its full manifestation.

Chapter Five follows Arawë's first steps in hekuramou practice, and explores the process of the continual expansion of a shapori's powers and capabilities through incorporation (but also loss) of additional hekura spirits. The main source of acquisition of additional hekura by far comes from dreams and dream-related activities. The chapter thus examines the role of dreams in Yanomami shamanism and analyses consciousness associated with dreaming. The specific focus is on the technique of dream control as a method of further incorporation of hekura spirits, followed by an analysis of dreaming in the context of shamanistic initiation. These issues are examined through a number of dream accounts relayed by the field informants, as well as my own dreams. The final section explores the links between dreams, illness and healing and the shaman's intrusion into other people's bodies through dreams. This is analysed through an

account of the death of a boy from Sheroana-theri, who was apparently attacked in his dream by a distant enemy shaman.

The case of the boy's death is the point of departure for Chapter Six, which focuses primarily on the issue of ambiguity of shamans' social position and the application of their personal powers and skills for healing and harming purposes. The chapter examines the dialectics between the defensive and offensive types of shamanistic activities – a dual role that any shaman can assume depending on circumstances. The first section explores – through various ethnographic cases – protective and curative activities that shamans apply on the intracommunal level, including detoxifying poisonous substances, providing assistance during childbirth, retrieving a lost soul and protecting community members from harmful hekura spirits during storms. But, the same shaman can simultaneously engage his personal spirits in lethal assaults on potential victims from other, distant communities. Therefore, the next segment provides various ethnographic examples of hekura attacks and shamans' responses to those attacks, followed by the analysis of shamans' activities to include phenomenology of healing and harming, implicit in the shapori's access to other people's bodies. The remaining part deals with issues of subjectivity and intersubjectivity in relation to shamanism as a practical method of cultural knowledge diffusion first of all from the spirits directly to the shaman and, via him, to the rest of the community.

To the extent that the book thus far explores the essential aspects of Yanomami shamanism, the remaining two chapters deal with shamanistic activities in the bicultural context of medical pluralism; more specifically shamans' changing role in the context of cultural change, especially their attitudes and responses towards introduced diseases (and the corresponding new forms of treatment), which have resulted in a terminal imbalance in the Yanomami lifeworld. Chapter Seven deals with *shawara* epidemics, which Yanomami primarily identify with fever and the arrival of white people. The generic concept of *shawara* is examined through three major health disturbances (malaria, diarrhoea and respiratory diseases) that continue to be the principal causes of high mortality among the Yanomami of the Upper Orinoco. The chapter also explores the relationship between shamans and medical workers, as well as Yanomami attitudes towards Western medicine, including the ongoing problems associated with prolonged treatment.

The beginning of Chapter Eight refers back to the myth of the great deluge and the disappearance of the primordial twins. Particular emphasis is on shamans' interpretation of the advent of white people and deadly epidemics of previously unknown diseases within the context of Yanomami cosmology. The Yanomami initially interpreted the arrival of

white people to the Upper Orinoco region in the mid nineteenth century as the return of their own ancestors or the offspring of their great cultural transformer Omawë to teach them the secrets of white people and bring them manufactured goods. Hence, the first part deals with the ways in which the Yanomami positioned themselves in relation to foreigners. The second part examines the overall process of the decline of shamanism and the shift in the nature of Yanomami leadership, which has paralleled the emergence of new, educated generations of Yanomami men who are now becoming less interested in continuing shamanistic tradition as a form of cultural identity. The last section explores the changing role of the Yanomami shamans and the link between the phenomenon of prophetic revelation and shamanism, which signals a radical shift in the Yanomami consciousness of the colonial context. To this end, the remaining part of the book examines the cosmo-shamanic discourse of the threat of a new collapse of the sky and subsequent ‘end of the world’ articulated through the shamanistic vision of the Brazilian shaman-prophet and political activist Davi Kopenawa. The situation in Brazil where the Yanomami contact with national society was much more traumatic is then compared to the Venezuelan situation where the threat of the crushing sky or collapse of a symbolic order is directly related to a general decline of interest in shamanism and a gradual decay of the Yanomami cosmos, but which arguably leads to the beginning of a new era.

The final section of the book (postscript) deals with several recent developments in the Upper Orinoco region and provides some updates based on my subsequent visits to field sites.

Notes

1. According to other sources, the word ‘shaman’ derives – via the Chinese *sha men* – from the ‘Vedic *sram-* (‘to heat oneself’ or ‘practise austerities’), and *sramana-* (‘practitioner of austerities’ or ‘ascetic person’) (Halifax 1979: 3; Hultkrantz 1973: 26; Lewis 1984: 5). Shirokogoroff and Mironov (cited in Peters and Price-Williams 1980: 398) argue that the word ‘saman’ is not native to North Asia but arrived there from the south from shamanism that, according to them, evolved from Tantric and Lamaistic Buddhism.
2. I will refer to the Yanomami shamans throughout the book using the male pronoun, mindful of the fact that they are predominantly male.
3. Zinberg (1977: 1) proposed the term ‘alternate’ as more appropriate than ‘altered’, because ‘different states of consciousness prevail at different times for different reasons’. ‘Alternate states of consciousness’ is an all-inclusive term, unlike ‘usual state of consciousness’, which is merely one specific state of ASC.
4. In the State of Amazonas, the term *criollo* signifies a non-indigenous person.

5. Holography is a special type of three-dimensional lenseless photography invented by Nobel Prize winner Dennis Gabor in 1971. Gabor used holographic film that contained an interference pattern of chaotic light signatures or a hologram. Each illuminated piece of this image-pattern produces the whole three-dimensional, original image.
6. These interrelated communities from the remote Siapa River Valley south of the studied area are known by the collective name Shamathari and they are the traditional enemies of the Orinoco Yanomami.
7. Prior to coming to Platanal, I obtained a copy of Jacques Lizot's (1996) *Introducción a la Lengua Yanomami* and memorised some words and basic grammar rules. In Platanal, my vocabulary expanded considerably, and with Jacinto's help I was soon able to communicate on a basic level.