

YANOMAMI COSMOPERCEPTIONS: ENTHEOGENIC TEACHINGS OF AN AMAZONIAN SHAMAN FOR DECOLONIAL PHILOSOPHERS

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ABSTRACT. This article aims to describe and analyze the philosophically significant ideas presented by Davi Kopenawa, as transcribed by Bruce Albert and published in *The Falling Sky*. Through a transdisciplinary methodology combining direct experience, bibliographic research, hyper-focused reading, comparative studies, hermeneutics, critical thinking, and creative writing about the concepts under examination, we seek to elucidate the ontological, phenomenological, and epistemological perspectives arising from the ritual use of *yākoana*, a master plant of immense significance to the Yanomami people. We demonstrate the indispensability of Kopenawa's thought for strengthening decolonial philosophies.

Keywords. Ancestral Epistemologies; Decolonial Philosophies; Spectral Phenomenology; Plural Ontologies; Traditional Shamanism; Yanomami Entheogenesis.

1. POSITIONALITY STATEMENT

Jan Freitas is part philosopher, paleontologist, botanist, neuroscientist, Brazilian, multiethnic, and psychoactivist; he is interested in shamanic practices with entheogenic plants and fungi. He has a longstanding friendship with Indigenous peoples from Brazil, Peru, and Mexico, working alongside recognized leaders in academic studies and social struggles. His alliance with Indigenous communities has resulted in several co-authored works with leadership figures, published in book chapters and high-impact journals, such as the *Progress in Brain Research* series. In addition, he lived for many years in the Potiguara territory on the southern coast of Rio Grande do Norte, Brazil, where he conducted ethnopharmacobotanical studies on monoamine oxidase inhibitor plants and DMT-containing native species used in traditional shamanic rituals that date back thousands of

Date: Received: April 12, 2025

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years. He currently resides in Fortaleza, Ceará, Brazil, where he teaches decolonial, postcolonial, and counter-colonial philosophies, with an emphasis on cosmoperceptual aesthetics, plural ontologies, ancestral epistemologies, phenomenologies of consciousness, ethics of resistance, politics of freedom, and psychedelic metaphysics at the State University of Ceará.

2. INTRODUCTION: THE FIRST SHAMAN AND THE TREE OF KNOWLEDGE

At the heart of Yanomami cosmoperception, as recorded by Davi Kopenawa and Bruce Albert in *The Falling Sky* (2013), lies the story of the origins of the *yãkoana* entheogen and its first connoisseur, Yãkoanari, the primordial shaman [*Shapori*]. To better understand the narrative under analysis, it is worth noting that “the interaction between entheogens, visionary metaphysics, and the vastness of nature has had both immanent and transcendent significance, from ancient times to the present day” (de Freitas 2024, 147). This knowledge, transmitted orally through generations, not only explains the origin of the entheogenic sacrament—a master plant believed to have the power to generate divine movement in humans—but also establishes the ontological, phenomenological, and epistemological foundations of Yanomami shamanism [*Xapurimu*].



FIGURE 1. *Virola elongata*, or *yãkoana* [Photograph by Robin B. Foster, The Field Museum of Natural History]

According to Yanomami tradition, *yãkoana* [*Virola elongata*] is not merely a plant but a being with both a body and its own personality. It originated at the time of the first beings, when the generative and auxiliary spirits gave life to the

elements of the forest, so that communication could be established between the terrestrial, subterranean, and supracelestial worlds (de Castro 2006; Kopenawa and Albert 2015). Taking shape and existence from the sap of an ancestral tree whose roots, trunk, and leaves connect the strata of the cosmos [the sky, the earth, and the underworld], the *yākoana* is said to have emerged as a plant manifestation of the *xapiri* or *xapiripë* [spectral entities]: “These are image beings, which are the heart (the inner image) of animals, plants, stones, objects, stars, forests, among many other beings, and which come to shamans, who are able to perceive them” (Wittmann and Schaan 2021, 196, my translation). The cosmic forces offered *yākoana* to the Yanomami as a gift that is both inebriating and purifying—its consumption can cause vomiting, dizziness, and fainting, which are necessary challenges for the optimization of the sensory vehicles: to open cosmoperception to the metasensory territories and allow what lies beyond the surface of the world to be known. Through the following words, the origins of the entheogen can be understood in perspective:

Later *Omama*’s son became a young man and his father wanted him to know how to call the *xapiri* to heal his people. He found a *yākoana* hi tree in the forest and told his son: “With this tree, you will prepare the *yākoana* powder! You will mix it with the odorous *maxara hana* leaves and the bark of the *ama hi* and *amatha hi* trees and drink it! The *yākoana*’s power reveals the *xapiri*’s voice. By drinking it, you will hear their clamor and you too will become a spirit!” He blew the *yākoana* into his son’s nostrils with a tube made from a *horoma* palm. Then *Omama* called the *xapiri* for the first time and added to his son: “Now it is up to you to make them come down. If you behave well and the spirits really want you, they will come to you to do their presentation dance and remain by your side. You will be their father. When your children are sick, you will follow the path of the evil beings and fight them to bring back their image! You will also bring down the *ayokora* cacique bird spirit to help you to regurgitate their dangerous objects, which you will tear out from inside the sick people. This way you will truly be able to cure human beings!” This was how *Omama* revealed the use of the *yākoana* to his son—the first shaman—and taught him how to see the spirits he had just created. Our elders have continued to follow the trail of his words to this day. This is why we continue to drink the *yākoana* to make the *xapiri* dance. We do not do that without reason. We do it because we are inhabitants of the forest, sons and sons-in-law of *Omama* (Kopenawa and Albert 2013, 31).

Yākoanari, until then an ordinary person, was chosen by the *xapiri* after a period of deprivation and trials experienced in the depths of the sacred forest. In dreams, *Omama*, the supreme being—or the one whose name makes the foundations of heaven vibrate—ordered him to metabolize the stem of the *yākoana* to obtain

the powers of healing and clairvoyance (Kopenawa and Albert 2015; Lutaif and Modernell 2022). By consecrating the entheogen of which he became guardian, Yākoanari “temporarily died”; that is, he entered a state of dissolution of the corporeal self, “became another,” and was led by the xapiripë to their dwellings: “Becoming another is a frequent and common occurrence that all elements of the narrative undergo, with none remaining with a constant identity, not even Omama, the demiurge” (Wittmann and Schaan 2021, 198, my translation). In these previously unknown ontological territories, he learned the language of the spirits (shamanic chants or *maximu*), the cartography of the invisible (the paths that connect the spheres of existence), and the diagnosis of diseases caused by hostile agencies, such as the *xawara*, and epidemics spread by colonizers. Upon returning from his initiation journey, Yākoanari became the first shapori [intermediary between humans and non-humans], as well as establishing the ritual method that Yanomami shamans still remember today.

The story of Yākoanari illustrates how yākoana is an indispensable element in the creation narrative while also weaving together the tissue of otherness between species in the Yanomami cosmoperception (Albert 2016; de Castro 2006). The sacramental powder inhaled through puffs on a palm tube allows interaction and learning with non-human beings—spirits, animals, plants, minerals, and so on—that ontologically are also persons, possessing other bodily forms: “With the help of yākoana, experienced shamans can contemplate myriads of them dancing, radiating vibrant colors and singing joyful songs” (Herrera 2018, 11). Yākoanari used the entheogen to expel the evils that threatened his people, anticipating the contemporary role attributed to shamans as guardians of ecological and cosmopolitical balance. In addition, he transformed its ritual use into a source of knowledge, an epistemological technology through which it becomes possible to incorporate the wisdom of the xapiri:

Yākoanari is the name of *yākoana*’s father. His image still lives in the place where long ago Omama had his son, the first shaman, drink this powder. *Yākoanari* is a true elder, a very powerful spirit. According to the white people’s words, he is the master of *yākoana*. The power of his powder is so high that he makes a blinding light explode inside us. When you do not know him, he violently knocks you senseless and you just collapse to the ground. You thrash about in every direction, your stomach gripped with terror. Then you remain unconscious on the dirt floor for a long time. This is what happened to me the first time. But later, once you have become familiar with using *yākoana*, that is over. You no longer fall and roll around and moan in the dust! Despite its sudden and powerful blast, you stay standing and then you can truly become spirit by relentlessly singing and dancing (Kopenawa and Albert 2013, 79).

Yākoanari’s initiation established a pedagogical model based on the principle of “transformative resistance,” through which the neophyte learns to endure nausea, terror, and loneliness—signs that the yākoana is “killing his old flesh”—so that he can be reborn as a shapori, that is, a guardian of the plant keys that open and close the doors between worlds. “Kopenawa must make a diplomatic pact with her because it is the plants, above all, that are the necessary mediators between bodies and the xapiri, the spirits of everything that exists in real time, visible or invisible” (Billi 2022, 3, my translation). In addition, each generation of shamans receives new songs from the xapiripë—melodies that update ancestral knowledge to face emerging threats such as the pathologies of the “people of merchandise”, which include the disease of mercury (*Pooxiki*) and the smoke of metal (*Boobè wakèshí*) (de Castro 2015; Lutaif and Modernell 2022). The emergence of yākoana and the initiation journey of Yākoanari are not treated among the Yanomami as myths, nor as legends or folk tales, but as cosmoperceptive manifestos that [a] establish a counterpoint to Western science by affirming that true and justified knowledge comes from dialogue with the spirits, [b] reject monolithic ontology by presenting myriad worlds where perception means interacting with invisible agencies, and [c] teach that shamanic power is not domination, but a service provided by cosmic forces for the evolutionary improvement of humans and beyond-humans.

Thus, through an analytical-descriptive methodology that integrates phenomenological appreciation, participatory action, bibliographic review, hyper-focused reading, hermeneutic approach, intercultural dialogues, critical thinking, and creative writing, we intend to [a] consider yākoana as an epistemic vehicle that allows the shaman to access extraordinary realities, [b] highlight how the knowledge obtained in shamanic initiation transcends materialistic empiricism, as it is based on interaction with non-human entities, and [c] justify the philosophical importance of the entheogenic phenomenon of partial disembodiment, which enables the experience of the multiplicity of being in a non-linear temporality.

As a result of this investigation, we aim to demonstrate the extent to which Davi Kopenawa’s entheogenic wisdom questions the foundations of Western rationality by pointing to ontological plurality, phenomenological cosmoperception, and epistemological ancestry, which find in yākoana the guiding thread of a philosophical project unprecedented in the history of ideas. In conclusion, with this work, we aim to elucidate the depth of the ontologies, phenomenologies, and epistemologies emerging from the words of the Yanomami shaman, based on a dialogue established with counter-colonial, psychedelic, and philosophical studies.

3. ENTHEOGENIC WISDOMS IN DIALOGUE WITH DECOLONIAL PHILOSOPHIES

Davi Kopenawa makes a radical epistemic break with the Western paradigm of cognition based on static visuality and the inert materiality of books to affirm a relational ontology where wisdom emerges from the incorporation of the cosmos through yākoana (Albert 2016; Dorrico 2018). The experience with the entheogen presents a spectral phenomenology in which “true seeing” implies a dissolution

of the boundaries between participation and perception, observer and observed, culture and nature, matter and energy, human and beyond-human: “It is by ‘dying’ under the effect of the hallucinogenic drug *yãkoana* that shamans are able not only to see spirits, but to see as spirits: to see, precisely, humans as specters” (de Castro 2006, 330, my translation). The receptivity to the breath of life of the ancestors channeled through the *horoma* palm tree is not a metaphor, allegory, or parable but an epistemic technology that enables the act of knowing through bodily and mental transformations, which allow one to inhabit and think about other ontological possibilities (Kopenawa and Albert 2015; Lutaif and Modernel 2022). The transmission of shamanic wisdom described by Kopenawa thus challenges the foundations of modern epistemology by establishing a regime of knowledge based on the active presence of spirits, on the reception rather than the extraction of learning, and on the multidimensional expansion of counter-colonial thinking. As the Yanomami shaman puts it:

I did not learn to think about the things of the forest by setting my eyes on paper skins. I saw them for real by drinking my elders’ breath of life with the *yãkoana* powder they gave me. This was also how they gave me the breath of the spirits, which now multiplies my words and extends my thought in every direction. I am not an elder and I still don’t know much. Yet I had my account drawn in the white people’s language so it could be heard far from the forest. Maybe they will finally understand my words and after them their children and later yet the children of their children. Then their thoughts about us will cease being so dark and twisted and maybe they will even wind up losing the will to destroy us. If so, our people will stop dying in silence, unbeknownst to all, like turtles hidden on the forest floor (Kopenawa and Albert 2013, 23).

The passing on of the breath of the spirits described by Kopenawa constitutes, according to a decolonial line of interpretation, a counter-regime of truth production that destabilizes the foundations of colonizing reason (de Sousa and Duboc 2021; da Silva 2024). While modern education is based on the individualized accumulation of objectified knowledge, the Yanomami initiation process operates through dispersion and multiplication in all dimensions of learning, as if it were a fractal: “By ‘dying under the effect of *yãkoana*’ and ‘becoming another’, the shaman enters a becoming-*xapiri*, which is the actualization of virtual forces implied by a multiplicity of multiplicities (‘infinite multiplicity’)” (de Oliveira 2019, 101, my translation). This ancestral epistemology presents a glimmer of resistance to colonial ethnocide by keeping alive a form of wisdom that cannot be captured by Western disciplinary regimes—knowing as a relational flow and not a static object (de Castro 2006; de Freitas et al. 2024). The image of multidimensionally expanding thought challenges not only the temporal linearity of Eurocentric progress but also the very Euclidean geometry that underpins the core of Cartesian rationalism, proposing in its place a topology of being where

true and justified knowledge is always perspectival and multi-situated in the networks of otherness that connect humans, non-humans, and ecosystems. From this perspective, *yākoana* comes to light not as an entheogen conceived in a Western sense but as a technology for decolonizing reality, an *ethnopharmakon* that simultaneously disperses the clouds of lies of colonized rationality and heals the rift between culture and nature imposed by modernity.

Kopenawa’s description of the experience with *yākoana* reveals a plural ontology, where the consecration of the entheogen does not produce mere hallucinations but effects a phenomenological transfiguration of the shaman into a “ghost”—a liminal state that destabilizes Western conceptions of life and death and being and non-being (Kangussu 2019; Wittmann and Schaan 2021). This process of “temporary mortification” configures a spectral phenomenology, where *xapiri* are not objects of experience but constituent forces of the initiate’s own interiority, who becomes a “dwelling place for spirits” in a transfiguring movement that reverses the modern logics of being in the world: “The concept of *xapiripë*, rather than designating a class of distinct beings, speaks of a region or moment of indiscernibility between the human and the non-human” (de Castro 2006, 321, my translation). The image of the *xapiripë* “feeding through us” suggests an epistemology of anthropophagy, where cognition becomes an act of cannibalism that dissolves the individuality of the knowing subject, establishing the body as a territory of transit and negotiation with beyond-human agents (Albert 2016; Billi 2022). The *xapiri*’s warlike preparation through dance, with its combat instruments, axes, machetes, spears, and arrows, also reveals a cosmopolitical dimension of this ontology; knowledge is not a simple act of contemplation but a strategy of arming oneself against “evil forces” that include, in a decolonial context, confronting the epistemic violence of the modern project:

When we drink the *yākoana*, its great power comes upon us by striking the nape of our neck. So we die and soon become ghosts. Meanwhile the spirits feed on the *yākoana* through us, who are their fathers. Then they slowly come down on their mirrors from their houses fixed to the sky’s chest, singing all the while. They dance on their shiny surfaces without ever touching the ground, covered in feathery adornments and brandishing their machetes, axes, and arrows, ready to do battle with the evil beings. From these heights they see the entire forest in the distance and warn us of the evil threatening us (Kopenawa and Albert 2013, 64).

The phenomenology of the experience with *yākoana* described by Kopenawa challenges Western paradigms of perception, as it presents a corporeality that dematerializes and then becomes a field of pluriontological agency: that is, an epistemological mirror where truth occurs as a play of reflective and vibrating surfaces (Herrera 2018; Silva 2024). The shaman’s transfiguration into a ghost does not appear in classical debates on the study of phenomena and, for this reason, manifests a phenomenological inversion that destabilizes the modern notion

of the independence of the cognizant individual, which is based on mental representations, the latter being devoid of connections with non-human entities: “Such empirical non-iconicity and non-visibility, in short, seem to point to an important dimension of spirits: they are non-representational images, representatives that are not representations” (de Castro 2006, 325, my translation). Unlike Western epistemology, which is based on the concept of “critical distance,” Yanomami wisdom emerges from a bodily and unrestricted becoming; the temporary death of the rational self becomes a necessary condition for accessing the primordial knowledge of the xapiri. This panoramic understanding, which overcomes the false dichotomy between universal and particular, between observer and observed, far from reproducing the “eye of God” of Eurocentric science always has a mediated and embodied character that depends on the symbiotic relationship between the shaman and the spirits (de Freitas et al. 2024; Kopenawa and Albert 2015). This multinaturalism constitutes an ontological counter-device in the face of Western panopticism, replacing the primacy of duality with a ritual synesthesia in which being is belligerent performance and knowing is reciprocal nourishment. In the passage highlighted above, Kopenawa does not merely describe a traditional ceremony of the Yanomami people but presents a philosophical perspective on perception and truth, where learning means actively participating in a network of both human and non-human agents, who are in a constant state of warlike alertness against threats to the cosmic balance—a stance that unquestionably integrates combative readiness in the face of the evils resulting from coloniality.



FIGURE 2. “Mamuruna” [Hydrographic pen, colour pencil, and graphite pencil on paper by Joseca Mokaresh Yanomami 2017, São Paulo Museum of Art].

Kopenawa’s thinking reveals an ontology of knowledge that challenges Western paradigms of epistemological transmission, which are based on human exceptionalism, on the anthropocentric idea that *Homo sapiens* is the only “metaphysically special” form of life (de Oliveira 2019; de Sousa and Duboc 2021). While European philosophy privileges vision as the primary sense of cognition, Yanomami shamanism establishes an olfactory epistemology, where knowledge flows through plant sap transformed into powder and internalized through the nasal passages: “In this way, through an expansion of consciousness, the shaman gains access to a transcendent platform of lucidity, where superior knowledge can be passed on

to him indefinitely” (Rocha 2017, 14, my translation). This means of absorbing ancestral wisdom manifests a legitimate ecology of the senses, where the forest is not a backdrop but an active agent in the cognitive formation of the shapori, which facilitates the connection between the xapiri and humanity. In this sense, the *yākoana* acts as a guiding thread for communication with entities, allowing humans to access the semiotic regime of spirits—a form of inter-species dialogue that challenges the linguistic anthropocentrism of Western thought (Herrera 2018; Sales 2024). The process described below constitutes a spectral phenomenology where living bodies are transformed into porous interfaces between the subterranean, terrestrial, and supraterrestrial worlds, an event that destabilizes modern notions of individuality:

We do not become shamans by eating game or the food from our gardens, but through the trees of the forest. It is the *yākoana* powder, the sap exuded by *yākoana* hi trees, that reveals the spirits’ words and spreads them far and wide. Ordinary people are deaf to them, but by becoming shamans we can hear them clearly. As I said, the *yākoana* is the *xapiri*’s food. They call it *raxa yawari u*, the juice of the water beings’ peach palm fruit. They never tire of drinking it down. As soon as its power increases, they absorb it through their father, the shaman, when it penetrates him through his nose, the entrance to their house inside his chest. There are a great many of them eating it. This is why the shaman who has called them does not collapse to the ground. By drinking the *yākoana*, he simply enters a ghost state, and once they are sated his *xapiri* come down onto their mirrors, spreading the sweet odor of their annatto body paint all around (Kopenawa and Albert 2013, 78–79).

The description of the alimentary relationship between xapiri and shamans also brings to light an epistemology of nutritive reciprocity that contradicts the unidirectional logic of modern consumption. While modernity has constructed a cognizant subject without a body of its own—for whom existence is reduced to thinking—shamanic knowledge comes into the world precisely from a state of controlled depersonalization, where bodily consciousness expands as it dissolves in the light of the *yākoana* (de Castro 2006; Kopenawa and Albert 2015). This dynamic between sensitive dissolution and intelligible expansion is a powerful feature of ancestral epistemologies that understand wisdom as the fruit of ontological multinaturalism: “‘Drinking’ *yākoana* powder is essential for a person to become a shaman. When the initiate ‘drinks’ this powder, they begin to see the spirits who perform their presentation dance” (Lutaif and Modernell 2022, 9, my translation). The image of initiates who manage to stand up to dance with the spirits suggests a spectral phenomenology—corporeality as a point of manifestation and mediation between cosmic forces, far from the Cartesian dichotomy between mind and matter. In this way, the “ghost state” induced by the entheogen represents

access to a broader and more consistent plane of existence, where true agency resides in the bonds of non-hierarchical connectivity between the realms of nature, rather than an escape from reality (Tible 2024; Wittmann and Schaan 2021). The above excerpt thus suggests that initiation into Yanomami shamanism is not a simple rite of passage but a pedagogy of perception that re-educates the senses to capture extraordinary realities. In this hermeneutic horizon, *yākoana* is elevated to the position of a cosmopolitical and beyond-human agent that mediates alliances vital for collective survival rather than being reduced to the condition of a psychoactive substance.



FIGURE 3. *Yākoana* ritual among the Yanomami people, photograph by Leão Serva 2022

Kopenawa’s analysis of the differentiated effects of *yākoana* reveals an ethnobotanical knowledge that is fundamentally distinct from Western perspectives on the pharmacodynamics of psychoactive plants (Dorrico 2018; Lutaif and Modernell 2022). In the shapori’s cosmoperception, entheogens are approached as elements of a divine pharmacopoeia, inserted into an ontology of transfiguration where plants of knowing are intelligent beings endowed with intentionality and relational power. That is, they are viewed as non-human beings with humanistic attributes: “Each category, in its mode of existence, possesses its own humanity, however, not necessarily universal and fixed in its humanity, and may take the position and perspective of non-human” (Sales 2024, 7, my translation). Meanwhile, the multiplicity of powers of the Yanomami entheogen reveals an ontological intensity that operates through gradients of force and temporality, confronting Western pharmacological categories that tend to homogenize the phenomenological diversity of ancestral flora through formulas, calculations, weights, measures, and hypothetical sets (Billi 2022; Wittmann and Schaan 2021). The distinction between varieties of *yākoana* also demonstrates a sophisticated ecology of the sacred, where the trees, shrubs, and herbs of the forest are not more than mere sources of active ingredients; they become entities with interspecific agency, epistemic potentiality, and their own corporeality:

The *yākoana*’s power is strong and lasts a long time. Yet it is less luminous and violent than that of the powder drawn from the seeds of the paara hi tree, which the *Xamath ari* use. There are

several *yãkoana*. Among them, the *yãkoana* haare a powder has the most intense power. If you inhale it without being prepared, its spirit will strike your skull with an axe and violently throw you to the ground. You instantly lose consciousness and do not come back to your senses anytime soon, especially if you mix it with *paara* powder! As soon as they have drunk the *yãkoana*, the *xapiri* seize their father's image and take it on their distant flights while his skin remains sprawled on the ground. Though the distances may appear considerable to our ghost eyes, they are nothing to the spirits, who are extremely fast. When they come down to us, we barely have time to hear a faint humming before they have seized our image and lost it very far away (Kopenawa and Albert 2013, 79).

The spatial dynamics described in the excerpt above—where immense distances are instantly traversed by the *xapiri*—reveal a non-Euclidean topology of the spirit realm, a fact that contrasts with the solid geometries of colonial reason. The description of the explosive intensity of *yãkoana* haare presents a phenomenology of disembodiment in which physical discomfort is not a side effect but a means of accessing the knowledge possessed by master entities (de Castro 2006; Rocha 2017). This pedagogy of the school of the war of life can be contrasted with Western ideals of cognitive comfort, by positioning the body as an ontological battlefield where the dissolution of the self precedes the reconstruction of the aspirant to wisdom: “This process of formation is transmitted intergenerationally, going against the grain of the Western model of education, as it does not aim to produce fixed identities anchored in the domestication and annulment of the body's powers” (Silva 2024, 16, my translation). The Yanomami compression of space and time also typifies an ontology of cosmic mobility in which both temporality and spatiality are not static but products of relationships established between being and becoming. The sound that precedes the abduction of the shaman's image by the beyond-humans constitutes an acoustic marker of transition between worlds, suggesting that hearing, rather than sight, becomes a privileged sense in these liminal moments, which challenges the visual primacy that underpins Western epistemology (Albert 2016; de Castro 2006). The perspective outlined above also emphasizes that shamanic initiation is achieved through the temporary dissociation of the cognizant individual to allow the emergence of an entheogenic cosmoperception. In this understanding, the *yãkoana* is not simply a means of accessing other realities; rather, it is a technology for decolonizing the perceptual apparatus that dislodges the human being from any central and fixed position in the cosmos.

The description of the difficulty faced by Kopenawa in trying to establish contact with the *xapiri* through *yãkoana* shows the pedagogical effect of serenity in the initiation journey, an enthusiastic wait that acts as an antidote to Western expectations of epistemological immediacy (de Oliveira 2019; Silva 2024). The



FIGURE 4. “Yanomami” [Acrylic on canvas by Ezequiel Mendez]

occasionally intense physical discomfort and progressive weakening of the body that are tests of the aspiring shaman’s willpower can be understood as processes of a phenomenology of the deconstruction of the subject, where the dissolution of somatic certainties precedes the reconstitution of corporeality as an interface of cosmic agency: “The expression ‘entering a ghost state’ (*poremuu*) refers here to altered states of consciousness, caused by hallucinogens and dreams, during which the corporeal image and its vital essence are affected and displaced” (Kangussu 2019, 45, my translation). This dynamic of ontological dismantling confronts Western models of learning, as it replaces the logic of accumulation with an appreciation only of the things that are at hand: an experience in which knowledge paradoxically emerges from the temporary loss of certain sensory and cognitive abilities, so that other potentials for sensitivity and intelligibility can be found (de Sousa and Duboc 2021; Dorrico 2018). The initial absence of visions in the entheogenic ritual does not indicate failure, but rather the need for bodily unlearning, accompanied by a cognitive emptying that constitutes the precondition for the emergence of new regimes of perception. The slow pace preceding the manifestation of the *xapiripë* thus reveals that, in Yanomami epistemologies, access to wisdom is a merit negotiated with non-human entities that require proof of respectability, patience, and commitment:

I was taking the *yãkoana* all the time and could not see anything! This is what usually happens, but I did not know. When you start drinking the *yãkoana*, you do not see anything at all. Your head is seized by a strong pain and your thought remains closed. You get weaker and weaker and simply lose consciousness. That is all.

The xapiri do not instantly reveal themselves to him who drinks the *yākoana* for the first time and, if he is not well prepared, he will not come out of this state. The spirits only start to do their presentation dance after they have stretched the initiate out on their mirrors. You have to spend several nights in a ghost state and be very worn out before they manifest themselves. (Kopenawa and Albert 2013, 86)

The initiation process described above by Kopenawa also establishes an ontology of specular mediation, profoundly distinct from the reflexive and calculating models that circumscribe thought in Western cultures (Sales 2024; Sztutman 2009). The image of the shaman stretched out on the mirrors of the xapiri constitutes a phenomenological manifestation of inversion, where the reflective surface comes to be understood not as a device for self-recognition but as a portal for interspecific connectivity: “It is the spirits of the paara trees (their dust), the father spirit of the *yākoana*, and the spirits of the urin hari forest that carry not only the image but also the breath of the shaman to deposit them in their ‘mirrors’” (Billi 2022, 3, my translation). This intermediate phase of spectral suspension presents a conception of knowledge as a gift of otherness—the spirits only manifest themselves when the initiate reaches a state of complete ontological openness, which ultimately deconstructs the Enlightenment ideal of a subject independent of nature in the face of acts of cognition (de Oliveira 2019; Wittmann and Schaan 2021). The late presentation dance of the xapiripë also suggests a ritualization of cognitive temporality, where, in contrast to the capitalist acceleration of learning, true wisdom emerges from a detached, patient, and non-instrumental relationship with time. The above passage thus constitutes not only an account of philosophical interest but also a counter-colonial critique of contemporary regimes of knowing and validation, suggesting an epistemology of initiation that values waiting, serenity, and detachment as necessary steps for accessing non-hegemonic forms of wisdom.

Initiation as conceived by Kopenawa articulates a metaphysics of bodily experimentation as an extraordinary path to cognitive access, by confronting, in total terms, Western paradigms of the production of meaning and truth (Dorrico 2018; Lutaif and Modernell 2022). The temporal progression of initiation marked by days does not concern chronological linearity; rather, it characterizes an alchemical temporality where each stage of physical exhaustion corresponds to a stage of ontological transmutation, through which the initiate ceases to be one to become another: ““Becoming another” refers to the loss of identity in both a positive and negative sense. In its most frequent use in narratives, it designates the process of shamanic initiation that requires spiritual and bodily transformation” (Souza and Duboc 2021, 895, my translation). This phenomenology of the controlled decomposition of the self resonates with the notion of “death of the ego” in mystical traditions, but there is one fundamental difference; here, the dissolution of the subject does not necessarily aim at union with the divine, from

which it is not separated, but rather the constitution of an ecological sensorium capable of perceiving beyond-human agencies as epistemic interlocutors (Albert 2016; De Freitas et al. 2025). The resplendent light of the *yākoana*, which appears when the sensitive eyes are closed, presents an epistemology of extrasensory perception, where seeing becomes much more about participating in an open field of relationships than neutrally observing objects present in a phenomenological enclosure:

The first day you really do not see anything. The following day you are unable to distinguish between day and night and you can no longer fall asleep. The day after that you become ever more exhausted. The next day the *xapiri* finally start to appear. You no longer experience hunger or thirst. You no longer know pain or sleep. The *yākoana* spirits have devoured your flesh and your eyes are dead. At that moment, you start to see the dawning of a vast and blinding light. Then you distinguish the cohort of *xapiri* singing as they head in your direction. Called by the elders from the ends of the sky, they approach you little by little as they dance along their luminous path. The first to arrive are still relatively few. They call the others as they pass. They gradually come together until they form a noisy throng (Kopenawa and Albert 2013, 87).

The gradual appearance of the *xapiri*—first in isolation and then in multitudes—points to a relational ontology of knowledge, where cognition does not reside in the individual but emerges from networks of cosmic sociability that connect physical bodies to metaphysical entities (Albert 2016; de Castro 2006). The illuminated paths where spirits dance constitute a geography of learning that diverges completely from the static spatiality of Western educational institutions and opens up other cognitive horizons: “By dancing for the shamans, the *xapiri* expand their thoughts, transmit wisdom, and indicate another path of research: not that of ‘tree skins’ (books), but listening to the forest and the songs” (Tible 2024, 5, my translation). The calling of the spirits performed by the elders, from the borders of the firmament to the ends of the earth, establishes an intergenerational pedagogy determined by decentralization, where human masters act as mediators of wisdom that far exceeds their individuality (de Oliveira 2019; Sales 2024). The collective and gradual nature of the manifestation of the *xapiripë* also suggests that, in Yanomami epistemology, valid knowledge always comes from community verification—an implicit critique of methodological anthropocentrism and the individualism of modern science. The excerpt under analysis thus constitutes not only a narrative that reveals a fragment of the great mystery but also a counter-colonial perspective on learning as a cosmopolitical practice, where knowing means participating in the constitution and maintenance of the networks of otherness that sustain the world.

Kopenawa's narrative about his first encounter with the *xapiri* reveals an ontology of overcoming fear which, when confronted with Western perspectives of learning as a safe and comfortable process, acts as an epistemological portal to the liminal fields of knowing (Rocha 2017; Silva 2024). The transfiguration of the natural landscape provided by the *yãkoana* configures a phenomenology that involves awe and admiration, where the perception of ontological space is not limited to humanity but stems from dynamic relationships that are reconfigured by interaction with ancient spirits and forest beings: "The world within the forest is populated by diverse beings, animals, spirits, artifacts, which play an active role not only in the origin of the world, but also in the type of world we are talking about" (Flores 2018, 88, my translation). The state of terror described is not a simple emotional reaction, but an indispensable condition for the collapse of the colonized subject and his rebirth as a shaman. The dazzling explosion following the consecration of the entheogen points to an epistemology of natural light, once again diametrically opposed to Cartesian rationalism (Albert 2016; de Castro 2006): here, truth is not achieved through methodical doubt but bursts forth as a deterritorializing event that completely reorganizes the frames of reference of those initiated into the Yanomami mysteries. The panoramic view that emerges from the entheogenic journey is not a neutral perspective, but a multi-situated knowledge, where the objectivity of the gaze lies in the glimpse of an interspecific and onerous phenomenological experimentation:

This is what happened to me, and I was very frightened, for I had never seen anything like it. The dreams I had been having since I was a child were nothing next to this! Seeing the *xapiri* come down to me for the first time, I truly knew what fear was! What I started to see, though I could not clearly distinguish them yet, was truly terrifying. The forest initially became an immense void, which was spinning around me without letting up. Then suddenly everything was immersed in a blinding brightness. The light exploded with a great crash. Now I could see only the ground and sky in great distances strewn with brilliant white fluffy feathers. This luminous down covered everything as it floated gently in the sky. There was no longer any shade anywhere. I was watching over everything from a horrifying height. I understood I was truly starting to become other (Kopenawa and Albert 2013, 87).

The moment of recognition when the shaman understands that he is beginning to become another also marks an epistemic-ontological turning point where learning does not merely "add information" to the initiate but rather transforms him into another category of being—a *shapori* (de Castro 2006; Wittmann and Schaan 2021). The total absence of shadows in the entheogenic manifestation suggests an epistemology of absolute immanence that rejects modern distinctions between essence and appearance. Transcendence, in this case, does not happen outside of becoming towards the one but inside of being towards the multiple.

The preceding passage highlights a territorial threshold where the Western fiction of a stable identity is broken down to give way to a becoming-spirit, a phenomenological movement through which the human person is transformed into a beyond-human entity: “When, with the help of *yākoana*, they enter a ‘ghost state,’ shamans become another and can contemplate the dance and listen to the music of the spirits, the *xapiri*, from which they derive great pleasure and knowledge” (Kangussu 2019, 45, my translation). The illuminated feathers of forest birds that uniformly cover everything that exists constitute the cosmoperceptive materiality of the Yanomami, in which, in a sense opposite to European models, the real is not mediated by abstract categories but presents itself directly as a vibrating surface of interspecific relations (Albert 2016; Lutaif and Modernell 2022). The admirable altitude from which the *shapori* contemplates the mirations of the *yākoana* does not indicate perspectival domination or perceptual hierarchy, since the latter does not control the visual field but is rather absorbed by it. Consequently, the above excerpt is not only Kopenawa’s autobiographical narrative but also a conception of existence as a cosmogonic phenomenon, where knowing becomes behaving proactively in the continuous reconstitution of the pluriverse, thus opening a counter-colonial horizon in the face of the paradigms of modernity.

4. CONCLUSION: AMAZONIAN SHAMANISM AND YANOMAMI COSMOPERCEPTIONS

Source: as a reference source for Figure 5. The detailed description by Davi Kopenawa and Bruce Albert of the experience with *yākoana* in *The Falling Sky* brings with it a knowledge that destabilizes the tripod of Western epistemology: namely, the primacy of vision as a cognitive sense, the subject-object dichotomy as the basic structure of cognition, and the individualization of the learning activity (Albert 2016; de Castro 2006). In its place, Kopenawa proposes a relational wisdom based on interactivity with the cosmos, where knowing processes emerge from the metamorphosis of the self into another, from an ontological transformation of the body into an interface for dialogue with non-human agents: “No one will be surprised, therefore, in the final analysis, that an ontological cosmopolitanism of human and non-human perspectives so closely intertwined corresponds to a ‘humanimal’ polyglotism of equal complexity” (Albert 2016, 99, my translation). Yanomami thought presents a theoretical framework for psychedelic philosophers that requires a reassessment of contemporary cognitive sciences. The analysis developed shows that *yākoana* acts as a vehicle for ontological transfiguration, providing access to an understanding of horizons that challenge the fundamental categories of Eurocentric philosophy, such as time, space, identity, and materiality (de Freitas 2023; Lutaif and Modernell 2023). This is not a hallucinatory state induced by substances that expand consciousness, but rather a complete reorganization of the perceptual-cognitive apparatus that allows the shaman to both be and exist, albeit temporarily, in other spheres of reality, such as those of spirits, plants, and animals:

Later the *xapiri* came to reassemble the segments of my body, which they had dismembered. They put my skull and torso where the lower part of my body goes, and they put that part where my arms and head go. It is true! They put me back together upside down, placing my rear where my face was and my mouth where my anus was! Then, they put a large belt of colorful *hëima si* and *wisawisama si* bird feathers at the juncture of the two parts of my reconstructed body. They also replaced my entrails with those the spirits have, which are smaller, dazzling white, carefully wound around themselves and covered in luminous down feathers. Then they replaced my tongue with the one they reconstructed and put teeth in my mouth that were as beautiful as theirs, colored like the plumage of the *sei si* birds. They also replaced my throat with a tube, which we call *purunaki*, so that I could continue to deftly learn their songs and speak clearly (Kopenawa and Albert 2013, 95).

The partial disembodiment experienced during shamanic initiation—when the aspirant to wisdom becomes a “ghost” while their body remains inert—contradicts modern conceptions of subjectivity and personal identity (de Oliveira 2019; Flores 2018). In other words, instead of a subject observing objects from a stable position—that is, only from a human angle of vision—we have here a consciousness that dissolves to actively participate in the perceptual field that constitutes the interspecific threshold: “The ontology presented to us in the work is relational and belongs to an extra-Western matrix, since it is born and developed with the forest and with the ancestral tradition concerning ethnicity” (Dorrico 2018, 63, my translation). This spectral phenomenology of the multiplicity of being, where the self fragments to inhabit different planes of existence, presents elective affinities with contemporary philosophies of difference without the risk of being reduced to theoretical abstractionism, being a lived and ritually coordinated experience (de Castro 2006; de Freitas 2023). This entheogenic cosmoperception outlines a panorama for revolutionary research that could redefine our ontological, phenomenological, and epistemological understanding, since the manifestation of the meaning and truth of being through the breath of life of the ancestors indicates that the knowledge obtained through sacramental practices with the *yãkoana* is not reduced to a simple mental representation but extends to a visceral incorporation of ancestral wisdom.

The wisdom obtained through *yãkoana* transcends the limits of materialistic empiricism, as it is based on direct interaction with entities that the Yanomami recognize as real—the *xapiripë* (Kopenawa and Albert 2015; Lutaif and Modernell 2022). Only through shamanic practices is it possible to learn from the plants, animals, and spiritual inhabitants of the sacred forest, who bring us the wisdom necessary for the continuity of life: “It is shamanism—always supported by the inhalation of *yãkoana*, this substance that gives access to the invisible,



FIGURE 5. From left to right: Bruce Albert & Davi Kopenawa (Friends forever).

to the supersensible reality—that allows men to interact with the forest-earth” (Sztutman 2009, 36, my translation). This multinaturalist ontology, where humans and non-humans participate equally in the construction of learning, directly confronts the epistemic monopoly of Western science by proposing in its place an ecology of knowledge: that is, a breaking down of the hierarchies of cognition, which includes perspectives generally marginalized in traditional academic discourse (Dorrigo 2018; de Freitas et al. 2024). The horizontally relational and situated character of this cognitive act—where understanding always means learning with the spirits—presents a valuable counterpoint to the individualistic theories of knowledge that have dominated analytical and Continental philosophy for centuries:

I had just taken the *yākoana* with an elder for the first time, and the spirits had put me to the test while I did not yet know them. It happened the way I just told it. Yet despite the painful wound they inflicted upon me, I was still alive. My blood had not run, and I could not even see the traces of their gashes! As soon as they put the parts of my body back together, my thought gradually started to bloom again. Then I felt overwhelmed by the smell of the annatto dye in which they had covered me and by the fragrance of their *yaro xi* and *aroari* magic plants. The *xapiri* stood beside me, unmoving, magnificently dressed. They had finished their presentation dance. They were now impatient to build a house in which to settle (Kopenawa and Albert 2013, 96).

Kopenawa’s account of his shamanic initiation brings to light an epistemology of self-transformation, in which learning is not acquired through bookish accumulation, but experienced as a process of ontological deconstruction and reconstruction—a symbolic death and rebirth mediated by the *yākoana* (de Oliveira 2019; Wittmann and Schaan 2021). The experience narrated, marked by physical and mental overcoming and by the subsequent recomposition of matter and

thought, suggests that entheogenic wisdoms operate through a confluence between destruction and regeneration, where deterritorialization and exhaustion are necessary forms of access to the xapiri: “During the sessions in which the shamans inhale yãkoana powder, the state of visual and auditory trance in which they find themselves allows their xapiripë to ‘descend’ from their homes and perform their presentation dances” (Lutaif and Modernell 2022, 8, my translation). The image of spirits as architects of a new dwelling—the latter being located in the heart of the initiate—paves the way for future investigations into Yanomami concepts of corporeality and cognitive space that contrast with Western notions of subjectivity and objectivity and for comparative studies between traditional pharmacopoeia and its neurophenomenological correlates by examining how master plants modulate different aspects of the entheogenic experience (Albert 2016; de Freitas 2024). Furthermore, the description of the ceremony as a rite that transfigures materiality into a territory occupied by the immaterial deserves in-depth analysis that is aligned with decolonial policies of cognition and questions how Indigenous practices resist dominant epistemologies and affirm the body not only as individual property but also as a relational horizon for negotiation with the invisible. These lines of research could fertilize both the philosophy of mind and countercolonial studies by proposing other paradigms for understanding the relationship between ontological plurality, personal transformation, and the production of knowledge.

The Yanomami experience with yãkoana, as narrated by Davi Kopenawa, not only describes an Indigenous ritual, but also presents a philosophical horizon where knowledge is not constituted as a mental representation of an objective world, but rather as a living relationship with the xapiri: entities that are simultaneously teachers, allies, and thinking expressions of the forest itself—who find us before we find them and understand us before we understand them: “the shamans (retro)feed the *xapiri* (image beings, ‘spirits’) with their ‘breath of life’ [yãkoana powder] so that hunger does not make them angry, to the point of tearing down the foundations of the sky” (de Oliveira 2019, 54, my translation). The disembodiment induced by the entheogen, as we have seen, does not correspond to a simple altered state of consciousness, but to a cognitive ontogenesis in which the initiate becomes the “parent of spirits,” becoming himself an entity that has gone beyond his own humanity to reverse the traditional hierarchies between knower and known: “‘Becoming another’ is a fundamental concept in the pedagogy of conflict developed by Kopenawa, articulating with decolonial strategies of reincorporating the body and marking the unmarked” (Souza and Duboc 2021, 895, my translation). The spectral phenomenology of the entheogenic process—marked by transformative surrender, bodily reconstitution, and the emergence of a panoramic perception—suggests that counter-colonial epistemology should start not from a simple critique of Western canons but from the recognition that there are other regimes of cognition where knowing is, above all, dying temporarily in order to be reborn as part of a cosmic network of human and non-human agents.

Kopenawa's entheogenic cosmoperception of the house that the xapiri wish to build in the heart of the shaman offers an image for understanding knowledge as living architecture, always unfinished, inviting us to rethink not only what we know but also how we coexist with wisdom. In this sense, the present study has shown that the consecration of the yākoana can reveal a sophisticated cognitive method that integrates ethnopharmacological, phenomenological, and ontological dimensions into a coherent model of ancestral knowing. The sacralization of nature experienced by the shaman transforms plant substances into epistemological vehicles, while the spectral phenomenology mediated by the xapiri presents extraordinary ways of apprehending the meaning and truth of being. In short, the plural ontology and inter-species multinaturalism that underlie Yanomami shamanic practices, in addition to dissolving Western dualistic paradigms, can open new horizons for decolonial thinking and psychedelic philosophies.

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