Roger Caillois

THE STONE MEN OF THE CANADIAN ARCTIC

To the memory of the ephemeral goddess Sedna, whose huge body reached out across the depths of the Arctic seas, whose hair was forever matted, full of ordure, clogged with bear furs and the snouts of narwhales, and could be combed only by a shaman on one of his cosmic journeyes.

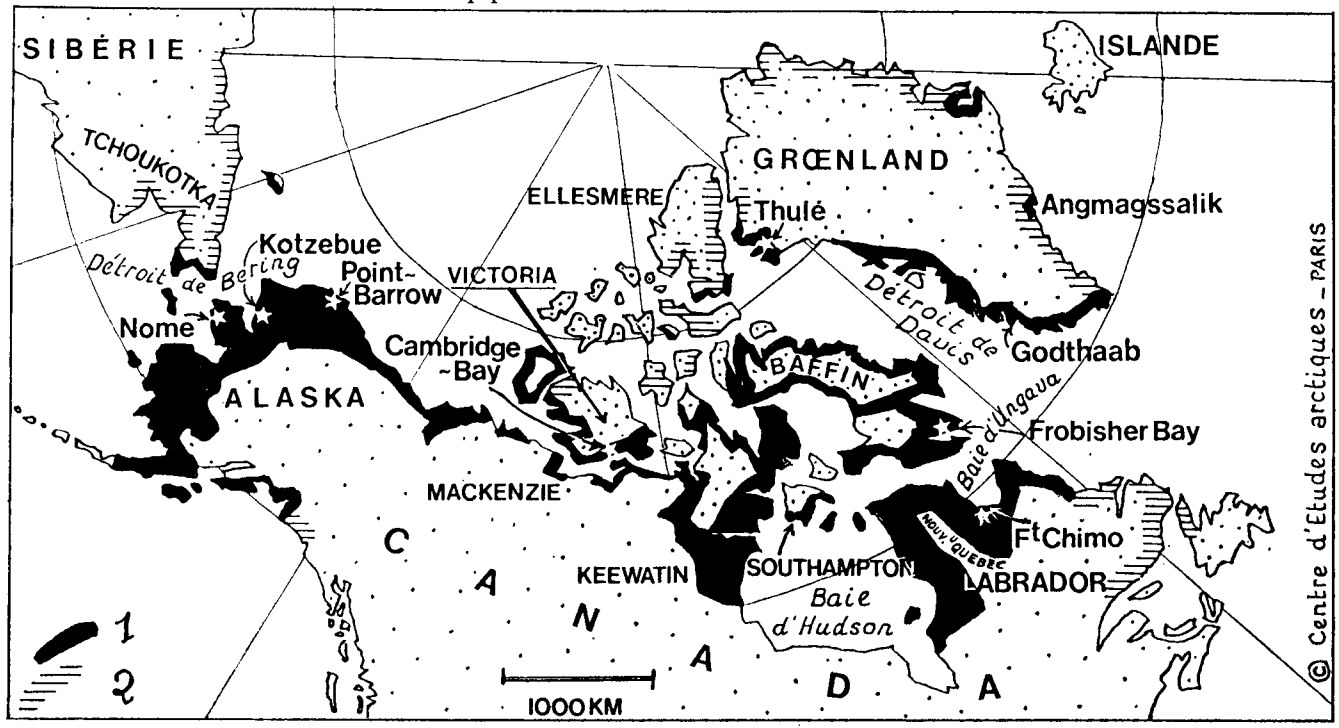
The *inukshuk* are piles of rough stone, shaped like men, and found on the coasts of the Canadian Arctic. I am well aware that they have never found a place in the history of statuary. However, they are unquestionably representations of the human form, and no one would confuse them with the simple cairns raised here and there by so many nomadic tribes in the course of their wanderings. They are disappearing, or have already disappeared with the recent, swift, and far reaching changes in Eskimo life. It is really almost a matter of chance as to whether one recognizes that they represent, or represented, a remarkable image of man. For me, the chance was a two-fold one, so to speak.

At the end of 1966, I believe, a celebrated Japanese painter, Taro Okamoto, who had recently been attending the College of Sociology, first chanced either through luck or boredom, in some

Translated by Paul and Rosanna Rowland

Areas presently occupied (villages and hunting grounds).

Territory formerly inhabited, and now abandoned by the Eskimo population.



waiting-room, upon a short article: in the September issue of the *Canadian Geographical Journal*, to be precise. It dealt with the figures of men erected with stones by the Eskimos to the North of the Hudson Bay, between Baffin Island, Southampton Island, and the Ungava peninsula, at the northern extremity of Labrador.

He was stunned by it, and expressed his deep feelings in his work *The Aesthetic and The Sacred.*[1] Generously, or rashly, he attributed to them a sacred character. The old name for these anthropomorphic groupings of rough-hewn stone is *inunguak*, i.e. " like a man." They are now designated by the word *inukshuk,* which if I am not mistaken can be translated as "*acting in the capacity of a man.*"

At Cape Enukso, the embarcation point of Baffin Island Eskimos for Southamptom Island, there are perhaps some hundred. Less than a century ago there were twice as many. Not only do the Eskimos no longer build them, but they no longer know their origin (for which each gives his own explanation). They now use the stones of which they are formed to set up their tents or fox-traps. The bears and the wind do the rest. Soon there will be no more stone men left. Kiakshuk, who died at a great age in May 1966 and from whom Brian Wyndham Lewis, author of the article in the *Canadian Geographical Journal*[2] which apparently was Taro Okamoto's only source, obtained his most significant information, saw one built before the crossing which he made in 1896 with his parents whilst still a child, over the straits separating the Ungava Peninsula from Baffin Island. The seal-skin vessel was equipped with a small sail, and would hold five families. The eldest man constructed the *inukshuk*, before the perilous voyage was attempted.

I could extract no more positive information from the four succinct pages by Wyndham Lewis, whose study is primarily devoted to relating the adventures of his unsuccessful expedition to Cape Dorset. Taro Okamoto, as I have already said, was vividly struck by the appearance and construction of these attempted statues. Responsible for the Theme Pavillion at the

[1] *L'Esthétique et le sacré.* Paris, Seghers, 1976. chap. 1, pp. 19-29.

[2] "Inukshuks and Inunguaks on Fox Peninsula and the North Quebec Coast," *Canadian Geographical Journal,* vol. LXXII, no. 3, September 1976, pp. 34-37.

Osaka Universal Exhibition in 1970, to go with the many other different representations of the human form he obtained permission from the Canadian authorities to have an *inukshuk* sent to him. He recounts that when the crates were unpacked there was general amazement: they appeared to contain nothing but common stones. One custodian ironically asked him whether they had been imported to build a road.

Needless to say, the senders had included detailed instructions for assembly. The helpers soon saw a human form emerge, arms outstretched, planted firmly on its two legs, with an astounding stability.

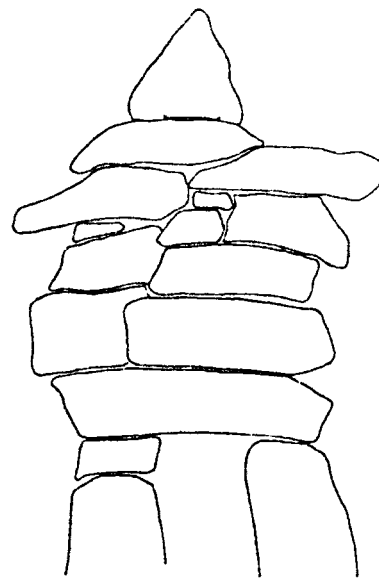
I have often seen, notably in central Asia, cairns and heaps of boulders to which the caravaneers would add by setting down a stone, designating either a tomb, holy place, or a trail-marker. The most complex have a circular base, created by thoughtful hands no doubt to avoid their eventually being scattered by the violent desert wind. On the top of certain ones flutters a rag knotted to a stick. I have never heard tell of others which represented anything at all, especially not the human form.

From its very beginnings, the human resemblance has figured in art. Whether it be carved, molded, sculpted or painted, art historians catalogue and comment on both historic and prehistoric examples. The aurignacian Venuses, the giant Easter Island statues, the fetishes or ancestors of Melanesia, sacred or secular effigies, representations of the human form from the most conventionalized to the most realistic, no matter what style they be inspired by, and no matter what material they be made of, all these simulacra have their place in the immense repertoire. Unless I am mistaken or have overlooked something, the *inukshuk* seem never to have figured as part of it. Ignorance? Such is hardly probable. Forgetfulness or negligence? Still less so. Some other reason? But what? I suppose that there is more than one specialized study on this subject, but none seems to have caught the attention of the encyclopedias that I have been able to consult, not even to the extent of a few lines written in haste or so that nothing be omitted. Their crudeness? But the menhirs are even more primitive, and simple: simple, upright monoliths.

These anthropomorphic shapes were clearly built slowly and painstakingly. They thus lack any kind of unity of conception

or vigor of execution, in which each person spontaneously and without always realizing it, finds the hallmark of the work of art. The *inukshuk* are rather reminiiniscent of card-castles or domino towers built by children, or even of the scarecrows set by the peasants in the middle of their fields to frighten birds. Except that they are built of stone with much effort and care, care being taken above all to make no changes to the material employed, which is heavy and durable, not to modify it or rectify it in any way, leaving it completely crude as it was found, discarding only the earth and the fine lichens that may cling to it.

The long Arctic night, extremely harsh living conditions, in terms of climate as well as of food, the cold, the wind, the snow, the darkness for half the year, finally the loneliness and little or no vegetation. Hunting and fishing as the only available resources, the tent or igloo as the only habitation, in a word: the desperate gamble of subsisting in such conditions. Nevertheless, witnesses report that the Eskimos lived content until quite



Inukshuk built cir. 1890

recently. Better still, they had a literature, games, toys, and graphic arts. There remains the mystery, though very localised in their vast and sparsely inhabited territories, of the *inukshuk.*

I suppose that they would begin by erecting vertically the two elongated stones forming the legs. They are carefully wedged in, for the whole construction will rest upon them. Then they lay a flat stone on the two pillars which will serve as a bowl (and a base for the rest) although not always, for the two halves of the body are often independent up to the head. On each side of the invisible spine, they superpose stones that touch and occasionally lean upon one another, while still maintaining the sagittal division of the organism. With each new element, the apprentice-architect trembles, holds his breath, and patiently searches for the best seating. He takes infinite precautions. He knows that one false move will precipitate the whole thing to the ground, and that he will have to begin all over again. Above all, I imagine that his anxiety reaches a peak when the moment arrives for him to choose and place the two penultimate, or the penultimate stone, if it is fairly long and sufficiently overhangs the line of each side in order to stand for the outstretched arms. Finally, a conical stone (whose shape, I suspect, is sometimes rather contrived) completes the effigy and represents the figure's head.

I have wondered about the singular shape of this stone. In an engraving reproduced in Wyndham Lewis's article,[3] the artisans completing the *inukshuk* wear hoods of skin which make them exactly like their stone "fellows." From this, I infer that the workers thought they were representing men such as themselves, and not gods or supernatural beings. Moreover, they are of the same height, the statues being hardly any taller.[4] In an *inukshuk*, doubtless built by Kiaskshuk, I dare say gratuitously and for no precise reason, one of the arms is vertical, reaches above the head, and seems to be hailing a stranger to whom the other arm, horizontal, indicates the path to be taken. Is this some personal phantasy, or definite memory? I suspect that we shall never know.

None of the stones is squared: they all stay in place by their

[3] *Op. cit.* p. 84, document belonging to the West Baffin Eskimo Cooperative.
[4] *Ibid.* Same document.

own weight. No cement is used. Neither is any feat of strength involved, but rather one of patience, skill, and adaptation. One man alone should suffice to do it. It seems that Kiakshuk built his all alone. In any case, in the engraving in the *Canadian Geographical Journal*, on which figure nineteen *inukshuk*, four of which are being given the last touches by the natives, each of the latter is occupied with his own work.

Once again, the slightest hasty movement at any time, the slightest imbalance, defective conception, a badly judged join, any tricky slope or unremarked unevenness, can provoke a general collapse. The stones roll to the ground, whereupon there is nothing else for it but to try, until the next setback or, more importantly, until completion, to reconstruct the monotonous puzzle which forms the object neither of admiration nor worship. Such obstinacy is baffling. There is no sign that they ever made any attempt to make them more beautiful, larger, or simply different. There is even an absence of competition. Neither had the author any idea of drawing or engraving the indistinct features of some individual or divinity on a surface which was, previously or subsequently, presented vertically, as for example on the stele of Saint-Cernin, in the Aveyron, where the worker carved on the two sides a figure with a complete face and hanging hair, with arms and legs, robe and belt.

Here, very clearly, the concern was exclusively to erect an upright and spreadeagled man, assuming as a fundamental, indisputable, and at least traditional rule not to allow any shortcuts by which the workmen could have easily benefitted, by splitting the stones, by smoothing them a little by grinding or hammering, by knocking off an awkward protruberance, or by adjusting them somewhat, one to another, in a way that would not have noticeably changed their appearance. There is a desire to respect the stones in their primal state to the extent that they be in no way marked by their momentary use. It is of mysterious significance that they remain untouched in appearance. It is doubtless this that makes Okamoto talk about the sanctity of the stone. As for myself, I will only speak of sanctity here in the sense that one speaks of the "sanctity" of the rules of a game; that is to say that the game no longer retains any meaning if the conventions upon which it is based are not tacitly considered to be more than inviolate, as if they were so automatic that it would be an unimaginable crime,

not if one violated them, but if one denied them: which merely goes to prove the extent to which they are both arbitrary and accepted.

When the "fellow" is brought down by an animal, foul weather, or subsidence of the land, unlike with fragments of earthenware or a statue there is no way of distinguishing the stones of which he was formed from the others strewn over the surrounding ground and which have never served any purpose. One would think that man was determined to restore them unchanged to that inscrutable anonymity from which he will simply have selected them. Such reverence no doubt indirectly explains the refusal, certainly not any manual incapacity or mental block, which might have prevented the Eskimo from conceiving the very idea for a design, for engraving, for modelling in the round, for sculpture. It was as if imposed upon him because of the necessity of piling up the stones required to raise the figure of a man: a constraint both complex and primitive, in any case absurd, for this was a case of an intention that might have been much more easily satisfied by methods clearly less onerous in terms of effort and ingenuity. All that would be necessary would be one line, a continuous incision, drawn upon a smooth surface. A symbol that included all the group concerned would fulfil the same function, or even a clumsy effigy provided merely with a few human attributes which would be sufficient to entitle it "man," a schematic man no doubt, but a striking, superior, supernatural model: an unchallengeable paradigm. I presume that the merest, formless rock could have supplied the desired idol. This was not what actually happened.

It is certainly fitting to bear in mind that in the whole mineral kingdom there is probably no single facies which readily presents a human form (like the mandrake root among plants), the latter being on such a scale that one can only seek a distant likeness of it. In each case, we must add the features of the desired presence. Men have made use of every possible size, from the colossi of Egypt to the figurines of the Cyclades and coins that can be held in the palm of the hand.

There is no people that has not had this idea. Only the Eskimos have abstained from the many quasi-naturalistic solutions, and from which it is almost miraculous that they have escaped, (at least up to the time, practically yesterday, when they were

absorbed by the technological civilizations). I would have thought that such a remarkable exception would have given rise to extensive comment and shrewd hypothesizing.

For, all in all, it was a question of nothing less than representing man from the exterior, if not from afar, without any distinctive feature other than his general form with the help of materials borrowed directly from a miserly earth, to which nothing is added and which are constantly prone to return to their original state without anyone being concerned or even noticing. I am not in any way claiming that such was the intention of the *inukshuk* builders: it was, however, what they in fact achieved.

The sizes of the *inukshuk* are neither gigantic nor minuscule: they correspond more or less to the dimensions of the human body. Their difference from all other known representations of the human body is that they are never of one single piece, but are always reconstituted from stone parts taken as they are from nature, and whose rigid and rugged form it seems forbidden to soften, visibly at least. The *inukshuk* are not merely men of stone, but figures of men aggressively built of pieces of stone which continue to belong to the mineral world without the slightest intention of making any changes, and which, even better, are unequivocally displayed as being destined to remain merged and impossible to identify by the slightest human token or manifestation. Never has there been such an eloquent or humiliating variant on the theme of *in pulverem reverteris.*

I believe it is too late to comment upon the myths or obsessions which but lately (and perhaps still do so today, although not for long) presided over the erection of the stone shapes lining the shores to the west of Baffin Island and the extreme north of Quebec. Several hypotheses have been advanced to explain the *inukshuk*: signals to navigators or to hunters returning from their long expeditions, (but these stone landmarks are scarcely visible); markers or indicators for food stores (there is not the slightest proof or tradition to uphold this); ancient ritual meaning (certainly, but what?); and finally, propitiatory offerings, built before a perilous voyage to bring the givers, if not the benevolence, at least the neutrality of the monsters who infest the open seas. This I accept, but I would surmise that it is more a question of a decoy: the sailors erect a deceptive effigy of themselves in full

view so as to convince the huge, voracious creatures who lie in wait for them in these ocean deeps, that they have remained ashore for all to see. This would not be an offering, but a substitution. The existence of such formidable and frightful monsters is in fact confirmed, in particular on a carved stone belonging to the *West Baffin Eskimo Cooperative*.[5] Thus it is that Kiakshuk's companions raise a man of stone before embarking for Cape Dorset.

The most ancient legend about the origin of the stone men, though today considered a nursery tale, tells how, in the not so distant past, two Eskimo camps waged a long and bloody war to win a woman of assuredly wondrous beauty. Many young men died in the fight. Some were taken prisoner, and their brains completely battered in. The torturers were then smitten with remorse and therefore raised an *inukshuk* in memory of each victim. I am willing to dismiss the war, which is at odds with the pacific nature of the Eskimos as is the theme, which might have been concocted by some intermediate narrator from memories of the *Iliad*: I am more concerned with the cold-blooded murder of the prisoners, i.e. the intentional killing of human beings, and their substitution by some kind of statue.

The Arctic population is no doubt the most sparse in the world. Add to this the icy expanses, the long months of impenetrable darkness, the exhilaration and relief of the short summer, but also the disproportionately long shadows and the reflection—as unflagging as the shadows—of the sun on the ice or snow. It burns the retina, and the Eskimos have to protect themselves against it with wooden glasses pierced by a narrow slit. Above all, I am struck by the interminable solitude of the arctic wastes. The accidental loss of a single man—all the more so when it is intentional and cruel—is this not felt to be more than a sin, almost like an amputation?

The known mythologies have germinated in clement climates—and occasionally in the unfertile savannas and impenetrable forests. A certain population density and the interplay of seasonal and nycthemeral rhythms no doubt create widely-shared conditions; and it is hardly astounding that they endow the variety of myths

[5] *Ibid.*, p. 87.

and liturgies with a partial similarity, assuredly rudimentary and unlikely to cause surprise. But in a boundless and extreme solitude, where men are few and far between, in which the disappearance of each one is felt immediately, could not the idea have been born to raise a simulacrum of stones which would be the counterpart of each individual, both guarantor and protector: an effigy replacing the living by its lone, inert presence, in the case of a prolonged absence or death. The *inukshuk* could, though not necessarily, have fulfilled the role either of external souls, offerings, or guardian spirits: were the stone "fellows" perhaps only erected to forestall or mitigate the simple and obstinate fear of too great a decline in numbers, and of overstepping the limits beyond which it would become difficult for the group to survive?

Whoever builds it, puts into it something of himself, not only his labor, but also his zeal, ingenuity, something of his taste and his inspiration. He has acquired a respondent more durable than himself, in such a way that, if my conjectures, based upon the uncertain logic of the imagination, were to be found correct, there would have been no recognized *inukshuk* makers, (I have never in fact found any reference to one), as there are painters, sculptors, ceramists or any kind of professional. In this intimate sphere, which claims something of the soul, it is naturally out of place, almost inconceivable, to work in someone else's stead.

I am surprised to find myself commenting on almost contemporary customs, which have already disappeared, or all but, as if I were dealing with prehistoric lore, whose ambiguous traces can be found on cave walls, and which go back to a time when man was still not so different from the animals, at least as regards his way of life. I also wonder as to how I dare in any way place in the same category as art a vaguely anthropomorphic pile of stones, heaped up in order to beguile some obscure presentiment.

All the same, in order to include works created expressly and solely for the sake of beauty, the notion of art has long been extended, and in my opinion rightly so, to a multitude of human works which were not originally thus designated. They only received this designation much later as a superfluous (and often unexpected) aspect of their original function, or even in opposition to it. The consequences are so far-reaching that art, considered as an autonomous activity, by which I really mean aesthetic, will perhaps have lasted for only a short span of the history of the

world, and that beauty will quickly be reabsorbed back into the general pattern of things, from which it has, no doubt imprudently and fleetingly, been disembodied or, if one wishes, distilled.

As to chronological discrepancies, I am somewhat reassured by the reflection that Eskimo life has only changed, and slowly at that, between the beginning of the century and the Second World War, and thereafter at an almost dizzying pace. Virtually only yesterday they used to live as nomads in settlements of 200 to 300 persons. There are about 80,000 of them, 15,000 alone in Canada, i.e. the population of a quite modest-sized sub-prefecture in an immense territory of some 3 million square kilometres.[6] For a long time they believed that they themselves and the animals they hunted constituted the whole universe. They had a few contacts with whalers' crews, then with trappers when white fox was in fashion, though this market collapsed in 1949. Arnold Toynbee cites them as one of the rare examples of "captive civilizations" which have managed to survive. Up to the beginning of the 20th Century they lived according to their ancestral traditions. Their equipment consisted of a kayak, a seal-fat steatite lamp which both illuminated and heated at the same time, a harpoon, and a few bone utensils: very much as in the Stone Age, until the introduction of the mining and oil industries. Though at first sporadic, the transformation soon became more or less total: a new generation of shop-girls and hairdressers in nylon smocks, workers going to their jobs on ice-scooters, fishing and hunting now reduced to mere amusement or a sort of black market for those who live on family allowance.[7] Even in cut-off areas, the settlements are abandoned for larger conglomerations where one finds shops, schools, workshops, and service stations, in fact all the small coinage which bureaucratic and technological civilization carries with it, even into its most advanced institutions.

The break was swift and recent, which is the reason I took

[6] This territory comprises several thousand kilometres of coastline. One should remember that the Eskimos do not normally inhabit the hinterland. As a comparison, there are 30,000 in Greenland, 24,000 in Alaska, and fewer than 3,000 in Siberia. All are Canadian, Danish, American, or Soviet citizens respectively. Their votes are polled regularly, and they enjoy their full rights, often benefitting besides from supplementary assistance. Alexandre Stevenson, "De la banquise à la grande ville," *Le Courrier de l'Unesco*, January 1975; Paul-Emile Victor, *Eskimos, nomades des glaces*, Lausanne and Paris 1972.

[7] P.E. Victor, *op. cit.*, p. 24 ff.

such care to establish the exact date in 1896 when Kiakshuk yet saw the building of a stone man before a perilous crossing. Today, one such man, either authentic or copied, though it hardly matters, can be seen by tourists at Toronto airport, standing as an example of ancient modes of beaconage: this seeming to be the prevailing interpretation.

Like Taro Okamoto, I am moved by the *inukshuk*. I am not overly concerned with the favors solicited by those who built them, the fears they were destined to allay, or the purposes they might have served. They intensified the human presence amid hostile expanses where the number of men could not decline even by one without bringing the others additional anguish or solitude. When a man died it was forbidden to utter his name for any reason whatsoever. The ban was lifted only at the instant when it was solemnly bestowed upon a new-born child at a sort of baptism, as it is also performed today in the ritual of the Christian churches.[8]

Religion and the arts also serve to sublimate this kind of permeating sadness. I wonder above all at such an unusual representation of the human form. I am surprised that it has passed unnoticed, and that these stones heaped up to form a standing figure should have remained practically unacknowledged by historians of art and technology, although neither calabash decorations nor varieties of propeller have escaped their notice. Little though I am disposed to flights of fancy, there is something more. I believe that I have discovered the secret of these images laced with cracks: the peculiarity of the chinks between the assembled stones, which no one has taken the trouble to fill and which, paradoxically, help them to fit. It is hard not to be reminded of the crevasses that rend the ice-floes at the moment of breaking up, or more simply the web of fissures that stars the ice-bed when the hunter pierces the hole where he will lie in wait for seals.

The *inukshuk* are human silhouettes, while at the same time they are linked to the earth by the stones that have been left free from any polishing, engraving, or shaping. Furthermore, these effigies while depicting the organic unity of the group, are auguries of dawn and spring, for in these latitudes their feature

[8] *Ibid.*, p. 134. The author has, furthermore, witnessed this ritual, at Ammassalik, on the east coast of Greenland.

of being built unclad signifies the intimation of light, the thaw, of the return of life after the long and dark annual slumber.

* * *

The story of Osiris, who was dismembered, scattered, and then restored, is a splendid myth. Nevertheless, I sense a greater aptness and imaginative foresight, a more exact correspondence between man, in his immense glacial prison, and the arctic fellows which he built without mortar, with such roughly jointed stones that the light of day sometimes penetrates the gaps.

They are not very solidly built, and tumble down easily; neither do they look very imposing: the artisan has added nothing either to complete or mold it. They are poorly hewn counterparts, golems of unmalleable clay, piles of hard rock.

Instead of a bone structure, the place of the vertebral column is taken by a virtually empty space. There was nothing to prevent putting there some kind of filler or narrow vertical stone. In any case, the construction of the human form out of grouped stones which seem to be on the point of coming apart is no doubt unique to the world. As for myself, it was certainly the one which from the first astounded me by its extreme originality. Now, I am being bolder when I vaguely discern there a certain analogy with the mazes of forked cracks which each spring open up on the ice-pack with the sound of thunder, for the surging forth of the liberated waters.

I am trying to imagine nothing. I am dismissing the idea that the ancient Eskimos intentionally built their *inukshuk* bearing in mind the image of the break-up of the ice. I shall also avoid making too much of the shamanism which the Baffin Island Eskimos did in fact practice. I am setting aside the fact that the shamanist initiation normally consists of a symbolic "dismemberment" followed by a magical resurrection out of the bones, which are specifically "omitted" from among the assembled pieces of the *inukshuk*. They represent the indestructible essence of life. I disregard in principle those vague relationships upon which the usual mythological interpretations are based. They either hit the nail on the head or miss it completely: this lies in the domain of the inaccessible past and not ingenuity of proof. Here, I shall simply be content to invoke a notion so general

that it will hardly pass for an explanation, and one might rather condemn it as a paltry tautology. Ever sure that the imagination is not free, I am convinced in this particular case that there exists a pool of images with which every people is endowed by virtue of the specific setting in which it lives, and even more so in the case of the Eskimos for whom, no matter how far they drive their huskies, the snow, the cold, the ice, and wind constitute a monotonous and everlasting habitat. There is no mythology which does not link man and his land. He sees himself as its direct, unquestionable, and consubstantial offspring, emerging fully prepared from the immense womb on whose surface he thenceforth leads the existence of an ant, so that a latent similarity necessarily appears, even before the intervention of the allegorical spirit, between the image which man creates of the earth and that which he sketches of his own likeness. I am not unduly surprised that the stone men of the Great North should have been conceived as human walls, made up of ice-floes which never melt and are yet already about to disperse, doomed to wander, like the waters solidified by the cold, with each renewal recapturing their freedom and turbulence thanks to the broad fissure rent in the compact mass.

I think that the *insukshk* are neither aesthetic works nor holy images, let alone documentary, realistic, or encoded representations. They play no part in any spiritual ritual, as do the Tibetan *mandalas* or Zen gardens, and they are thus neither part of any religion (there is no liturgy concerning them and no sacrifices are offered to them) nor of the realm of art (no aesthetic value is ever attributed to them). To some degree they may fulfill a utilitarian function, though vaguely and indirectly and on a rather superstitious level, somewhat after the fashion of the objects or landmarks that hearten gamblers or sailors: generally speaking those who are ready to assume great risks, which they know very well to be beyond the control of their knowledge or strength, and which in a word, they can influence only to a minimal and insignificant extent.

There is a poorly explored domain, in which art could easily gain a foothold—for the cost or rarity of a lucky charm increases its effectiveness—and to which the *inukshuk* seem to belong. They are like exaggerated amulets, or ex votos. On account of their size, material, technique, and above all on

account of the fact that they are human effigies, they certainly deserved to be put on a level with works currently reproduced and analysed as examples of original and unique styles in the heritage of art—in the widest sense of the word, of humanity. This recognition was probably very nearly bestowed upon them. In such cases it is partly a matter of luck, since there is no absolutely certain criterion which might enable us to make a clear choice.

I have just, in fact, referred to a domain which certainly still survives in our very way of thinking, being a question of the actual fabric of the universe, but which previously existed and whose distant responses, echoes, and repetitions were to attract even more attention in premythological times, by which I mean pre-discursive, in which symbols themselves were absent. I think, therefore, that here there are no rational grounds for comparison, for any metaphor of the thawing sea and the construction which leaves the cleverly assembled materials intact and free, (there is, moreover, nothing in common between the effigy of the standing man, and the flat, white expanse of the ice-cap). I am thinking, rather, of some kind of response to, or a spontaneous reproduction of the world, all the more abetted by parallel situations (or contradictory ones, but culminating in apparently similar effects), i.e., of those reproductions of nature that I have so often referred to as one of the inevitable results of a closed world of limited elements, and about which, as far as the present case is concerned, I can merely state that two of their important elements are to be found clearly and uniquely united on those very shores of *Ultima Thule*,[9] whose name imparts so powerful a sensation of remoteness that it seems to indicate a constellation.

[9] As Knud Rasmussen, who did so much for the Eskimos and our understanding of them, has chosen the name Thule for the most important township in north-west Greenland, I should eliminate any ambiguity here by recalling that this is the legendary *Ultima Thule* of the ancient geographers, i.e. a northern land of which all that is known is that there lies nothing beyond it.