

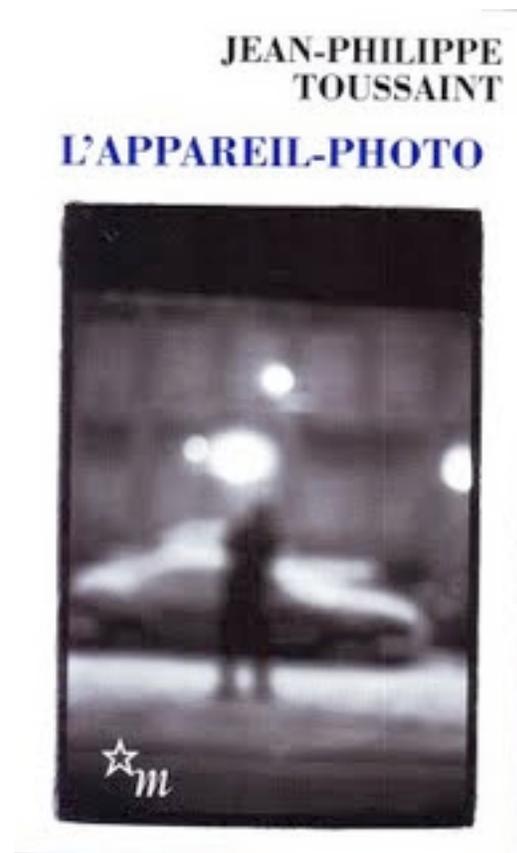
[The Bibliophilic Blogger](http://bibliophilicblogger.blogspot.com/2008/08/jean-philippe-toussaint-infinitesimal.html)

<http://bibliophilicblogger.blogspot.com/2008/08/jean-philippe-toussaint-infinitesimal.html>

This is the blog of author Nicholas Murray. "A precondition for reading good books is not reading bad ones: for life is short" - Schopenhauer.

Monday, 4 August 2008

[Jean-Philippe Toussaint: The Infinitesimal Novel](#)



It is that season of the year when the Man Booker Prize longlist is released and this time I find it hard even to stifle a yawn. In the search for some interesting contemporary fiction away from those dismal 3 for 2 window displays in Waterstone's, it is sometimes helpful to compare what is happening elsewhere. I have just read Jean-Philippe Toussaint's wonderfully original novel *L'Appareil-Photo* which is to be published in November by the estimable Dalkey Archive, translated by Matthew B Smith as *Camera*. This short novel was first published in 1989 and it is an exquisitely funny book that is at once about everything and nothing. Its immaculate descriptions of the banality of the quotidian are, I feel, a kind of subversive attack on realism and it is just the sort of perfectly written, original, intellectually stimulating fiction that one would love British publishers to let us read.

The current *éditions de Minuit* paperback comes with a fascinating interview with Toussaint by Laurent Demoulin in which the author talks about his approach to fiction.

They discuss how this kind of writing can best be labelled. One possibility is to call it, as some French critics have done: "Le nouveau 'nouveau roman'" or even "école de Minuit" after the publisher who has promoted it. British critics would probably plump for "minimalist" but Toussaint himself has proposed "roman infinitésimaliste" which I don't think needs translating. As he puts it in the interview [my translation]: "The term 'minimalist' merely suggests the infinitely small, whereas 'infinitesimalist' refers as much to the idea of the infinitely large as the infinitely small: it contains the two kinds of infinity that one should always encounter in a book." His art of maximal suggestion through minimal means works for this reader.

Posted by Nicholas Murray at [10:31](#)