

Something is
Crook

in Middlebrook

(a comic database in 12 parts
which is thoroughly jolly and in
many respects useful to read)

By
James R. Hugunin

Copped Right in 2011
by *U-Turn*, Oak Park, IL 60302

Book Blurb

by James Hugunin

While guarding some of the world's most valuable art, Arthur Strewth Middlebrook suffers a brain event that leaves him with shot-gun mike sensitive hearing in his left ear. Cajoling art professor, James Hugunin, to tell his tale of 'becoming-ear,' of *earotic* engagement with his aurally-enhanced world, readers are now privy to how Art's *heard mentality* (both curse and blessing) changes his life and those around him.

Art and his neighbors—Peven, a blind photographer and Al, a professor of Combinatorial Analysis—fight off the annoyances of tiny twin furies, the Boettcher Brats, suffer the antics and prying of a rogue C.I.A. agent disguised as a clown, and eventually discover where Teamster boss, Jimmy Hoffa's remains are stuffed.

Apropos Art's newly altered life-world, media theorist, Marshall McLuhan, wrote, "The extension of any one sense alters the way we think and act—the way we perceive the world. When ratios change, men [*sic*] change." While French theorist, Michel de Certeau, asserted, "The ear is the delicate skin caressed or irritated by sound; an erogenous zone . . ." See how these phenomenologies play out in the odd life of this former art professor-critic, who is now reduced to working as a part-time museum guard (where his weird ear comes in very handy) while re-skilling as a graduate student of geology listening to his quirky professor's ode to a geode.

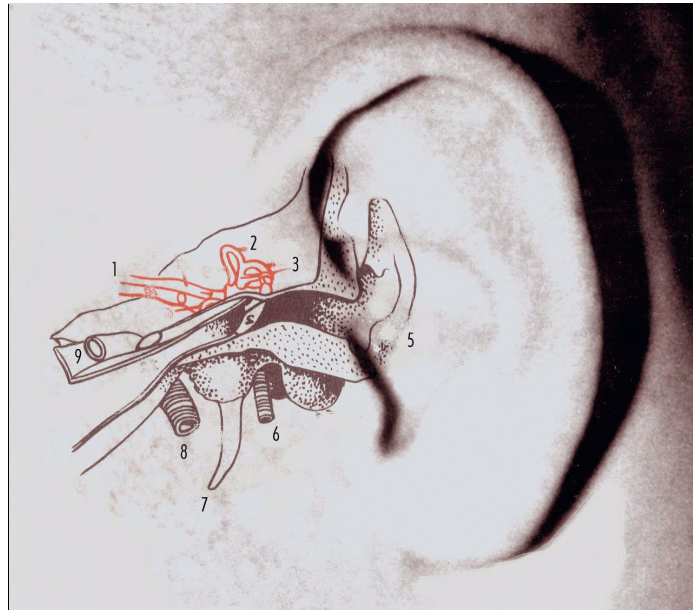
Sit with Arthur in his golf-ball inspired dome-home's cockloft and listen in on his pan-audicon hearing as he sucks the sound waves out of Chicago's radios, televisions, and teeming millions. Blush as you listen in as *earotically*-charged Una Calda Bionda wins Art's heart through *aural sex*.

A submarine in a sea of authorships, Hugunin—a textual *bricoleur* inspired by his famed photo-collagist mentor, Robert Heinecken—faithfully follows Arthur's authorial demands as he torpedoes a myriad of texts, re-assembling the verbal wreckage into one playful, wonky hodge-podge which, Art boasts, is a new genre of literature: a *Ludicakadroman*.

*The extension of any one sense alters the way
we think and act — the way we perceive the world.
When these ratios change, men [sic] change.*
— Marshall McLuhan

*The ear is the delicate skin caressed or
irritated by sound: an erogenous zone . . .*
— Michel de Certeau

*For the perceiving subject who sees is situated and placed
within a set of clarities and distinctions, but the perceiving
subject who hears is displaced within a set of obscurities.*
— Kevin Barry



Arthur's Left Ear (Photo by Beth Reineck)

*Think now of a world devoid of quiet and empty,
where every surface shouts and every silence is filled.*
— Brent Staples

*Suppose the eye [ear] were an animal—
~~sight~~ [hearing] would be its soul.*
— Aristotle, modified

Let him who has ears to hear, hear!
— New Testament

Noise is what defines the social.
— Michel Serres

. . . I heard the voice of the city.
— Saul Bellow

Something is **Crook** in Middlebrook

1.0

~~It is the best of times, it is the worst of times, it is the age of wisdom, it is the age of foolishness, it is the epoch of belief, it is the epoch of incredulity, it is the season of Light, it is the season of Darkness, it is the spring of hope, it is the winter of despair, the gigantic anthropological circus is in full swing. Art has everything before him, he has nothing before him ... he has a thirst for contradiction like a thirst for wine.~~

City of Chicago, like spatter of ink on a map. Another day in our deMOREcracy.

Something's crook in Middlebrook. Something's wrong with Arthur Strewth Middlebrook that is. As he comes limping down sidewalk, he can hear your heart a-tickin' from across street. Or sitting high up in his cockloft on top his golf-ball shaped dome-home with his left ear focused in your direction, he audits conversations hundreds of yards away. Pure electronic hum of untuned radio some four blocks away bores through his *cabeza*. With swollen ear, gimpy left foot, at 55, Art finds everything auditory to larboard closer than soundings to starboard. Only malleable waxy ear goop purchased at Walgreen Drugs thumb-stuffed into auditory canal can balance his auditory perceptions. How would you recognize him? Could be stunt-double for beefy actor Bob Hoskins, except for enlarged left ear, that gimp, and his left-handedness. If an artist did symbolic portrait of Art, it'd look like some fantastic cartoonish creature out of repertoire of Chicago Imagists such as Jim Nutt or Karl Wirsum. When watches frightening films, put his hands over his ears, not his eyes.

Wants to audit *mucho* stuff, so his Chicana workmate, Mala Gra-decido—who sports teeth like screaming horse in Picasso's *Guernica*—blesses him in Spanglish after each museum shift: "*Bato, go con la oreja al vuelo* (Friend, go with ears wide open). She wittily captures Art's new selfhood in punning couplet: "*Hombre nuevo/hambre nueva*."

"Yes, new man, new hunger; I'm fearfully and wonderfully made," agrees Art.

1.1 It all begins little over year ago in eighth biggest city on earth. Budget cuts at Chicagoland suburban jerkwater college art department. You know, large campus green with bad imitations of Richard Neutra architecture built circa 1965. Classrooms that have tall, narrow windows easy to defend with student desks firmly bolted to floor. Art department in basement of science building so student work nearly invisible. Must not risk offending anyone. One ominous word from Dean Gerta Hackenkruzler and Art's yearly renewable part-time pedagogical position teaching "New Forms"—critical writing, conceptual art, performance, video, digital art—to suburban brats *ist Kaput*. His usual Gramscian mantra—"Pessimism of the intelligence, optimism of the will"—isn't working any more. Last class Art declaims: "God is dead, Marxism is a specter—neither alive nor dead—budget cuts are rampant, stu-