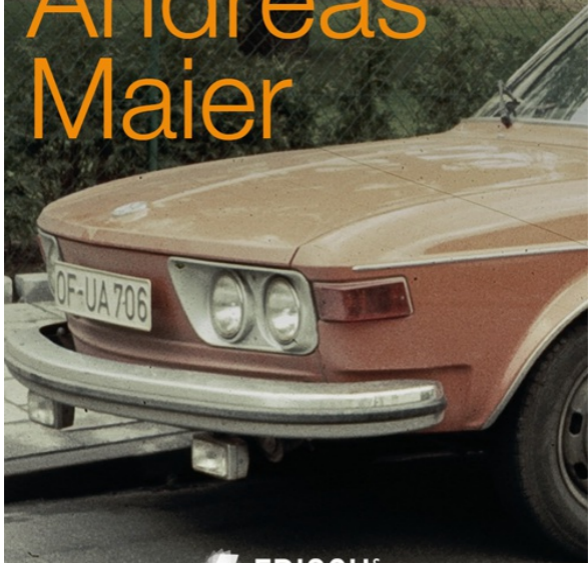


The Room Andreas Maier



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This is how I imagine a day in the life of my uncle J: At around half four in the morning, he sets off in his camouflaged parka, with a hat in winter and in summer without, walking the eight minutes to the nearby Bad Nauheim train station, where there were still two counter clerks and the trains ran exactly on time. Coffee was drunk from porcelain cups and the kiosk wasn't yet openly accessible, which meant you could only look at the porno mags if you asked the kiosk assistant for them. So no standing around shamefaced in the corner as they do nowadays, looking at the selection of bust and butt magazines like *Anal* and *The Neighbour's Wife*, and even cock mags now too, because the sexes have gotten all mixed up, even in train station kiosks, despite the fact that everything tends

to reach them last. Nowadays you have to know exactly what you want, whereas back then someone like my uncle still had a relatively narrow selection, albeit one that didn't seem in the slightest bit narrow to him. Men would have confused him. Maybe it would be different today. But he died at just the right time, in that sense. In his day, there were still relatively clear divisions. For the most part, people lived ordered lives in which they went to work and listened to Heino or had a thirst-quenching beer at the inn or standing in front of the fridge at home, and the other thing was secret and only took place—if it took place at all—at the kiosk, where they would go twice a week, and the magazines cost money, after all, and then they had to be hidden away. Back then, those magazines were the means of escaping from oneself, from one's inner, God-given nature

—people would look at the pictures and live with them and from them, then return, unscathed, to the refuge of society and working life. There were still morals; everything else was pushed aside into a corner. Today, everything would have been too much for my uncle.

It's possible that he had a good business relationship with the kiosk at the Bad Nauheim train station. He smoked a lot, R6s, and he would have bought them there for sure. Maybe the kiosk owner used to open up as early as half four because of the night shift and early shift workers. But maybe it wasn't like that at all; maybe Uncle J just sat there with his little leather bag, reputable and washed amongst his colleagues, finally part of it, somebody, a commuter on his way to work, someone with stories to tell, stories about his work, about his superiors, his

colleagues, stories about particularly heavy packages or particularly interesting deliveries or unusual happenings. Or maybe they were all in cahoots, talking about the women. Perhaps they had already realised, with utter clarity, what and who my uncle was, and they let him buy all kinds of things for them, paid for out of his pay check. And he bought them and paid for them in order to belong and feel accepted by his colleagues, at half past four in the morning in Bad Nauheim in the Wetterau.

My uncle was a great frequenter of inns, and whenever he went someone or other would suss him out. My uncle, mentally impaired at birth, was constantly boasting about his existence, or rather about his Boll existence, his existence as a Boll. He sat there in the inns and told stories about his father, the big company boss with a chauffeur

and a dog. Of course he didn't mention the fact that his father hit him, or rather used to hit him, with a leather belt. When he was talking about his father, a bad word never passed his lips. I probably thought everything that happened was normal, just part of the entirely normal, natural way of the world. He would talk about the company, the employees, the pay checks; he probably even told people where the cash was kept, the best way to get to the company premises and so on. But it would never have occurred to anyone in Friedberg or Bad Nauheim to break into the premises by the Usa; instead they would just have gotten to the money through my uncle, who for my family had always been an open sore, financially speaking, the Bolls' open wound. And even though he was only ever giving away his own pay check, the family still didn't want to see it wasted like