

The signs start appearing in May, prime time for a kiosk opening. A blackboard stand propped up against a bicycle that points potential customers in the right direction. Promising cold beer and ice cream, postal services, the usual. Then a second sign pops up on the other side of the street.

RimeD//More Than a Kiosk—Espresso, cappuccino, cookies, homemade lemonade, Rindswurst

Their aggressive advertising comes across as rather desperate, though their location more than warrants the effort. The kiosk is situated on an undertrafficked side street around the corner from the ECB. A blind spot amongst a hodgepodge of buildings that look like they were slapped together in a week in the aftermath of World War II. One block further west the streets turn leafy and serene, red sandstone and shaded balconies. To the east, identikit luxury apartments sprout like a rash, mimicking those already present on the riverside. The whole area is rather like a slab of bacon, with distinct layers of fat, gristle and meat, and looming abstractly above it all like an oversized knife is the ECB tower.

Every morning, men hang around across the street from the tower, waiting for someone to pick them up for a day's work. The Arbeiterstrich or, as some even more unashamedly like to say, the "Polenstrich". The term was coined when the mammoth construction site across the road was still warm and has stuck, despite its grating inaccuracy. Some of the men are alone, diffident, drinking bakery coffee on the wooden benches of the unfortunately located Apfelweinkneipe, which sits its patrons in front of a traffic light on a busy street. Others gather in small groups that look like they could split up at a moment's notice, tenuous solidarity cut short by the prospect of employment. None of them look convinced, almost as if they are doggedly trying to overcome the odds of an underheated labor market by faithfully standing out in the cold, as if their efforts will be rewarded simply because they are there.

The owners of RimeD clearly do not take this tack. A few months later, a new sign appears. They have now covered all possible routes of approach. I assume that, like me, no one turns into that street without a reason. An overlooked blip, it is sandwiched between the corner where the sex shop is and a nondescript perpendicular leading down to the tower. Only venturing down it do you realize that it is not, in fact, a dead end.

An orange apartment building, stained grey with age, breaks out from the otherwise monotonous feel. Across the street from it a huge sign, made of what seem to be triangular building blocks, spells out "RimeD". The triangles with the "r" and the "d" are slightly more elongated to make room for their sweeping slogan—More Than A Kiosk—which flanks the oddly chosen name. Under the sign is a cavernous opening. A PVC strip curtain a few meters in doubles up as a door.

It is clearly an ambitious project. What strikes me first as the plastic flaps glide past my shoulders is the startling array of beers, most of which are not refrigerated. These, as well as other beverages, are arranged on shelves according to categories. A display of wine bottles rests on top of a stack of pallets covered by a chestnut-stained plywood board. Spread out on more of these makeshift tables is a selection of imported snacks from the US: Ding Dongs, Hostess cupcakes, Cheetos, M & M's with more inventive flavor profiles than what is normally imported to Europe, Whatchamacallits, Nerds, what have you. On the countertop in front of the cash register are bowls of fruit sold by the piece and glass jars with individually hand-wrapped cookies the size of a baby's head. Gluten-free carrot cake dusted with icing sugar, pre-sliced under a plastic dome so that one can spy the walnut chunks in it. They make

homemade börek and pide and have even put in a pizza kitchen behind a long counter, the blackboard menu full of Italian misspellings. The flyers outside the place advertise 5 Euro pizza for their inaugural month. A month has come and gone, yet the pizza is still advertised at 5 Euros. Like stores that leave the “just opened” sign on their window for years, hesitant to relinquish the sense of novelty. Their efforts, while valiant, cannot cover up the warehouse quality of the space, a dark garage which is simply too large for a kiosk. Such an enterprise is meant to take place in a hole in the wall, to convey a feeling of coziness and intimacy that distracts customers from the fact that the people selling them cigarettes are involved in a high risk, low reward game. One look inside this place leaves you with an uncomfortable feeling that when you come back it will have folded up the dizzying variety of goods and disappeared. The dizzying variety of goods is a shot in the dark – they are taking diversification a bit too literally and one cannot help but think that this strategy is bound to fail.

After fulfilling the purchase that was my excuse to check the place out, I emerge back into the daylight and pause before heading towards my bike. Next to the cave-like entrance of the kiosk is a shuttered shop window. Its concrete ledge serves as a handy beer rest for the straggly group of men in their early 20s who gather here in the late afternoon, puffing around in front of their precariously parked cars, blocking off whatever traffic there is.

This morning, a faded purple backpack, frayed around the straps and with the zipper half open, rests on top of the window ledge. Next to it are a supermarket container of sushi and a can of Oettinger beer. A dumpy-looking man, with his back to the street, reaches out for the sushi piece by piece. Single-minded and oblivious to his surroundings, he has carved himself out a corner of privacy for the length of the task at hand. Once he is finished, he zips up his backpack, putting the empty plastic boat inside it. From the way he picks up the can of beer I can tell that it is almost empty. He walks away along the tram tracks, in the opposite direction of the tower and the possibilities of the day.

Winter goes by, spring is almost over when another sign makes its appearance. This time well 100 meters away from the kiosk. Seemingly a last-ditch attempt to attract attention, it is placed right in front of the entrance to the artificial square where the fancy Rewe is. The pizza is now advertised at 6 Euros. I pass the sign on a few more occasions before deciding to go out of my way and crossing the street. An LED display board has been added above the drinks fridges near the entrance, in full view now that the seedy plastic flaps have been taken down and the space is seamlessly accessible. The board is not big enough to hold their entire slogan in one go, so the words pop up slowly, one after the other.

RimeD      More    Than    A      Kiosk