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# Were You *Silent* Or Were You *Never Heard*? Story of Refusal Zofia Krupa

*Refusal to speak?*

*Refusal to listen?*

*Refusal to conform?*

*Active Refusal?*

*Refusal or Withdrawal?*

*Refusal or Resistance?*

*Refusal or Refuting?*

*Refusal or Refraining?*

*Refusal or Non-engagement?*

*Refusal or being careful about things?*

*Is Refusal about negation or production?*

*Refusal of the architectural commission?*

*Refusal of a singular view on Architecture?*

*Isn't Architecture always trying to find a solution for things?*

*Or, Could it be the part of the problem?*

*Coming together – re-constructing the profession*

*Refusal of «professionalism»*

*Practice of imagination*

*Who are architects?*

*Refusal is self-care.*

*Refusing Refusal as inactivity.*

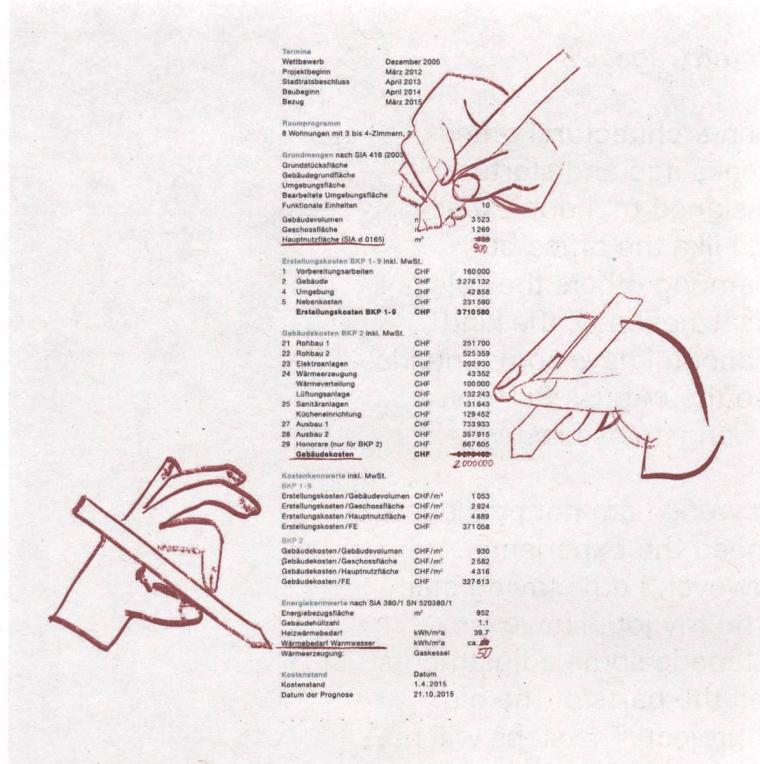
*Refusal is not a solution for things, it is a mechanism.*

*Collective Refusal.*

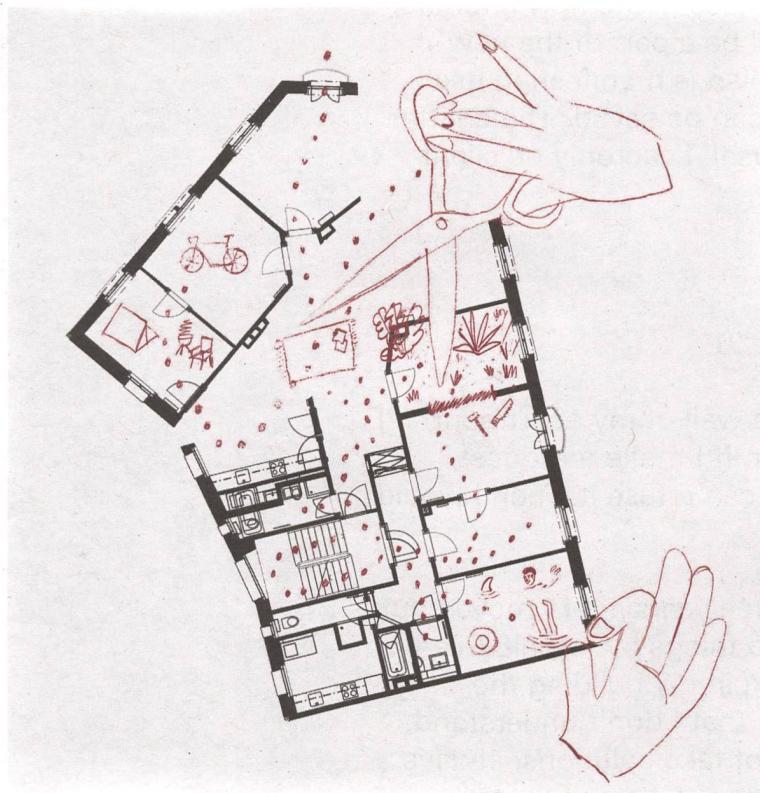
*We are all refusing, all the time.*

*You cannot «not do it».*

A



B



C



A Competition brief. Image: by the author  
 B Ground floor plan. Image: by the author

C Site of Refusal. Image: by the author

## ACT I

*01.01.2022, Zurich, architecture intern, age: 23*

Like many others in this city, I work in an architectural office from 9 to 6. I arrived in Zurich a few weeks ago and started working on a competition that I was assigned to. I don't really have a choice since I am just an intern. I like the office but there are a few things I disagree with, among others the sole purpose of this competition. It is an «Ersatzneubau», the kind of proceeding I heard already so much about. I have some friends in the city. They invite me all the time to the «Abriss-Partys». I went to one in an old house close to Langstrasse last week.

I am not really in a position to refuse to work. I am not privileged enough to do so. I need the money. I need the Experience. I need a letter of recommendation. However, I am staying still, silent. I come to work every day and I do my job. However, I can still refuse. I fail to fully perform. I made some adjustments to the competition brief. I will not let all the parts of the old house die. They will endure in the new project! The slabs will be turned around and will become a part of the new facade, the old windows and doors will find their place in the new interiors, the vegetation growing on the roof will be a part of the new green courtyard. The obscurity of my plan is manifesting itself in the calculations, where the money can be saved. The chatter of numbers is the only sign of my refusal. I can only be silent about some things. (1)

## ACT II

*10.06.2015, Zurich, student, age: 21*

Should I ask if I can make a hole in the wall of my apartment? (2) Maybe. But I am scared of the answer. If I make a request, the owner, the landlord, the neighbour can refuse it. Then I would have to take a position; defend myself.

I have lived in this house for the last three years after I moved out of my parents' house. Now I have to do things by myself. Every time I have asked to change something in my building the answer was always a rumble of words that I don't understand, a meaningless mumbling of excuses, of fake solutions, always directing me to the next person because the person I was talking to doesn't want to take the responsibility. I was meant to be mute and not ask for anything. However, I cannot only refuse to ask for what I want. My refusal to ask is the agency I have to act. I choose to take care of my own home even if it means assuming a new role that I wasn't schooled in. I am

a politician, an activist and an architect. The act of defiance is a part of my new professions.

### ACT III

*26.05.2130, Zurich, ghost, age: 200*

I don't think that anyone can see me. They pass through me, they never hear me talk even when I scream. I tried to give them advice, because they just moved into this house but I have been living here for many years. I know every dark corner, every nook and cranny, every wrinkle on the floor. They don't listen when I ask to be careful about some things, to step over the delicate parts, to avoid the harmful movements. A few weeks ago they started «renovating» the house. They sealed the porous surfaces, cutting out the air. They threw away the precious wooden floors that have been the apple of my eye. They put in new plastic windows. They already changed a lot. However, I couldn't stop them. I was losing my voice. I couldn't repeat myself all the time. I was consigned to oblivion.

I don't want to be a hero anymore, save the house, tell them how to live their life. Instead I want to maintain, take care. «It takes all the fucking time». (3) I couldn't save the whole house, but there are still some old parts that can thrive. I will clean the gutters, close the doors gently, and dust the attic. I refuse to be heroic. I will take pride in everyday things. I will stay invisible as my actions. It may look «empty» (4) but we don't have enough pedestals for all the heroes. (5)

### ACT IV

*01.01.2039, Zurich, architect, age: 40*

There is no ultimate way of doing things. Since I have my diploma already, I have the experience, and I have my own architectural office, I should know how to do things, how to design. However, with every new project I get more and more uncertain about things. What exactly is my role? What is my expertise? Is there a hierarchy to it? But not anyone can be an architect. I guess.

I was working recently on a really complicated project – an intervention on an old house. I hit the wall at some point. I didn't know how to go on. I was searching for similar built projects, references, maps, analyses... None of this could help. Finally I turned to people who live there now, who know the place the best. It is filled with their secrets, memories, histories, and biographies. They are the only ones that can answer my questions.

There is no clean sheet. Architecture is never really finished. When I say I designed something, I mean I brought everyone together. Maybe I am a mediator? Maybe I am a conductor? All the voices need to be heard. We need to listen to the background noise, «the disordered sounds that we refer to as cacophony» (6). Every rattle and whisper are trying to tell us something. We need to give in and let them be heard. I refuse to be the only author.

### CHORUS

*09.2023, Langstrasse, Zurich, site of refusal*

I was empty for many years. I had no more life inside me. My bones were cracking. I was falling apart. I couldn't keep the warmth inside me anymore. I didn't think anyone noticed me, because my doors and windows were closed, I was no longer «efficient», «sustainable», and of «high potential». For a long time no-one really cared about me. However, a few weeks ago I felt something, someone was inside, someone opened the windows, broke through the stiffness in my joints, took care of the surface of my old skin. They gave me my voice back. I could hear the buzz.

There was life again! There was a party, there was dancing, there was singing, there was purpose again! «No Church In The Wild» was playing. (7)