

When Hybrid Organizations Rethink Relational Modes for the Commons: The Case of Macao-Milano

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*We seek authenticity in the deed of revolt.
We won't sacrifice it either to organization or to proselytism
Carla Lonzi*

The present article intends to investigate the organizational and relational aspects of the life and activities of Macao. Organization and relation are two terms that relate to different schemes and political sensibilities. Whereas organizing entails a structured and structuring activity aimed at efficacy and goal-attainment, relation constitutes a looser and wider concept that embraces both general human relations and the abstract ideas that shape groups, communities and organizations. In this sense, the concept of relation allows room for a political stance, room that is often used by social movements, whose aims often include a struggle to define new modes of relations and, ultimately, to search for a different (and better) life. It is in the difference between these two concepts that this article draws its analytical space.

Within Macao, the issue of organization is rarely worded in these terms, rather it is framed in relational terms, implying such topics as care, conflict, embodiment and power distribution. Following a grounded approach, I was able to isolate the thematic strand of relation, but it was during the validation stage that I realized that the discursive production about relations ultimately referred to organizational forms. Relation, within Macao, represents a discursive device through which it is possible to deal with the multiple empirical options that are available, in terms of configuration of participation and, most importantly, through which one can tackle, reflexively, the political and ethical issues connected to organization.

The theme of relation is crucial for the life of Macao, both as regards its internal and external dynamics. Concerning the internal point of view, relations are fundamental to the extent that they constitute a field in which struggles are fought in order to establish a hierarchy among the other core areas of Macao's activities: action and production. In particular, relations are deeply interconnected with both the logic of action and the models of cultural production. Concerning the former, the eventful logic draws on bodies acting together, on the deployment of affective dynamics based on artistic and aesthetic elements that produce

strong ties. Concerning the latter, the design and the implementation of alternative models of cultural production is often conducted with relations in mind, both as oppositional and supportive elements. Relations, therefore, do not only play their roles as if they were confined to two separate realms, but they also act as a hinge between the inside and the outside of Macao.¹

The main aim of this article is to identify the relational mechanics at work within Macao. To this end, three main dimensions will be explored. The first tackles the articulation between the individual and the collective level of participation, a peculiar articulation that produces what I define as a *non-exclusive dialectic* between the two levels. The second investigates the organization of participation along the opposed and co-existing notions of horizontality and hierarchy: analyzing the constantly shifting balance between radical inclusion and leadership. I will stress how this particular configuration allows a *legitimate monopoly of symbolic capital* of recognized leaders that co-exists with a refusal of horizontality—this latter is understood as an inescapable axiom of contemporary mobilizations. The third and last dimension is the collaborative making processes, which helps to build and maintain relations and to handle conflicts in a better way. This last dimension will run as a more background dimension as it is embedded in the first two dimensions and influences, in an encompassing way, Macao's relations.

The exploration of these dimensions is in line with the overarching aim of the article, which is to try to pin down Macao's organizational model. Linked to the findings of the previous research concerning the eventfulness of their logic of political mobilization², Macao can be envisioned not as a well-defined organization that produces events but as a link of events in itself. In other words, an event might also act as an organizational device for which Macao does not produce events in order to persist as an organization with its structures and roles but as a series of events that become the organization of action and communication.

A brief introduction to Macao

Macao was born during the winter of 2011/12, as a part of “*Lavoratori dell'Arte*” (Art Workers), a group of artists, art critics, curators, journalists and activists who had been politically active in Milan since the previous autumn. Macao defines itself as the “New Centre

¹ In particular, it is telling what happened with “Occupare in Conflitto” (Occupying conflict), a series of seminars that originated in episodes of sexist violence and homophobia that occurred within Macao. The idea embodied in this initiative was to address, publicly, the relational dysfunctions within Macao: dysfunctions that also affect other collectives and, more generally, the “outside” of Macao. <http://www.macaomilano.org/diario/fonte/occupare-il-conflitto>

² Cf. Cossu and Murru (forthcoming), Macao before and beyond social media. The creation of the unexpected as a logic of mobilization, «Studi Culturali».

for Arts, Culture and Research of Milan”. In the first phase of its existence it was an idea in the making. This idea became visible in April 2012, in the form of a Twitter profile, a YouTube channel and a Tumblr site³. Macao only became an open space for citizens to experiment with new modalities of art, culture and research in May 2012, when hundreds of cultural workers occupied an empty skyscraper (Torre Galfa) in the centre of Milan. They were evicted some days after the occupation, and a few weeks later, they managed to occupy a former slaughterhouse and moved there⁴.

If we look at the past, we can consider Macao as a peculiar combination of distinct histories of Italian mobilization.

The first history, more strictly political, relates to the wide field of the Italian radical left movement that is also linked to the experiences of the *centri sociali* as previously described. Since the early 2000s, this movement was particularly active around the themes of *precarity* (Neilson and Rossiter, 2008), developing innovative political actions, combining an autonomist political culture with a highly creative and innovative repertoire of action (Mattoni, 2012).

The second historical trend that led to the development of Macao is connected to mobilizations in which artists were directly involved. In this respect, pivotal has been the experience of struggles against gentrification brought about in Isola, a formerly working class neighbourhood in Milan, which underwent a strong and harsh process of de-industrialization and gentrification. The artistic mobilization (many participants in which are also part of the Macao movement) denounced the interests of speculators, building a particular artistic narration called *fight-specific* involving many inhabitants of the Isola neighbourhood.

Finally, a third important connection in the history of Macao is the very recent network of activists in Italy. In 2008–09, a movement emerged among Italian art workers that denounced the scarcity of public funds for the arts and the precariousness of jobs within the cultural economy. In 2011, this movement organized the Italian National Network of Occupied Theatres⁵ which was established after a large and very successful occupation in Rome in April 2011, where activists also aimed to give another (cultural) life to those spaces. Macao presents itself as a reality,⁶ whose main constituency is composed of culture and knowledge workers. Macao’s activists are not the “usual squatters” or typical political

³ Twitter: <https://twitter.com/MacaoTwit>; YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/user/wmacao>; Tumblr: <http://wmacao.tumblr.com/>.

⁴ For an accurate analysis of the subjectification of Macao as a political actor through the use of art see Valli, 2015.

⁵ <http://www.lavoroculturale.org/imprudenza/>.

⁶ The term *reality* is here used to differentiate Macao from other squatting movements (namely the *centri sociali*) that are usually called “collectives”.

activists. They are, on average, 34 years old; they hold a university degree and work under precarious contracts in the artistic or knowledge sector. Notwithstanding their presence in the labour market (as their jobs are precarious, Macao's activists are often involved in more than one activity), on average people devoted around 33 hours a week to the project.⁷

1. Framing organization in hybrid movements

In the last decade a literature on organization and social movements has been emerging, highlighting the fact that a convergence of organization and social movement studies should take place (Davies and Zald, 2005). As noted by Clemens (2005), however, social movement scholars demonstrate a deep discomfort with the concept of organization. Conceived as a system of order and authority, it seems incapable of taking into account processes of social change. Growing attention has been dedicated to how activists are able to avoid structures and processes of institutionalisation, with new media playing an important role in providing a non-hierarchical environment. It is the case of connective action (Bennett and Segerberg 2012) in which social mechanisms characterised by weak ties have allegedly made it possible to overcome the rigidity of collective action, whereas the latter is conceived as a super structural process that endangers freedom and fluidity.

Issues of power and leadership in movements have been relatively neglected in the last five years. In fact, only recently has a renewed interest in these dynamics re-emerged, countering the overwhelming quantity of contributions that have emphasized the flat and distributed nature of the new forms of mobilization, marginalizing the role of leadership and hierarchy. An indicator of this trend is the latest work of the major sociologist Manuel Castells (2012), which deals with the wave of mobilization that has been sparked globally since 2010. In his previous book Castells had dealt extensively with the issue of power (Castells 2009). In his most recent book he conceives of the autonomy of “third spaces” – the spaces resulting from the interconnection between occupied urban spaces and digital networks – as being based on the intrinsically free nature of the online space (Castells 2012: 222). Other studies highlight, however, how digital networks are deeply influenced by mechanisms of verticality, authority and exclusion (Gonzalez-Bailon and Wang 2013, Nunes 2014). Other authors (Arvidsson *et. al.* 2015, Gerbaudo 2015) state that we need to overcome the network paradigm in order to better understand the crowd dynamics that are emerging in social media as well as in processes of mobilization.

⁷ Data source: internal survey conducted by Macao itself, http://issuu.com/macao milano/docs/69300_ore.

Within the literature that attempts to return attention to issues of leadership and power, within the field of social movements, the contribution of Simon Western (2014) helps us to remember how anarchists like Bakunin, Proudhon and Kropotkin did not have particular taboos regarding dealing with leadership. For them “individuals and groups take temporary leadership autonomously and on behalf of the wider collective, without assuming a formal position of power or authority over others” (Western 2014: 676). In this respect interesting connections emerge between the issues of leadership, entrepreneurship and processes of political mobilization. Critical management studies have recently brought together these three areas (Swann and Stoborod 2014) from an anarchist point of view – similarly to what Gregory Sholette (2011) has proposed in the field of art criticism in his latest book, in which he analyses the artistic world facing enterprise culture. Particularly relevant is Sholette’s understanding of the subsumption (and the mirroring, I would add) of artistic organizational models by enterprises:

It’s not the artist’s seemingly transgressive, risk-taking non-conformity, but exactly a mode of distributed risk and social cooperation denied by neoliberalism that leads certain CEOs and business thinkers to see artistic methods as near-miraculous models of “just-in-time creativity.” (Sholette 2011: 43)

From a different angle social movement scholars interrogate the same nexus that brings together cultural innovation, artistic radicalism and forms of disruption to existing capitalist forms. Davis, in particular, focuses on topological similarities among social movements and enterprises.

Internally formal organizations would seem to exhibit emergent features and mobilization processes very similar to those we see in social movement groups. Similarly, in their external relations, formal organizations also would seem to mirror their movement counterparts, participating, as they do, in fluid relationships with other organizations, joining in coalitions, and engaging in political action to affect state policy (Davis *et. al.*, 2005 : xiv)

What, then, are these movements? Are they still movements as we used to know them – with the same recruitment and organizational mechanics? Let’s be clear, I’m not proposing a new label. Social movement studies have provided extremely valuable insights about social movements; however, as has recently been pointed out, they forgot to include capitalism in the equation (Barker *et. al.* 2013). In the attempt to capture the specificity of movements that embody the heritage of artistic avant-gardes, workers’ movements and start-ups, a multiplicity of perspectives must be interwoven. In the Italian and international context

growing attention has been paid to cultural and social entrepreneurship, to social innovation, and to peer-to-peer forms of production and organization (Arvidsson and Peteirsen 2012). At the same time, social movements and squatting centres have radically changed (Prujiit 2013; Moore 2015) – increasingly becoming hubs of cultural production and experimentation rather than spaces of social healing and inclusion. In other words, hybrid forms are emerging in this complex field, and Macao is certainly one among them.

2. The strength of strong ties

Dust, paint, sweat, smell of sweat, detergents, brooms, dustpans, paper, wood beams, coffee, pasta, couscous, coffee, beer, wine, myrtle, cigarettes, computers, music, books, photographs, songs, dances, assemblies, respect, growth, smiles, rages, fears, hugs, kisses, dreams, passions...encounters⁸.

This excerpt from the diary of Macao was written during the summer of 2012. It allows us to understand the material, emotional and symbolic dimensions that were attached to the making of Macao. In fact, shortly after the occupation of the former slaughterhouse of Milan (June 2012), Macao launched a Summer Camp⁹. This was a two-month long initiative to turn the building into a hospitable place for Macao. The diary was published every day for the whole duration of the Summer Camp and it never bore the name of its individual author (if there was one). The Summer Camp served multiple purposes, and through it we can see some of the key elements that characterize relations in Macao. In the first place, it satisfied a need to widen and consolidate relations inside Macao.

I wake up rested, perfumed in a soft and cleaned bed... what a strange feeling! It was a couple of weeks that it did not happen..if I knew this would not happen anymore, I think I'd go crazy. Yet now, in the comfort and cleanliness of my house I feel trapped, I miss my fellas' laughter, the endless discussions and that sense of community, where everyone gives, for better or for worse, in stress and in joy. And so on riding my horse, wind in sails and wings spread to Macao. (Summer Camp day 2)

The emotional attachment, the detachment from private houses as traps which separate each other, the need to continue on the flow started in Torre Galfa, the enthusiasm, the desire to make a space a bit your own, to live collectively under the same roof for weeks, abandoning routines and comfort – all of this constitutes a concrete sign of what the lived experience of Macao meant for its activists and collaborators. In interviews conducted later, this period of intense work [insert picture] was retrospectively acknowledged as a sort of golden age, during which Macao was genuinely driven by desire. In this first period, the people in Macao who

⁸ Summer Camp diary, day two. <http://www.macaomilano.org/articoli/3190/macao-summer-camp-giorno-due>

⁹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N5dfNYVWe6Y>

had technical skills organized the work so that others could learn and be safe when carrying out work which was not always intuitive and immediate, or safe. A process like Macao's, started by artists, becomes entangled with craft, in a process in which, from the de-materialization of art, passing through the relational and social wave, it becomes a living process that is deeply-rooted in everyday practice and largely outside institutions, and in a process of active drift from them. Being captured, to use Deleuzian jargon, does not really matter here, since the starting point of Macao's political action is that we all are already subsumed.



Picture 1. Differentiation of tasks and organization in Macao

The Summer Camp, more pragmatically, served the functional imperative of improving the quality of the space and re-signifying the space itself, a task that was achieved with a particular aesthetical/political frame in mind. In order to better describe this frame, I combine an ethnographic with an historical analysis, finding substantial analogies with the ideas previously developed by the Isola Art Center (cf. 1.3) – where some of the Macao founders were involved (and are still involved, in some cases) – in clear opposition to the practices of the institutional art world. In the first place, their idea of having a space as a *dirty cube* – opposing the neutral white cube that is widespread in museums and exhibitions – implies refusing a denaturalizing aestheticization of the occupied space. In other words, in

order to create a New Centre for Arts and Culture that intends to host and produce alternative art and culture (or, at least, do it in a different way) one must make it perceivable also in aesthetic and architectural terms. This meant leaving the marks of abandonment visible, to apply a selective political/aesthetical judgement according to which it appeared legitimate to reveal the marble – covered in a dull white paint - that framed some of the doors but, at the same time, to avoid the temptation to paint anew entire rooms. Secondly, the notion of *fight-specific*, underlying that the cultural and artistic processes taking place in the occupied space must take into account the local needs. In this sense, re-signifying that space implied establishing a dialogue with the neighbourhood, to organize initiatives and explorations of the vast area that surrounds (ex. walks in the abandoned slaughterhouse), making the walls of the Macello speak, and porous to contamination from the outside. Third, and finally, the idea of a *dispersed centre*: that is, to conceive of the art centre not as a physical space but rather as a mental and bodily attitude. (cf. Isola Art Center, 2013)

Furthermore, the Summer Camp expressed a will to establish an image of Macao as a positive and constructive force of the city of Milan. In this respect, Summer Camp can be viewed as one of the first projects that was developed in the former slaughterhouse exchange, through which a part of the Milanese citizenry was implicated. More precisely, it provided those stuck in the city – due to the traditional Italian summer break in August, during which cities are deserted – with an alternative way to learn new things,¹⁰ to cooperate, to work and to be part of something. It is interesting to note that all of these process aspects, although subject to a constant process of becoming and change, were also present in the initial project of what Macao should and could have been, as established by the “founders”. In fact, in a YouTube video created for the launch campaign in April 2012 that the autonomist intellectual and activist Franco Berardi, “Bifo”, clearly states that occupying should not constitute an end in itself and that what has to be done goes way beyond that. In his words:

It's not about occupying the streets, although we will continue to do it, it's not to ravage London [...] blocking factories and the daily death [...] It is about the fact that, while we do all this, we must be aware that the soul of the problem is ... the soul. It is the collective body, our ability to return to live and express solidarity. Solidarity is not an ethical or a political value, **solidarity** is the problem of living next to the body of the other, solidarity is the awareness that my interest is the same of the others, solidarity is the pleasure of living in the city as a place where we are together. This is what we have to do, rebuild solidarity, and to do that, Macao: burn banks, set London and Athens to fire, block roads, occupy the factories – of course, if all this is necessary.

¹⁰ Such as music editing, masonry and restoration.

But maybe what is essential is the word, the sign, the dream, the imagination, in every possible way.¹¹

The relevance of Berardi's comment is at least dual. In the first place, although originating from a pessimistic analysis of contemporary society¹² he focuses on solidarity in an attempt to stress how only together might we eventually overcome our "sad times". This is the same trajectory that was followed and experienced by Macao activists, sick as they were of the depressive self-pity so widespread in the previous assemblies of precarious workers in which they had participated. Secondly, it signals the performative role of the intellectual discourse on the shaping of a movement. Macao was not even born when Berardi uttered those words and it is noteworthy how his contribution was actually embodied in the concrete activities of Macao: in particular, if we consider how intensely Macao worked on the sign and the imaginary. This "heritage" shows us once more the deep affinity of Macao with the theorists of the previous generation.

Furthermore, the very fact that it was possible for Macao to secure the endorsement of influential public intellectuals reveals the peculiar social status of Macao's founders: a kind of *marginal elite* within the Italian cultural realm, bearers of a high cultural capital, with middle class backgrounds who directly took part, often with highly visible roles, in the previous waves of mobilization both at national and international level. In fact, it was only due to the previous connections already established by the founders of Macao that they could reach the cultural and intellectual panorama. This is a sort of co-belonging that not only ties Macao activists to leading figures in the critical thought but also with more institutional actors in the city of Milan.

Relations in Macao, then, are sites of affect, a fundamental political space in which bonding happens, a space emphasized by the activists as the true space in which activism is based. The worthiness of a political endeavour must be evaluated on the quality of such relations, and not based on the results attained. Or perhaps it should not be evaluated at all – it must be lived, in all its complexity, joy, disorientation, but also conflicts. Macao, as a composite reality, partially reflects the complexity of society, and with it bears the marks of some of the traditional cleavages that affect our societies more globally. The next section will deal with such conflicts.

2. Taking care of conflicts

¹¹ My translation. Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=njqAiP4gX04> (Accessed December 2014).

¹² Cf. Berardi's analysis on contemporary society and suicides (Berardi, 2015).

As Macao activists have experienced, being part of a movement – even of a movement where a deep solidarity was successfully built and where the collective endeavours have a substantial individual salience – does not automatically mean that the conflicts that flow through the social body of a movement will be overcome. In particular, it is in the latency phase of a movement that the typical euphoria – or sense of urgency – leaves room for an everydayness (although revolutionised, or in the conscious attempt of being revolutionised) and for a reflexive take on the newly constituted body within and across the movement.

This process has to be considered with regard to the changing composition of Macao. In fact, starting from the relatively homogenous group of Macao's "founders", hundreds of people joined the process in the "normalized" phase, the start of which coincided with the occupation of the former slaughterhouse exchange. After June 2012 it was not only artists that were present; rather, cultural workers in the widest sense were also present: video-makers, employees, students, plus a smaller group of squatters with more technical and manual skills. What is relevant for the present article is to investigate how the cleavages that run through this new composition were addressed, politically and organizationally, by Macao.

Particularly relevant conflicts emerged around the issues of gender, material vs. immaterial work and the digital divide. As I have hinted before, the starting point here is the understanding that the sheer fact of being together in Macao, both individually and collectively, did not result differences among participants being overlooked. Therefore, as conflicts arose, assemblies were dedicated to the discussion of such issues, and in some particularly relevant cases, seminars and meetings were organized in order to cope explicitly with them.

Gender, at least in numeric terms, is not an issue for Macao. The overall composition of Macao shows a substantial equity in terms of male and female distribution, as the self-inquiry conducted by Macao makes clear (26 males and 24 females in December 2012). What is at stake, then, were the imbalances in roles and functions within the organization. During my ethnography I was able to grasp how, among the activists, there was a perceived unease regarding a male dominance in the assemblies. In particular, during a seminar organized in March 2013, called "Occupare il conflitto" (occupying the conflict),¹³ Macao activists pointed out how males were more likely to take their talking turns during the assemblies and to speak longer, and they were much more likely to occupy the public sphere. However, during this

¹³ Cf. note 1

seminar, led by Federica Giardini, a feminist and political philosopher from the University of Rome, the picture was revealed to be far more complex. In particular, it emerged that relations are not determined by gender belonging per se. In fact, as Angelo says in his intervention during the seminar:

It has not to do with being male or female, it relates with a masculine or feminine attitude. Here in Macao there are female people who have masculine attitudes, they shut me up within the assemblies, and I cannot take the floor (audience laughs) because they have this attitude. Therefore it is reductive to say that in Macao assemblies, or in the national and public meetings, only men can speak, it is about a masculine attitude.¹⁴

Furthermore, it is not that women have no voice in Macao: they express it in different ways and using different channels one of which being the digital social media. Using digital methods and techniques (Rogers 2013) I have analysed the flows in the Macao mailing list. The data refers to the main mailing list used by the activists, labelled the “Communication Mailing List” (CML). This mailing list was initially dedicated to the discussions of the homonymous group that was in charge of Macao’s external communications. Later on, this mailing list actually came to host a number of different topics and it has come to serve as a hub, with multiple functions. In the first place, activists use the list to post news from media outlets and ask for support or additional work in order to make news publishable in Macao’s social media channels. Secondly, together with the online platform, which is based on WordPress, the CML constitutes a vibrant space of discussion concerning the assemblies and their agenda, and for sharing information that is relevant to the life of Macao (public calls, news from the national network of Occupied Theatres, news concerning the global social movement scene etc.).

The data extracted from the CML amounts to around 3,000 emails and spans the period from June 2013 to June 2015. The data has been elaborated using Gephi¹⁵ and, together with Gephi’s visualization capabilities, it allows us to understand to what extent women are implicated in Macao’s communications. In fact, among the top 10 contributors we find only three men. More significantly, the first contributor, Camilla, shows a degree of engagement that appears to be more than twice (weight=1337) that of the second most active user (weight=668).¹⁶ Ethnographic insight gathered during the fieldwork allows us to understand that Camilla is in fact the person who, since the beginning of Macao’s life, has acted as the “head” of Macao’s communication. This information is represented graphically by the

¹⁴ Macao activist (male and gay) intervention during the Occupare il Conflitto seminar, May 2013, Macao.

¹⁵ <http://gephi.github.io/>

¹⁶ The weight of an edge that connects each person (represented by a node) to the mailing list (small node at the centre of the graph) is based on the numbers of emails sent.

thickness of the edge that connects her to the central node, which represents the CML itself. Analyzing the data from the mailing list more closely, it is possible to notice how a greater activity does not necessarily correlate with the influence of a person node. Influence is based here on betweenness centrality,¹⁷ a metric that indicates to what extent a person acts as an intermediary between two other people in the group. This metric is represented by the size and the darkness of a person: the darker and the bigger the node, the more influence a person holds in the group.

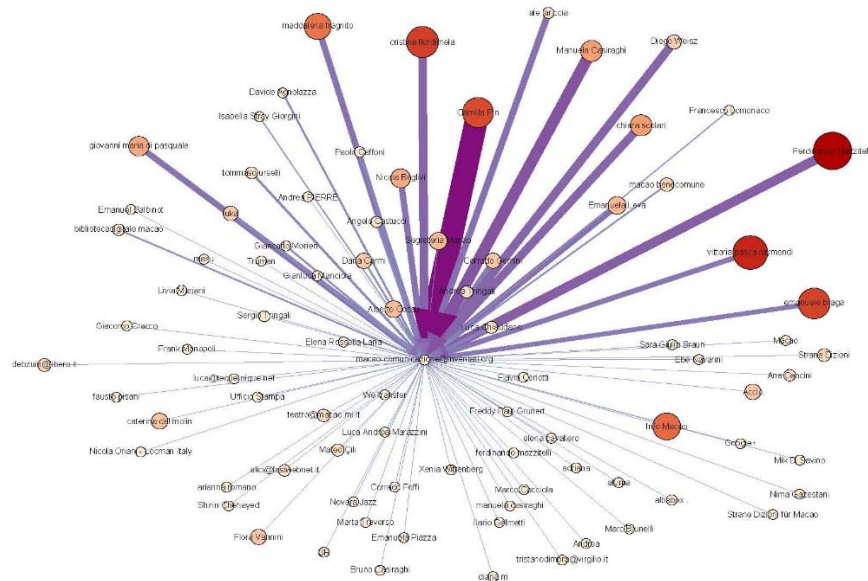
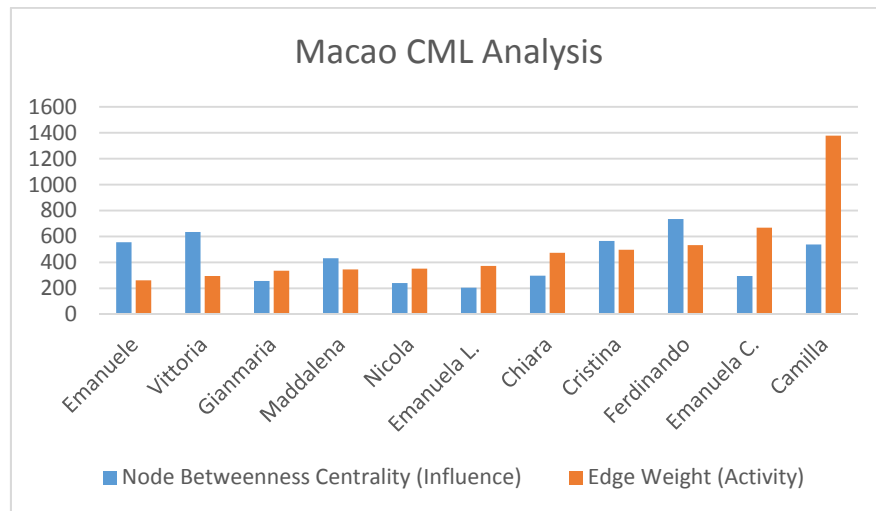


Image 1. Graph of CML elaborated in Gephi

As is clear in the next graphic (cf. Graphic 1), there is no linear correspondence between activity and influence. New subjects emerge, showing a substantial lower activity coupled with a much higher influence. In particular, two males (Emanuele and Ferdinando) and a female (Vittoria) emerge as influencers. How is it possible to explain this discrepancy? Following the data, it shows that these three people have been engaging in email conversations with a wider number of participants, and are therefore acting as connectors among different sub-groups. Two of them were also part of the initial group that founded Macao, while Vittoria has been a very active member of the Macao theatre group, and has therefore engaged in discussions with them as well as linking their discussions to the main group. Therefore, I suggest that influence also reflects the social dynamics that take place in Macao's offline activities.

¹⁷ The algorithm used to calculate betweenness centrality is Brandes (2001).



Graphic 1. Analysis of CML for Betweenness Centrality and Edge Weight (top 11 users)

This takes us to the digital divide issue within Macao. Notwithstanding the high degree of media literacy, typical of knowledge workers, Macao’s digital tools are not used by the whole of its constituency. In particular, there are two main reasons for this phenomenon. In the first place, in Macao is at present a relatively small group of people who actually live in the occupied building. They live there due material need or, in a few cases, as a political choice or for security reasons.¹⁸ It is important to note that this small group (five people) neither uses the social digital platforms provided by Macao nor engages in most of the “deliberative” bodies – namely, the weekly assemblies and the working groups. Another kind of digital divide concerns the Macao online realm itself. This is related to the internal diversification of platforms implemented for internal communication or geared towards intra-organizational ends. Adopting a diachronic perspective, we can distribute these tools according to whether they are inclusive or exclusive. These two latter categories are to be considered in relative terms, in which the ideal absolute extremes are total inclusion and complete secrecy. It must be noted that personal texts sent via mobile phone or personal emails could not be traced for technical and ethical reasons, both digital and ethnographical.

Time Period	Inclusive	Exclusive
April – May 2012	Facebook groups (100+ members)	Mobile phones
June – Dec. 2012	WordPress platform (self-registration, no invite required)	Mailing list of each working group
Jan. 2013 – Sept. 2014	CML + Whatsapp (global chat, 100+ members)	WordPress platform (invite only + more exclusive groups are created within

¹⁸ Since the beginning, the policy in terms of dwelling has been highly debated. In their first occupation (the Torre Galfa skyscraper), people slept there in order to be present in high numbers to resist eviction. While at the Exchange of the former slaughterhouse, where Macao is currently based, people dwell in the building in a sort of unlawful behaviour as regards Macao’s very informal policies. This is tolerated because most of these people would not have the means to sustain the costs of private housing, and because they actually provide a number of technical and manual “services” which are vital to Macao’s economy and cultural activity.

		the platform itself) / Whatsapp for each working group
Sept. 2014– current	CML	Whatsapp abandoned

A tentative systematization of the differences that segment Macao's body, can be drawn by using two axes, in order to build an imaginary space within which to allocate Macao's constituency. The first axis represents the artistic skills (AS), while the second axis accounts for the communication skills (CS). The intersection of the two axes produces four ideal types of activist as regards the inter-linkage between competences and communication: it produces four quadrants, representing different ideal-typical categories of Macao members. The first, showing a high degree of (AS) and a lower degree of (CS) can be defined as a "pure" artists: a person who is not particularly keen on manual and technical tasks, whose contribution is merely artistic (e.g. performing or organizing artistic events in Macao). The second category is the "artistic communicator", and includes the people in Macao that not only hold AS but are willing to transpose their AS into ideas that can be circulated in digital space (e.g. setting up a campaign "artistically" inspired to be diffused on Macao's Facebook page).¹⁹ The following category, the "technical communicator", represents all those activists who contribute to Macao's official communication but not necessarily by deploying highly creative processes.²⁰ Activities in this are are closer to public relations and also include the sharing of artistic content through social media. Finally, the fourth category, what I have defined as "technical activist", constitutes a residual category composed of subjects who show a low degree of both sets of skills whose contribution to Macao lies in their manual/technical work. This fourth category partially overlaps with the dwellers group but for its being a highly stylized category, it also functions to produce difference from which the meaning of the other three categories derive. As in every classification, rigidity is a disadvantage of seeking analytical clarity; in fact, the same actor at different points in time can play various of these categories/roles: a choreographer can act as a pure artist when she invents a performance to be staged in the urban space. She can become an artistic communicator by setting up a creative campaign based on that performance.²¹ She might be a pure technical communicator when she tags people online in order to secure higher

¹⁹ I will analyze closely one of such campaigns in the next section.

²⁰ It must be noted how these processes are key to the production of value and constitute a fundamental form of work in our digital lives (**Arvidsson 2012**), and a site of capitalist value-extraction (**Terranova, 2002**).

²¹ A performance might as well integrate elements to make it shareable online, as we have hinted in the previous chapter considering the dual nature of the political events set in motion by Macao, in their being events and media events since their inception. (cf. 3.3)

visibility of the creative campaign, and, finally, she can be a purely manual activist when she repairs the floor of the room in which the choreography has been rehearsed. This is not to say that I am invalidating my own typology since there is an empirical truth supporting it, insofar as these different ideal types mirror social and cultural cleavages among the rank and file of Macao. In particular, the activist I have described, capable of embodying the four different roles, actually represents a normative ideal that has been explicitly criticized within Macao. In the life of Macao the ideal activist is someone who is dedicating resources and time to individual and collective projects created within the movement and, most importantly, is capable of responding to the four ideal-audiences that scrutinize their work from every corner. This means that the ideal Macao activist must respond to a certain idea of engaged political art (cf. 1.4), show a high effectiveness and originality in her digital engagement, and conform to a hard-working stereotype when it comes to sharing content or performing manual work for Macao. More specifically, the activist must not just respond to these normative requirements or ideal-typical audiences, but they must also appear worthy of their co-belonging, in the eyes of the different concrete sub-groups that populate Macao. Actually, very few people in any organization can perform multiple roles at the highest standard in terms of quality and/or commitment. In particular, what appears relevant in terms of conflicts within Macao is that if some of the immaterial workers tend to have – at least – the basic resources to perform clerical or manual tasks, the contrary is rarely the case. This helps us to connect the cleavage between the immaterial and material workers with the issue of leadership. In other words, given the higher accessibility of competences required to perform manual skills compared to the soft skills,²² the immaterial worker is more likely to get closer to the normative ideal that is prevalent in Macao. The picture is more complex, because, as I have experienced in my ethnography, this does not simply result in sheer domination. In fact, it is thanks to the peculiar organization model created and incessantly re-invented by Macao that effective counter powers are possible. We will say more about this at the end of the article but, before that, it is necessary to say something about Macao's concrete experiences.

²² Including different types of capital (social, cultural, symbolic) that are partially inherited and partially acquired through extensive education.

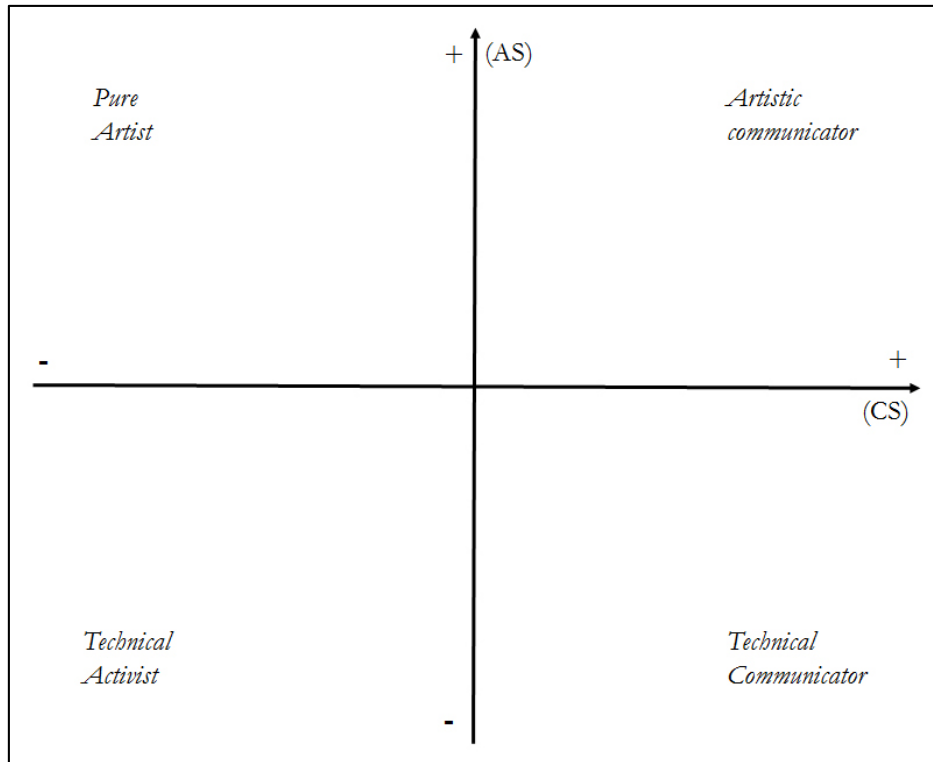


Image 2. Macao constituency ideal types

3. Relations in practice

In order to assess Macao's organizational model I will look now at their cooperative practices and the relations implicated in them. I will present two cases that are different in a number of aspects, which will help to highlight the specificity of Macao's organization.

Case 1. Rebuilding the rooftop

Since the occupation of the former slaughterhouse exchange improvements have been constantly in progress or on the agenda. One major project dealt with the rooftop, the condition of which meant that rain poured into the building, and also presented the risk of pieces of heavy glass falling right into the main hall of the building where the most popular events hosted by Macao take place. In practical terms, the work consisted of removing the old glass plates – which weighed about 30 kilograms – and substituting them with new and lighter polycarbonate panels. The roof condition was known since the first day of the occupation, back in June 2012, and it is telling that the press release and the video were both released in June 2014, shortly after the work had been accomplished.

Period of work: eight months.

Cost of materials: € 7000.

People involved: eight per day, on average.

Days worked: 30.

The first data tells us that it took 16 months to actually reach the necessary conditions in order to start the repair operation. It is not that the roof repair was not a compelling task, but rather the proliferation of other projects and urgent tasks constantly competed in the list of goals to be achieved. Furthermore, the substantial amount of financial resources

needed, €7000, was also a major cause of delay since an organization like Macao does not dispose of that amount of money at any single given moment. This implied a slow but constant allocation of funds in order to buy the necessary materials. It must be noted that none of the activists received remuneration for this project.

There were, on average, eight people involved. These included members of the former self-building working group, some from the “dwellers” group and artistic activists who were familiar with technical work. One person, usually the most competent or bravest, was harnessed and worked from the inside to detach the glass plate from the roof structure while a team of three people was dedicated to slowly removing and sliding the heavy glass to the group standing next to them on solid ground. The group coordinated mainly face-to-face and through personal social media (Whatsapp). In fact, no discussions about this project were conducted in mailing lists or in the WordPress platform. Two more relevant features of this project, that are useful when seeking to pin down Macao’s organizational model, consist in its drive (a material need sustained by the consensual agreement of the assembly), and its inward orientation, since it aimed to take care of Macao’s own space.



Image 3. Activists fixing the rooftop of Macao (frame from YouTube video)²³

To conclude, the video produced in order to document the rooftop repair allows us to connect once more the level of physical work to a discursive level – in this case analysing its translation into a visual narration. The video in itself was edited so as to produce a time-lapse sequence, a technique that renders the passing of time considerably faster. On the one hand, this technique helps to shrink a long activity into a few minutes of video; on the other hand it is used to contrast the lyrics of the song that plays throughout the whole video. The choice of the song and its lyrics is in itself telling of the activists’ approach. The author, Enzo del Re, was a radical singer who was active in the late 1960s and early 1970s, who had been trained as a classical musician but always refused to play normal instruments, and instead used only a chair to accompany his voice; he also requests as a fee for his performances the minimum pay of a metalworker. A political stance, the one of Enzo del Re close to the post-workerism and the Italian political “autonomy” which also constitutes a background of Macao. The lyrics of the first verse of the song are as follows:

*Working with slowness
without making any effort,
quickness harms, and makes you
end up in the hospital,
in the hospital there's no place*

²³ Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BdG67mbzKZQ>.

Case 2. “Non è mica la Luna” campaign

In July 2013 the Ligresti family, whose financial group legally owned the Torre Galfa skyscraper occupied by Macao the year before, was subject to three arrests for bankruptcy.²⁴ This fact triggered a strong and immediate reaction in Macao. One group thought it was the perfect chance to re-gain possession of the tower, now legitimized by the arrests of former owners. This project was discussed by a small group through personal media (Whatsapp, phone calls) and a closed mailing list; only hours afterwards did it reach the more open mailing list, in which a lively debate took place. During the day, the majority of Macao activists were busy with their “day jobs” so a long conversation within the common platform (99 posts) took place: another small group countered the idea of occupying again the tower. They agreed that something must be done, that there was a desire to do so, and that the best way to further discuss it was to meet physically. Performing a content analysis of the 99 posts that compose the discussion about re-occupying the tower, I have isolated six main discursive elements.

The first element is an orientation towards action (galfa, action, tower, make, com'on, forward).

The second is an orientation towards relation (macao, are, we, we want, we have, we do, we think, common).

The third regroups words that delineate an analytical stance (regulation, Ligresti, prosecutor, speculation, contents, issue, proposal).

The fourth deals with a spatial matters and the time frame (now, here, tomorrow, city, moment, space, slaughterhouse, Milano, square, day, evening, tonight).

The fifth contains the modes of action (photo, saying, occupation, to build, to go).

The sixth shows a reflexive take (it would, but, it might, consider, it could).

The content analysis of this discussion allows us to empirically grasp the plurality of needs and orientations that co-exist in Macao. What happens, then, is that those who propose re-occupying are, in the first instance, obliged to enter into a dialogue with the whole Macao constituency. Secondly, the dialogue takes place in the digital environment where their position is not countered but evaluated, commented on and included with a number of other projects that could take place instead of the re-occupation. The conclusion of this dialogue was that the matter necessitated a face-to-face meeting where the group proposing to occupy would face a larger group that had started to support a public campaign. The result of this nightly discussion was to abandon the re-occupation idea because of material difficulties and because it was also perceived as having a limited political impact. Nonetheless, the consensus arising from this meeting around the campaign was not a sign of repression of the desires of a minor radical fringe, it rather represented the capacity of the other group's desires to spread to the whole assembly. The result of this exchange was that a campaign was established.

The campaign was divided into two main actions, the first aimed to denounce the abandonment of a number of buildings in the city of Milan. A quote from Macau's press release clarifies the meaning of this first action (cf. Image 4):

²⁴ <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2013-07-17/ligresti-family-members-arrested-in-fondriaria-sai-probe>.

Imagine that we feel naked, but we have nonetheless the strength to speak, to write, to point at, to enlarge the meshes of this fabric and to blow up its contradictions.²⁵



Image 4. Macao activists during the “Non è mica la luna” campaign, first action.



Image 5. “Non è mica la luna” campaign, second action.

Image 5 is one of the photos that composes the second part of the action, which consisted on writing on the abandoned buildings' walls the amount of cubic metres subtracted from the city: An excerpt from the press releases states:

Towers, buildings, abandoned areas: the strong deed to leave a mark on these places is meant to expose the physical dimension of the subtraction of space that, until today, was repressed. But the city does not end with abandonment or speculation; it's the possible space for dreams, represents a geography of desires. Places become then much more than their walls, their matter; they are symbols and they open imaginaires. «Non è mica la luna» is the tale of these two cities: the one of abandonment and the one of desire. The first has to be revealed, the second must be staged.²⁶

Different elements in this campaign are of interest as regards understanding Macao's organizational model. In the first place, the campaign was based on a compulsive work rate, since the news of the Ligresti family arrest happened on the 17th of July and the

²⁵ http://www.macaomilano.org/piazza_macao/diario/articoli/2013/07/19/nonemicalaluna-2/

²⁶ http://www.macaomilano.org/piazza_macao/diario/articoli/2013/07/19/nonemicalaluna-1/

campaign was on the social networks and Macao's website 36 hours later. It was radically inclusive: every sub-group of Macao felt compelled to give their contribution to a shared and desired goal. Furthermore, it was highly participative and was mediated not just by the assembly but by the online WordPress platform, as well as mailing lists. The drive of the campaign can be identified in a desiring mechanic sustained by small groups who attempt to contaminate others. I personally witnessed the meeting prior to the second action where, at 2 am, it was decided to go and actually write on the buildings with white paint. The number of people willing to participate was so high (around 20 people) that a cap had to be imposed allowing only the people strictly necessary (six people) to perform the job, in order to avoid attracting too much attention from the police patrolling the streets of Milan. Finally, the campaign showed an outward orientation to the extent that it was not about taking care of Macao's own space any more but it was rather about taking care of the city.

To conclude the analysis of this empirical case in which relations were embedded I will look at the interplay with its discursive emergence, which, in this particular case, allows us to say something more about leadership in Macao. Following the arrests of the Ligresti family, the Italian justice minister had been under immense pressure to resign over claims that she had interfered with the transfer out of prison of financier Giulia Ligresti, the daughter of the real estate magnate.²⁷ What happened next is that Macao, who since its forced eviction from the Torre Galfa suspected the Ministry itself backed the entire operation in order to favour the interests of the owners, found in its archives footage that showed a police officer openly stating that the eviction was being carried out because of "orders from the top", referring to the minister herself. The footage was released on YouTube²⁸ and triggered a chain reaction, attracting the attention of two national broadcasters who eventually invited Macao to contribute to their prime time shows, which were covering the Ligresti affair. In the assembly that was called to discuss this situation a problem was raised concerning who should have represented Macao and voiced their critique. The natural choice was Emanuele, one of Macao's founders who had been considerably more exposed to media than others, but another activist openly challenged what he felt was a hegemonic position. Emanuele's leadership on this matter was questioned but, in the end, based on an evaluation of his greater depth of study of the issue, plus his previous experience as a speaker, granted him a renewed, but still temporary leadership, until a further questioning.

These two cases, which represent two ways in which Macao acts and in which relations are implicated in very different ways, are summarized in the following table:

²⁷ Cf. *Financial Times* article: <http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/2025e524-51f7-11e3-8c42-00144feabdc0.html#axzz3f2terY29>.

²⁸ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MuldQWuOQ5U>.

<i>Rebuilding the rooftop</i>	<i>«Non è mica la luna» campaign</i>
Slow work rate	Dynamic and compulsive work rate
Social division of labour	Inclusion of everyone
Planned Activity	Eventful Activity
Face-to-face coordination and personal social media	Highly participative and mediated by the common platform and the assembly
Drive: material need sustained by a consensual agreement in the assembly	Drive: desire sustained by small groups who try to contaminate others
Inward orientation (taking care of their “home”)	Outward orientation (taking care of the city)

Before we deal with how such different relational modes can co-exist, I will briefly trace a genealogy of Macao’s cooperation. In the first instance, one major element pushing the Macao activists to act in such a particularly cooperative way is a critique of the existing relations in the creative industries in which many of the Macao activists live and work. Nevertheless, such a critique does not result in a paralyzing effect, as happened in the previous wave of mobilization on precarity (cf. 1.5). A different contribution comes from the actors’ artistic backgrounds. As we know from Howard Becker (1984) and Bourdieu (1996) art is intrinsically a collective and social activity and seldom is the result of an isolated genius. However, what made possible the complex and collective “living work of art” that is Macao, was the experience of Torre Galfa (cf. Cossu and Murru, forthcoming). The solidarity sparked in those early days is still, according to Macao activists, the main source of trust and mutual cooperation. This point is close to the argument put forth by Judith Butler in her essay “Bodies in Alliance” about Tahrir Square (Butler 2011). Another element derives from the post-workerist tradition, which has deeply influenced Macao (cf. 1.5). To elaborate on this it is interesting to read a quote from the first book published by a small and independent publisher, recently founded by three Macao activists. The book is by Maurizio Lazzarato and it deals with Duchamp’s peculiar refusal of work:

The anthropology of workers’ refusal is anchored to an anthropology of labour [...] while the idle action (founded on the *otium* of the ancient) undermines the foundations of the work, it shakes not only the identity of the manufacturer, but also their sexual

assignments. What is at stake is the anthropology of modernity: the subject, the individual, the liberty of men, the universality of men. (Lazzarato 2014: 15; my translation)

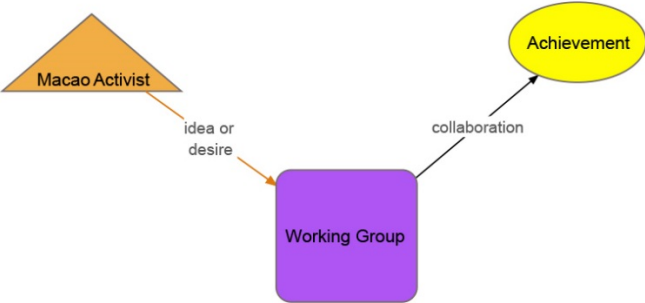
This is deeply connected with the substantial import of feminist theory within Macao. In particular in the “politics of difference”, a movement of subtraction and creation at the same time, based on the work by the feminist movements of the 1970 on relations (cf. Lonzi 1978). The strong presence of women in the construction of Macao has moulded the movement’s forms of action, giving essential importance to the quality of exchange rather than the result it is desired to attain, thus affirming the crisis of the whole business management ideology. This ideology is widespread in many projects of self-entrepreneurship in the creative industries (Bandinelli and Arvidsson, 2013) with which Macao has established a non-dogmatic dialogue, unlike its predecessors – such as the social centres that have been active in Milan since the early 1980s. A further contribution comes from the work of Alberto Melucci, and his insights about the specificity of women’s contributions to social movements. In the excerpt I produce below he is referring specifically to the feminist movements of the 1970s, but I find his analysis fits perfectly with the feminine sensitivity embodied in Macao.

“Female” activities within the movement consist of pointless meetings, writing for its own sake not for the market, apparently aimless communication, and time spent in ways incoherent with utility and efficiency. The cultivation of memory; the search for the margins, nuances, and seams of experience; and the duplication of the same activities by a myriad of groups, with complete disregard for economies of scale, are all aspects that the dominant masculine culture judges as “senseless”. Nevertheless, it is this waste that breeds innovation, as recent years have shown. (Melucci 1994: 120-1)

4. Findings

The first finding is related to what I define as a *non-exclusive dialectic* between the individual and the collective, which places Macao’s relational pattern beyond the two main available frames of collective and connective action. Through the results of the enquiry presented in this article we can see how individual desires and needs are welcomed and find their expression in a dynamic interaction which does not always entail the approval of the assembly (cf. mode 4), similarly to what happens with the tasks carried out by the working groups. Furthermore, such desires arise both from people who are already active in Macao and from people who enter Macao for the first time.

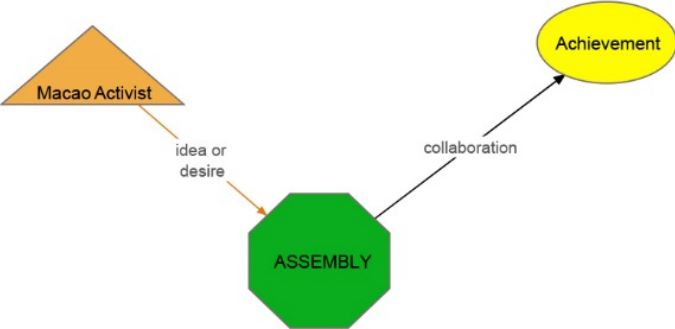
Mode 1. Macao activist through Working Group



Mode 1.1 Working Group activates individual Macao activist



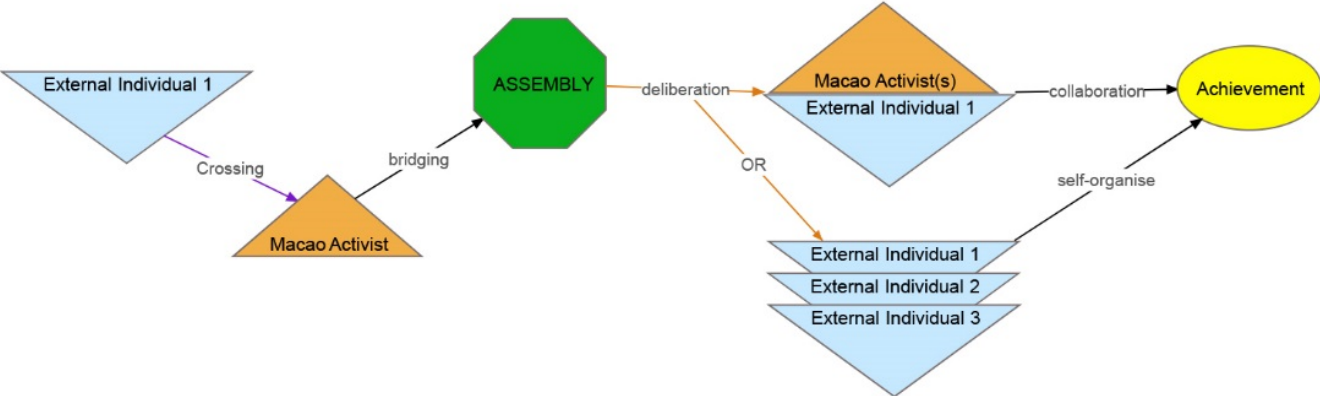
Mode 2. Macao activist through Assembly



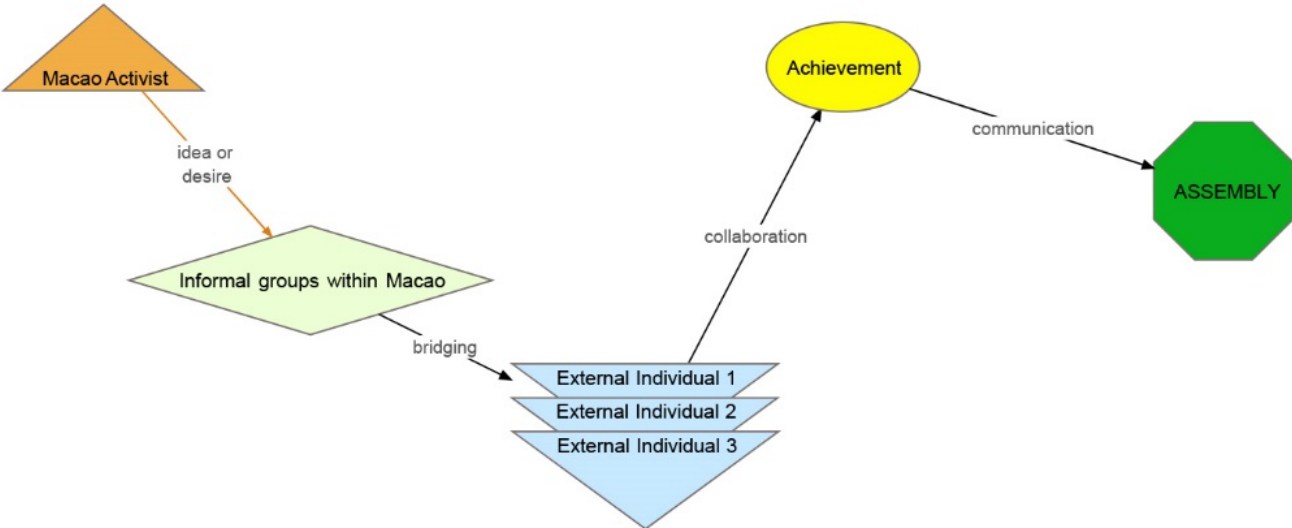
Mode 2.1 Assembly activates individual Macao activist



Mode 3. External individual crosses Macao



Mode 4. Informal contamination without deliberation including insiders and outsiders



The coordination in Macao does not take place in the way that it does within institutions such as unions. Coordination in Macao is a mobile, open and conflicting network in which the different types of associations (the working groups, assemblies, alliances, friendships, etc.) constitute spaces for the discussion, and the production, of skills, behaviours and expressions in constant transformation. Both the reproduction of the beliefs and moral principles that are derived from the public opinion of the majority and the most innovative political and aesthetic practices find their place here. How, then, has this model been imagined and implemented? Three main elements come together in the explanation. As I have highlighted in the genealogy of Macao's cooperation, previous experiences and orientations inspired the model in the first place: art as a social activity, feminism, post-workerist tradition and the "Galfa effect". Secondly, the ongoing experimentations brought about by Macao in its activity constantly generated new crossings²⁹ by other subjects and ideas (cf. Mode 3). Finally, these different models of organizing relations are able to co-exist in the same space because of a *desired instability*, which – paradoxically – constitutes a "sound floor" on which activities are based. Instability is a feature that characterizes many organizations nowadays, both within and outside the realm of social movements, and it does not represent an unintended negative outcome of systemic dysfunctions. As Chiappello and Boltanski (2005) have highlighted, capitalism itself has drawn ideas from counter-cultures and implemented them in new management theories. In Macao's case, however, there has been a step forward. Insofar as there is a shared awareness of being already subsumed into the neoliberal capitalist mode of production, the reflexive desire to have an unstable organization represents the outcome of a process of political subjectification in which the refusal of work (Lazzarato 2014) appears as a key component. Rather than being a hegemonic – and thus naturalized and pre-reflexive – frame for Macao, the desire to be unstable constitutes a safeguard from self-exploitation.

The second finding deals with the organization of participation along the opposed and co-existing notions of horizontality and hierarchy. In Macao there is a constantly shifting equilibrium of radical inclusion and leadership. On the one hand, radical inclusion is granted by the "crossings" by other subjects and groups that Macao, as a process and as a space, empirically supports by having, for instance, a weekly assembly that is fully open. Regardless of their status – individual, group, acting inside or outside Macao – everyone in these

²⁹ Crossing is a translation of the Italian word "attraversamento", to pass through. In Macao's lexicon, the "crossing" is a key concept representing their responsibility to leave Macao open to be permeated by third subjects as well as the enrichment deriving from it.

assemblies is welcome and is granted a space in which it is possible to propose ideas and collaborations. However, this does not necessarily imply agreeing dogmatically with horizontality. In fact, leadership, and not leaders, represents a concrete reality in the activities of Macao, as has been substantiated in the second case study. As Simon Western (2014) has suggested, in many contemporary movements leadership is not just *de facto* already in place, it is an unavoidable and beneficial feature of every human grouping, as anarchists in the first place have also acknowledged. In Western's account it was exactly an unwillingness to recognize leadership in movements like Occupy and Indignados that caused growing dissatisfaction among activists and led to their dissolution. What is different in Macao, then? As I have stressed in the first finding, desire³⁰ is actively pursued and given free-rein so that it can permeate assemblies or, in other cases, simply ignore them and bypass them. Furthermore, there is a strong recognition of individual qualities and differences. Different forms of leadership are simultaneously co-present as they are disseminated in the social body of Macao, leading projects that might involve highly diverse skills and interests (e.g. organizing a theatre festival vs. a seminar on free software).

The fourth and main finding relates to the overall organizational model of Macao. In previous research (Cossu and Murru, forthcoming) I have highlighted how the event represented a fundamental logic that guided the Macao activists' political action in the public sphere. I have also stressed how it contained a deep ambivalence, especially to the extent that the threshold separating a staged event from a disruptive event, a media event from a more authentic event that is bodily and emotionally perceived, is very thin. This ambivalence is still present and the event seems to play a role in the mechanics that govern the organization of Macao. From this point of view, the event is the minimal unit which compels activists to cooperate within a just-in-time regime of production that appears all too close to the regimes experienced by less politicized cultural workers. Within a framework that is characterized by a desiring and desired instability, however, events offer a manageability that leaves room for a critique of work beyond self-exploitation, as highlighted by the slow work rate that defines many of Macao's activities (cf. Case Study 1). Furthermore, what must be considered is the fact that the current Italian political arena³¹ is not capable of mediating the needs originating from art and cultural workers, as traditional collective actors appear unfit and unwilling to represent them, thus leaving a gap to be filled. Such a gap has been occupied by hybrid organizations that bear the heritage of both social movements, artistic avant-gardes

³⁰ A fundamental keyword within Macao, it originates from the adoption of a Deleuzian and Spinozian frame.

³¹ In this respect the cases of Podemos in Spain and Syriza in Greece appear to be substantially different.

and workers' movements, like Macao and many others around Italy and Europe. If, traditionally, action was structured around organizations producing events (e.g. trade unions calling for a general strike or a rally), if the main economic system is centred around the event economy, if access to power through institutionalization (e.g. becoming a union) or cooptation is not either feasible or desirable anymore, if the only means available to change capitalism are from within (since there is no outside), what happens to the concept of organization for this type of hybrid movements? In this context, as highlighted by the experience of Macao, the appropriation of a capitalist logic for political purposes requires us to rethink organization as we are used to conceive of it (that is, an organization that produces events) and rather to think of it as a linking of events. In other words, as the event becomes a key organizational device, the new organization is not any more a unity that produces events in order to persist with its structures and roles, but becomes itself a series of events that loosely interweave the organization of action and production.

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