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Macao evacuated, “But only a distance of 30 metres”

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“Sorry guys,” said one girl, interrupting a meeting, “but this afternoon’s lesson is starting in front of the restaurant *Toscana*.”

In the end, it was only the location of *Macao* (the centre for arts and culture in Milan) that changed. With a dawn raid, this morning, a number of police units in riot gear evacuated the arts workers from the Galfa Tower (the Ligresti Group skyscraper, which has been abandoned for fifteen years), which had been occupied since 5 May. For ten days, *Macao* was the destination for thousands of people, with lessons and cultural activities.

“You’ve moved us on, but only a distance of thirty metres,” screamed one youth, in the middle of the gathering that, from the morning, had occupied the street in front of the entrance of the first skyscraper in the world to be occupied.

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From the early hours of the morning, as soon as the news was issued, a great many people (including the Nobel laureate, Dario Fo) rushed to the foot of the tower, and stayed there. “*Macao* isn’t a physical, but a cultural place,” explained one youth, and for this reason, “you can’t talk using the past tense, but the present,” said another.

Admittedly, being forced to leave the tower, “which had become home for all of us”, did upset somewhat the plans of the hundreds of young people, who, for 10 days, had animated what was “a 32-storey high dream”. But the plans were changed, not cancelled. The meetings and lessons that were planned on the first floors of the tower, were moved to the renamed “Macao Square”, and in place of the first or second floor there was the entrance of the restaurant *Toscana*, and of the *Esso*. It is certain that the work to make the skyscraper safe, or the operations in the skyscraper’s small garden cannot start anymore. “I would have brought one of my cherry trees here today,” said one girl, looking sadly beyond the line of shields and truncheons that were blocking access to the tower’s small garden.

Over the next few hours, the future of *Macao* will remain uncertain. “Today, we’re staying in the street,” one boy announced, amid shouting and applause. “Also tonight,” he added, addressing the police officers. But nobody can predict what will happen tomorrow morning. Admittedly, on Monday, the day before the evacuation, Mayor Pisapia had made a series of inspections in four disused or abandoned areas of the town. Some interpreted this as a sort of veiled message to the young people, who, it is clear, do not intend to disperse.

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