Tomás Saraceno looks to the sky and sees possibilities. He imagines an airborne city as an escape from the realities of the earth, where we live beyond the mess (in both physical and social terms). Along the strands of a perhaps not only provides a poetic graphic model for Saraceno’s future cities, but the flexible strength of spiders’ webs suggests the ideal qualities for Air-PoCyt’s netlike superstructure. Saraceno’s suspended and floating environments envisage networks of habitable structures that float in the air. The freedom of these airborne locations allows for living space to be envisioned as a modular cellular framework, to join together like clouds, creating aerial cities in constant physical transformation. As he explains, “Like continental drift at the heart of the earth, the form of the bubble is the building block for much of his large-scale vision. The form of the bubble represents a flexible building component that relies on principles of tension to gain stability. Saraceno’s interest in bubbles and other soap-film structures builds upon his earlier experiments. Organized cellularly, with interdependent constituent parts, these sculptures redefine the idea of wholeness and completeness as states of change. For Saraceno often experiments. 

Some of Saraceno’s interactive installations anticipate this social realm— upon entering one of his inflatable structures, your presence affects the suspension of others in the space.

Tomás Saraceno: Atmosphere Architecture, 2017 [right], digital print, 64.5 x 40.5 in.; courtesy of the artist.

Tomás Saraceno: Livingjecting (details), 2017; 40 x 70 in.; courtesy of the artist.

Tomás Saraceno: Aerocene sculpture (details), 2017; analog print, 24 x 36 in.; courtesy of the artist.

Tomás Saraceno: Suspended Architecture, 2017; C-print mounted on stainless steel; 40 x 50 in.; courtesy of the artist.
Much of Saraceno’s work demonstrates the physical properties of his materials, articulating in small-scale the potential for their application to Air-Port-City. He has already experimented with the possibilities of flying on passive solar energy. Transcending quixotic ambition, he built and flew the largest solar-powered geodesic balloon ever built. Looking into projections of future possibility, he has applied practical principles from engineering, physics, chemistry, aeronautics, and architecture to experiment and model logistical solutions. With the aid of lawyers and engineers, to date Saraceno has filed for patents for the construction of habitable airships, flying gardens, and cities in the sky. Much like Frei Otto, whose experimental work with lightweight materials inspired the Air-Port-City, Saraceno’s work is an exercise in humanity, imagining shape-shifting possibilities, like Saraceno’s vision for an untethered future in the sky.

Beyond technological and material feasibility, we are still left with the conundrum at the heart of all utopian visions—how do we reconcile individual agency and collective harmony? How can human beings live better together? Visions of utopia are defined by this lack of stasis, so fluid revisions of the social imagination are an important exercise in humanity, imagining shape-shifting possibilities, like Saraceno’s vision for an untethered future in the sky.

Much like utopias are defined by this lack of stasis, so fluid revisions of the social imagination are an important exercise in humanity, imagining shape-shifting possibilities, like Saraceno’s vision for an untethered future in the sky.