

Artist **Tomas Saraceno's** installations and interventions have a strong architectural element. *Roberta Marcaccio* catches up with him while he has two feet on the ground.

It's almost literally a leap of faith to involve yourself in Tomas Saraceno's *On Space Time Foam* – a sculpture of 70,000 cu m of air, whose soft and unstable form is delineated by three transparent membranes 24m above the ground. The visiting public activates the piece: each person's step, every breath, produces a reaction throughout the entire installation. Moving around one of the pressurised sacs of air causes the layers below to be squeezed and the shape of the inflated structure mutates – everything and everyone is connected.

RM: Your work *On Space Time Foam* is informed by scientific and cosmological theories, but the title also recalls the book by Siegfried Giedion, *Space, Time and Architecture*. Was this deliberate?

TS: Maybe on an unconscious level these things come together. But more straightforwardly, at the moment when I was thinking about this variation, I was looking at the drawing by the astrophysicist Paul Davies. I think some things make sense when they connect to more than one field.

Having visited *On Space...* [right], it's not quite as I expected from photographs – in fact, the philosopher Bruno Latour has said that the piece is frightening..

This I love, this is very different. I agree – it is frightening! When there is something you don't know, the first reaction you have is getting

frightened. Despite that I want people to access it, and hopefully enjoy it. The pressure in the structure is so low that you try to anchor yourself, to find security. I think we still don't have the right language to express these things – about finding security, solidarity, fear, about taking mutual responsibility – and we must try.

What I see is a big stream of air coming towards me – it makes me lift up my head and think that the same stream of air that is supporting the guys up there is the same air that I am breathing. For me, there is this magical moment where you come into the venue, you feel this air, then you see somebody suspended up there and then you start to weave relationships.

CLOUD CITIES IS ABOUT TRYING TO UNDERSTAND WHAT LIFE IS... THE CONCEPT – THE IDEA ITSELF – IS COMPLETELY OPEN AND FLEXIBLE

Tell us about the scale and ambition of your ongoing project, *Cloud Cities* [below], in terms of its architectural and social potential.

I understand architecture as something that has to help orchestrate or articulate. You also need to see architecture as a system – the architecture of a poem, for example, or a piece of music. We



*Above: Leaping around *On Space Time Foam*, by Tomas Saraceno*

*Below: *Cloud Cities* 2012, installed outside the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City in*

can extend the term 'architecture' in several ways to articulate a variety of different things.

It might be that by the time we are able to build *Cloud Cities*, it will already be obsolete. By that time we might have finally learned how to live on this big floating spaceship Earth, which is part of a cosmic cloud in the Milky Way galaxy. *Cloud Cities* is like a system, helping you to reinterpret how we live and at the same time spark ideas of how you position yourself in relationship to something that is already happening.

Then again, maybe we have to rethink the way we are interpreting this. When we talk about clouds, we could talk about galactic clouds, about cosmic filaments, and then come round again to think about how we are living and understanding what is around us.

Cloud Cities is about trying to understand what life is, to help position yourself in relationship to something that is already happening. The concept of *Cloud Cities* – the idea itself – is completely open and flexible, but at the same

time I try to materialise the idea because that always helps understanding – to narrow the focus to something specific, though it is much smaller than what we trying to understand.

So, more a machine for thinking that architecture itself?

But I think that architecture is a machine for thinking. And that's the position we have to take today on architecture – I think so.

Arguably, architecture's task has been to separate the artificial from the natural. In your habitats they are not so easily distinguishable. Do you think such hybrid conditions redefine the task of architecture?

It's not so productive to make a distinction between artificial and natural; it is trivial. I think this kind of division is problematic; we are natural and artificial at the same time. When you make a territorial distinction – for example, beyond the back door of your house – then you stop caring in the same way about things beyond that boundary.

