

1,001 handshakes

François-Joseph Lapointe - March 23, 2023

• *microbiome* • *selfies* • *performance* • *contagion* • *networks* • *identity* • *bacteria*

I inhabit the microbial world. Microbes live on my body and inside my body. Every opening in my body envelope is populated by millions and millions of different microbes. I eat microbes, swallow microbes, digest microbes, and defecate microbes. When I kiss my wife, I share microbes with her. When I shake hands with my neighbor, we swap our microbes. We are both part of a complex network of microbes commonly referred to as the *microbiome*, which is an essential part of our individual and collective bodies. The composition of my microbiome fluctuates on a daily basis, according to my all my actions and encounters. Although my genome is fixed, my microbiome is changeable and adaptable. I can transform my microbiome as I wish to change my identity. As part of my artistic practice, I expose my own body to various types of experiments aimed at changing the makeup of my microbiome. I then use the tools of science to quantify the effects produced.

On February 3, 2016, I shook hands with 1,001 people at the Berlin Transmediale, gradually transforming the invisible community of microbes living in the palm of my right hand. At regular intervals, assistants took samples of this skin microbiome to study how contact with others transforms who we are. Since then, I have repeated this hybrid project, at the interface of art and science, in Copenhagen, Montreal, Perth, San Francisco, Baltimore, and Paris. The performance of *1,001 handshakes* raises awareness through physical engagement, through acts of participation and exchange at the social, individual, and microbial levels.

As a scientist, the objective of this experiment was to collect scientific data on the human microbiome, the dynamics of contamination of my microbiome in contact with the microbiome of others. As a bioartist, it was more the notion of individuality that appealed to me, a philosophical concept that I formalize through microbiome self-portraits, or microbiome selfies generated from the DNA of bacteria harvested from the palm of my hand. Am I still the same after a thousand handshakes with strangers? Hidden beyond the visible, in the palm of a hand, as the most curious visitors zoom in, these *microbiome selfies* reveal themselves on a micro scale. These multicolored bacterial networks attest to my metamorphosis.

This mundane action of the handshake comes to us today in a new light amidst a global pandemic exacerbated by social distancing. The limits of my body are not those of my skin. I touch therefore I am. I carry traces of your microscopic identity with me. I am a network of microbial cells that dance with my own cells to construct the person that I am in real time.



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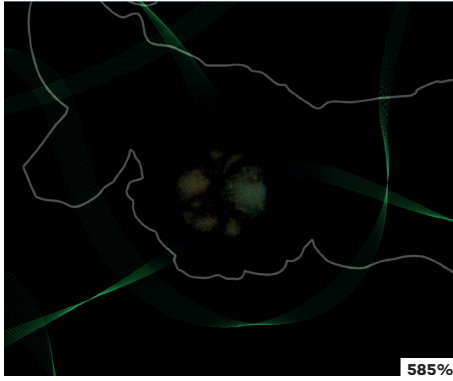
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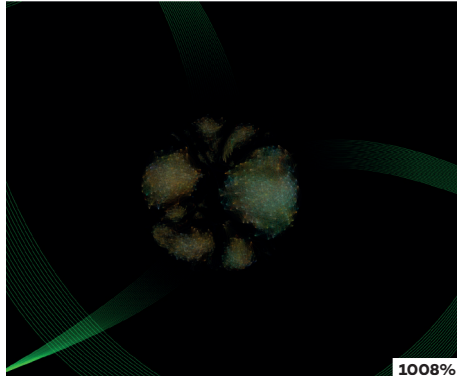
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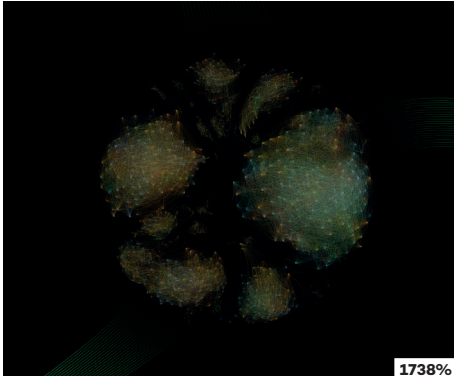
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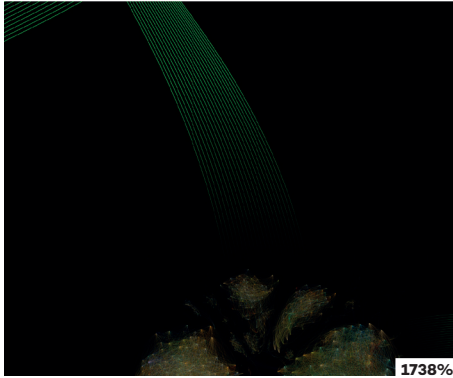
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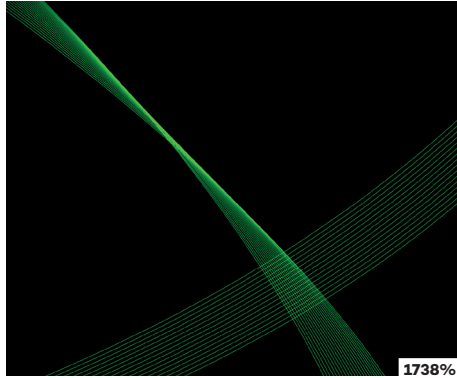
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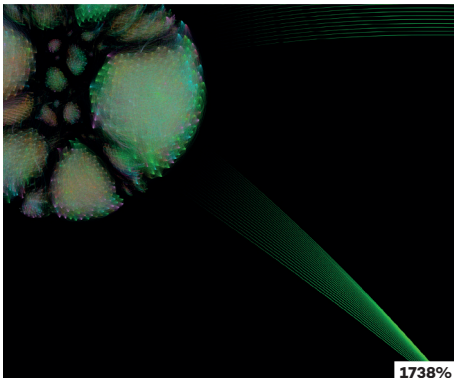
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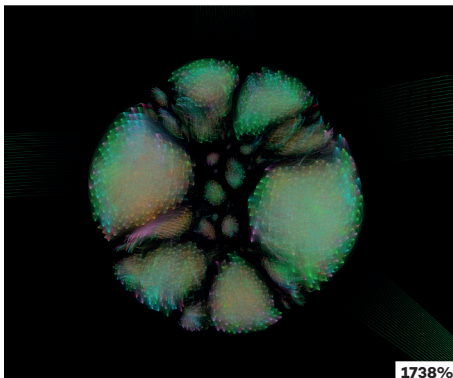
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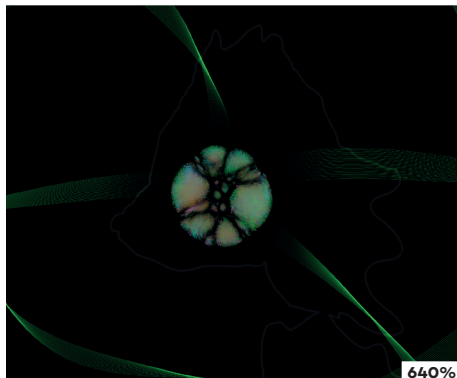
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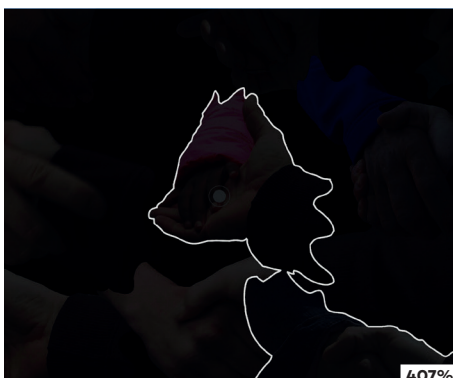
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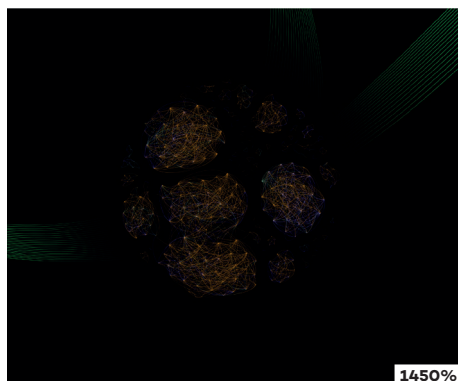
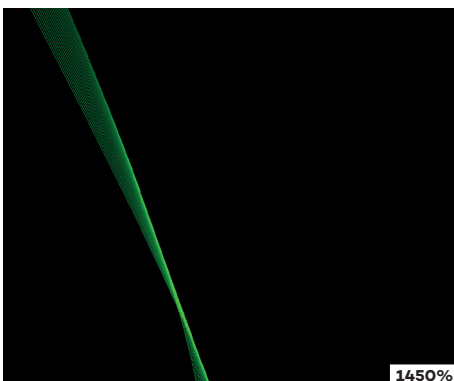
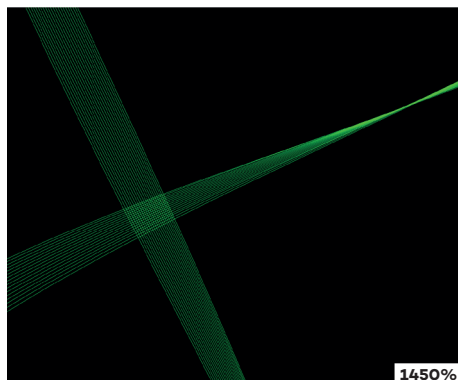
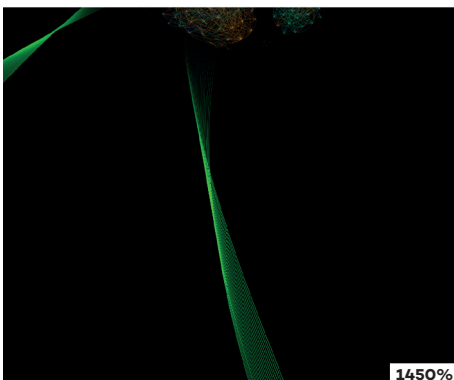
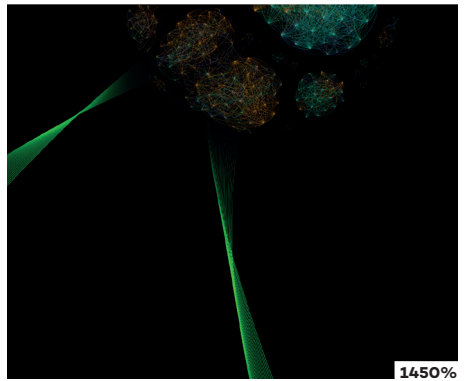
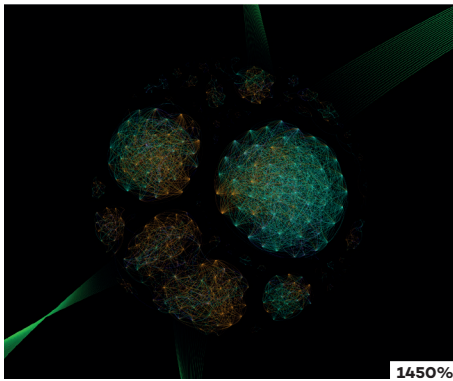
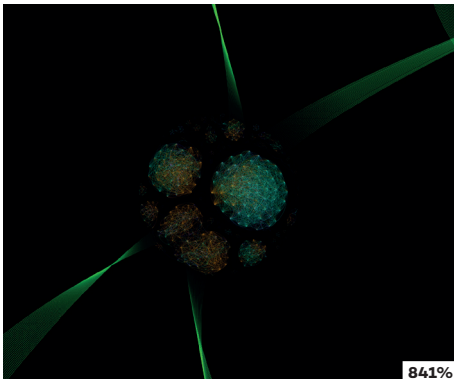
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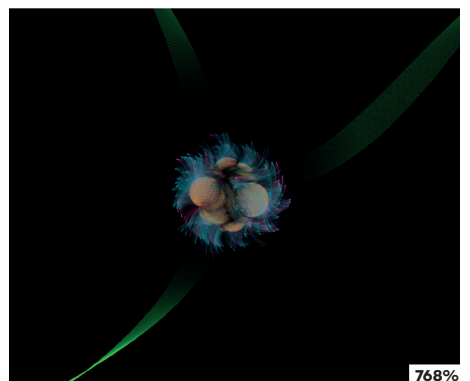
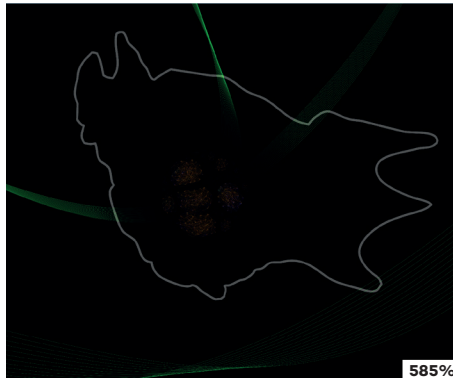
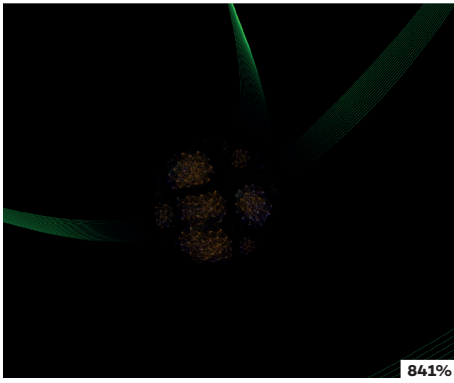


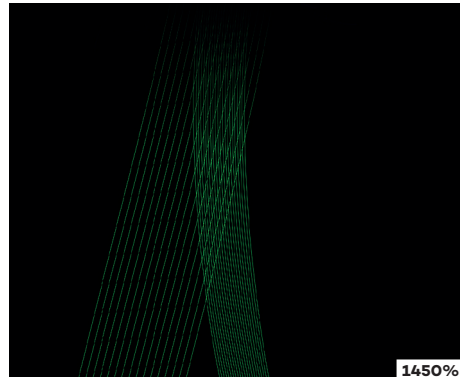
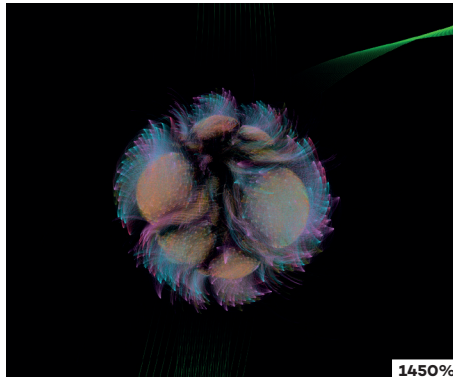
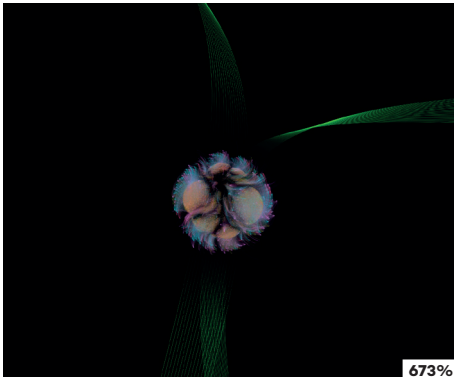
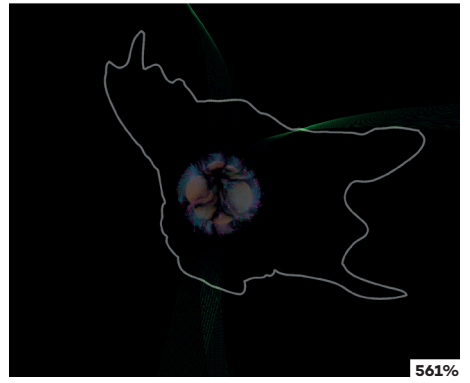
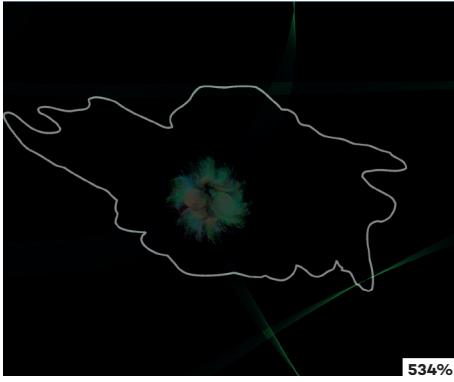
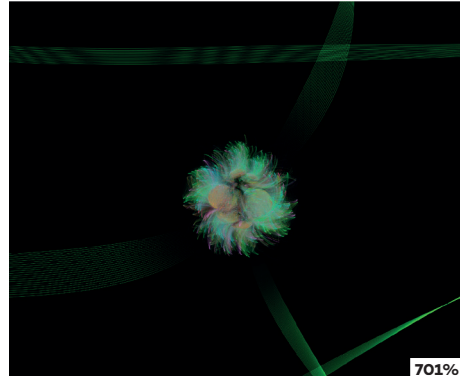
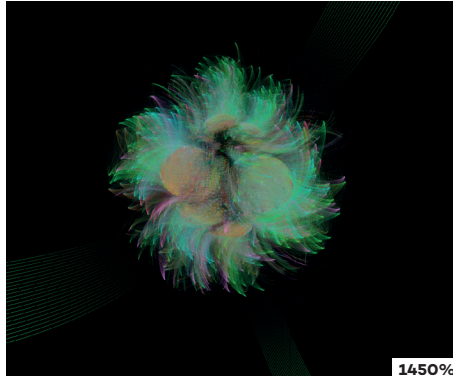
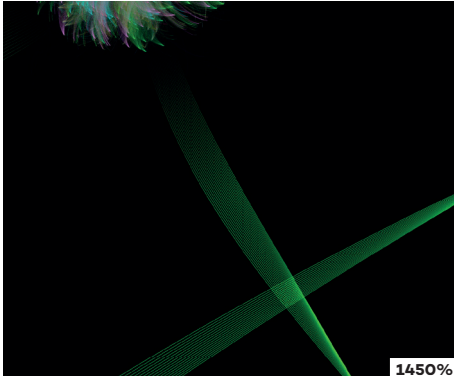
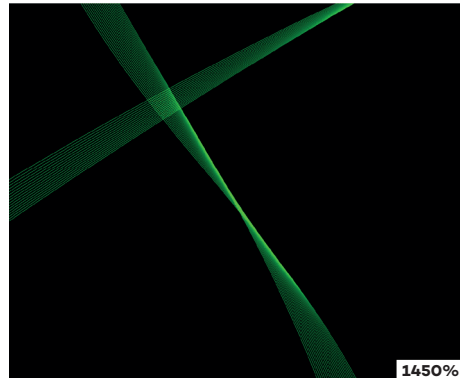
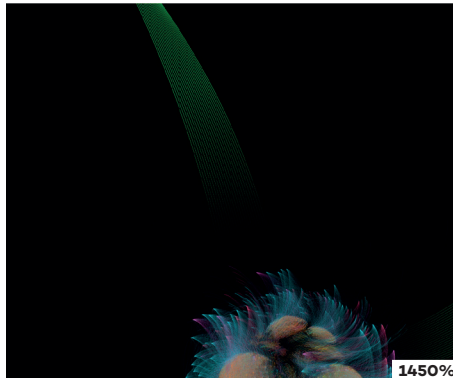
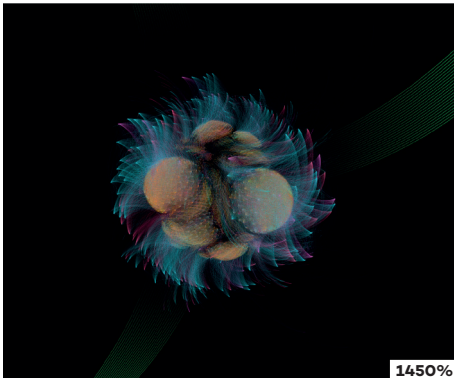
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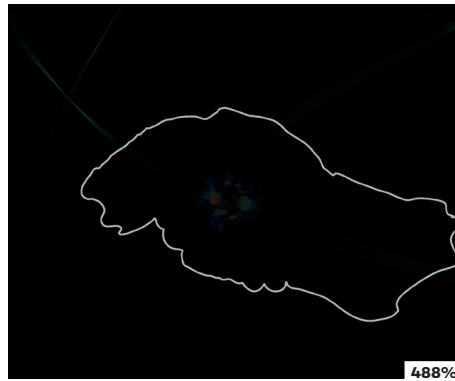
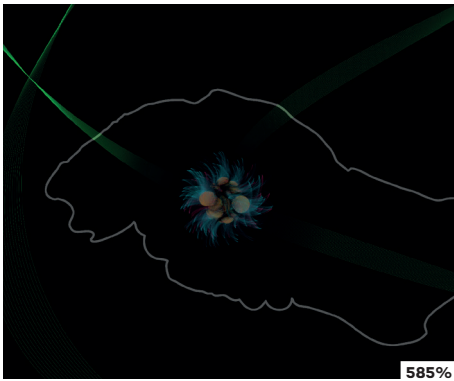
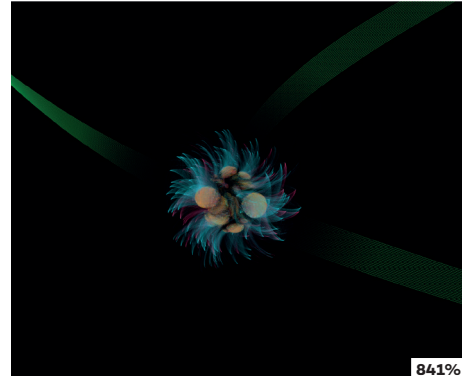
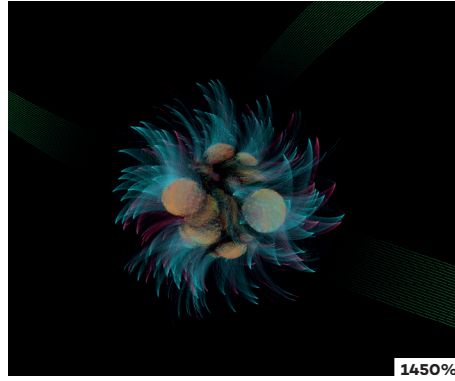
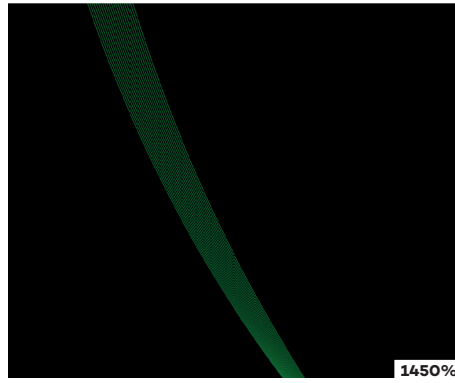
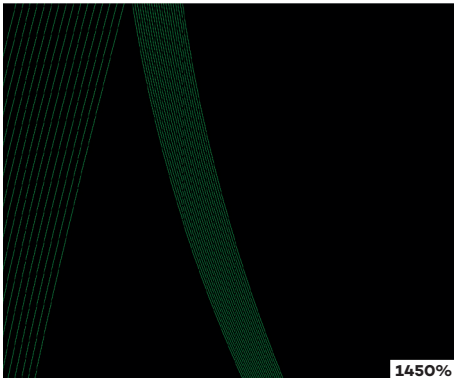


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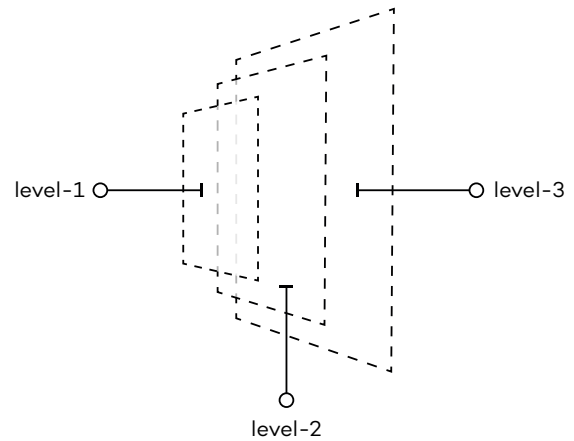




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