

1,001 handshakes

François-Joseph Lapointe – March 23, 2023

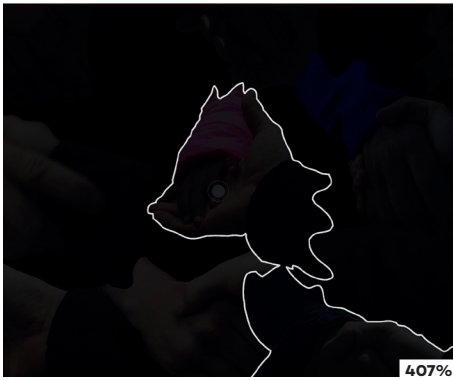
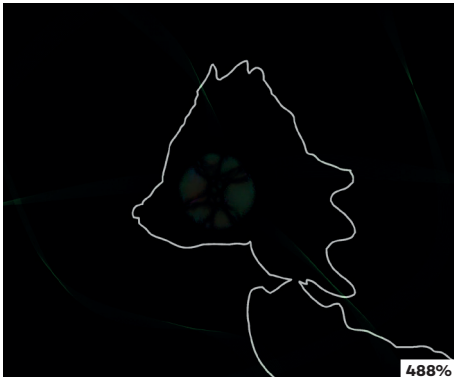
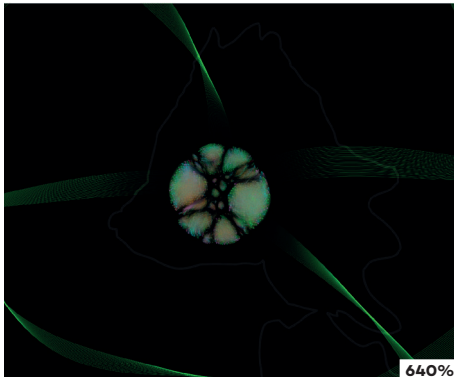
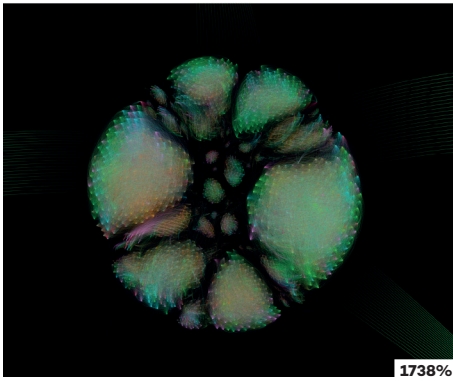
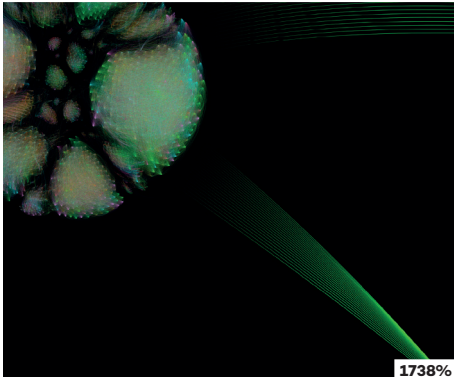
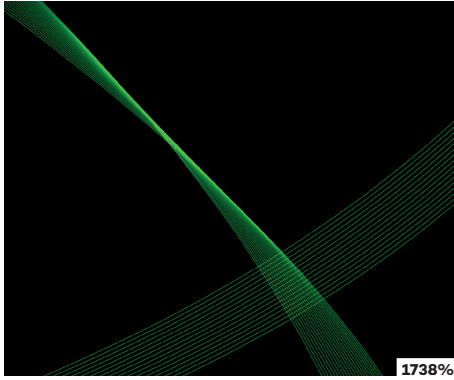
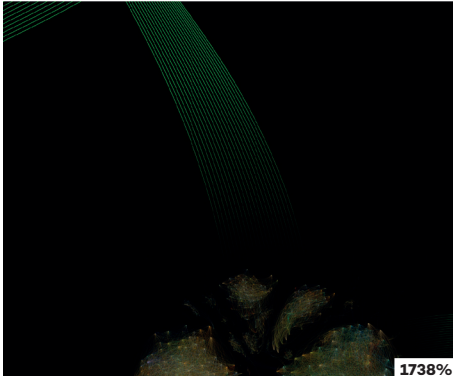
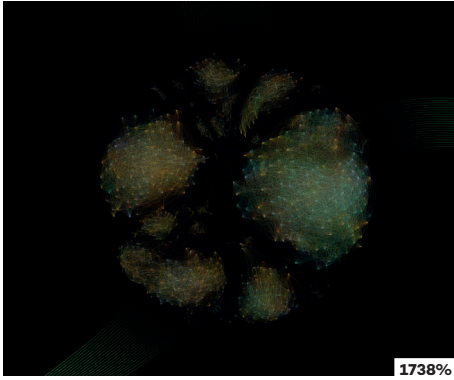
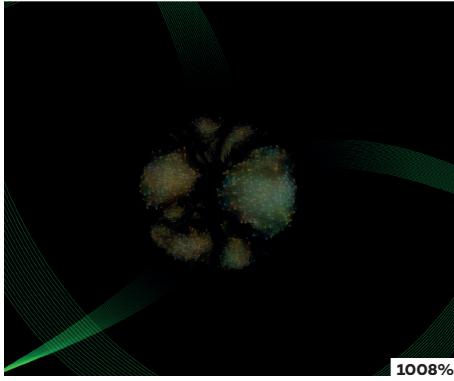
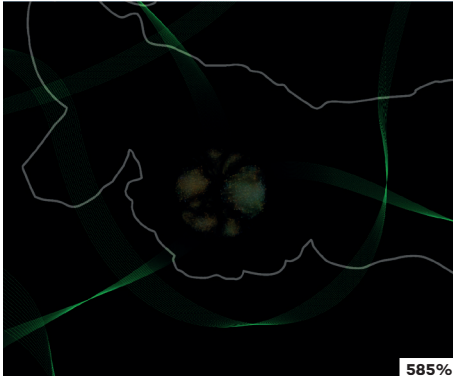
•microbiome •selfies •performance •contagion •networks •identity •bacteria

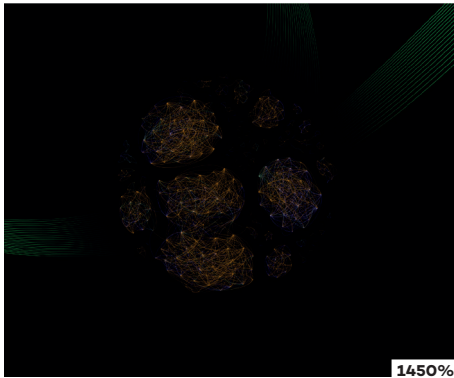
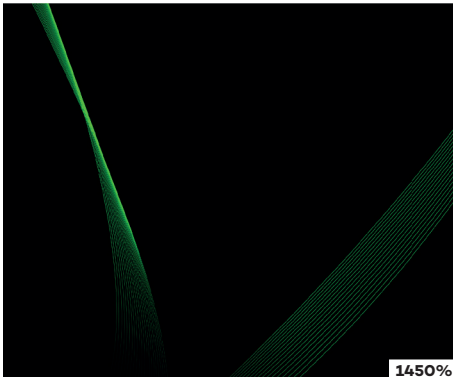
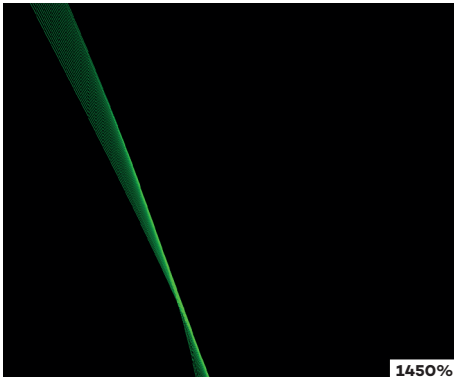
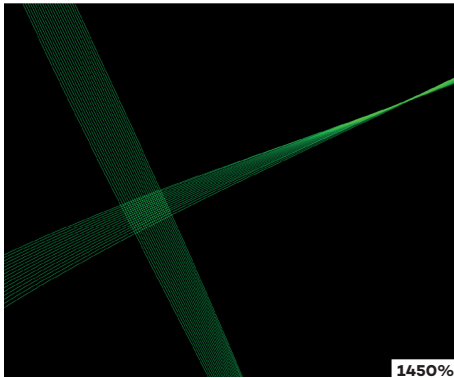
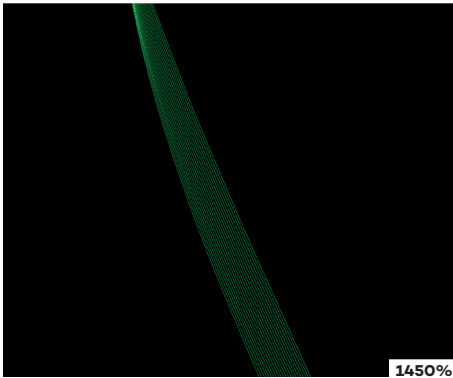
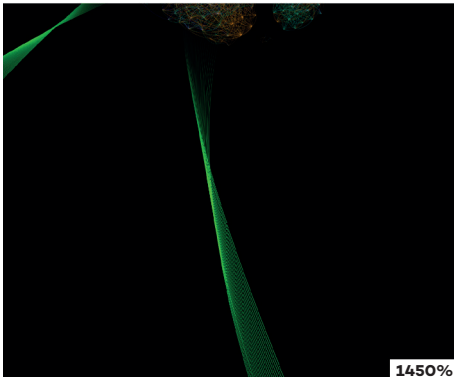
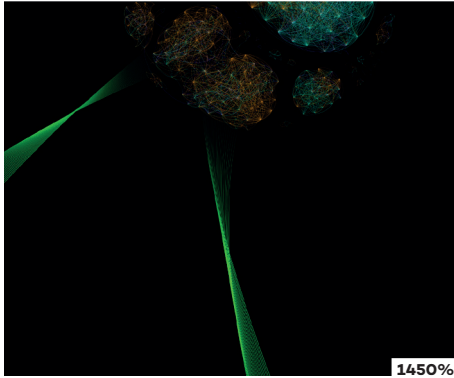
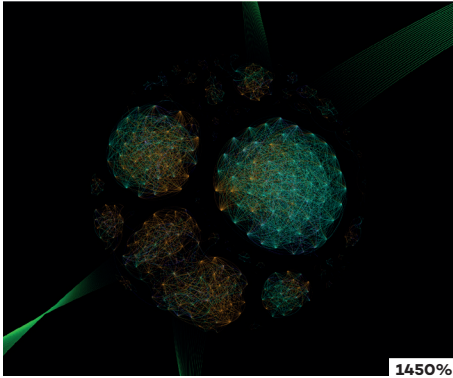
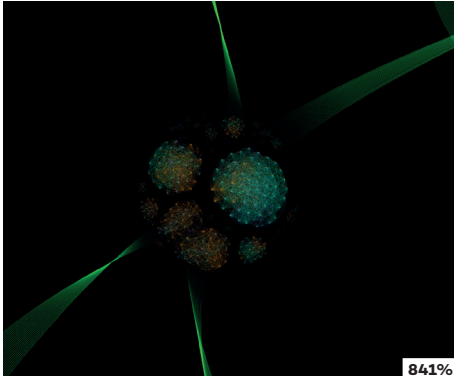
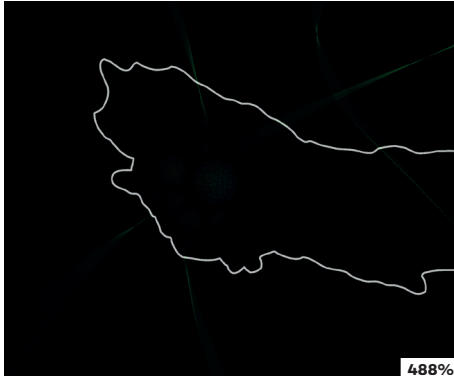
I inhabit the microbial world. Microbes live on my body and inside my body. Every opening in my body envelope is populated by millions and millions of different microbes. I eat microbes, swallow microbes, digest microbes, and defecate microbes. When I kiss my wife, I share microbes with her. When I shake 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.

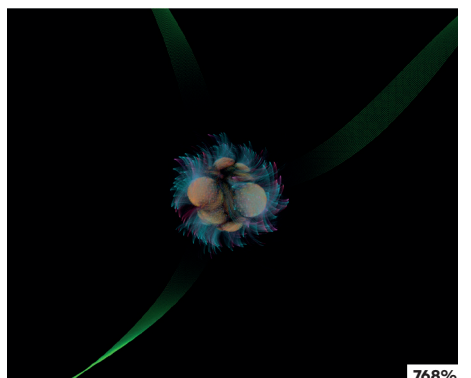
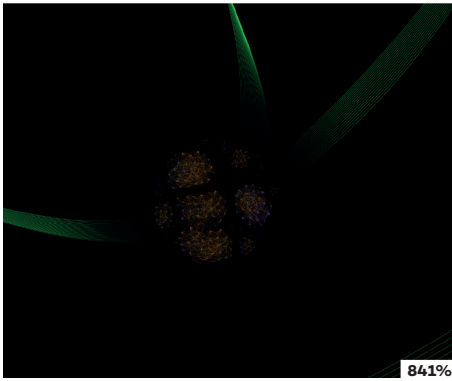
On February 3, 2016, I shook hands with 1,001 people at the Berlin Transmediale, gradually transforming the invisible community of microbes living in the palm of my right hand. At regular intervals, assistants took samples of this skin microbiome to study how contact with others transforms who we are. 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.

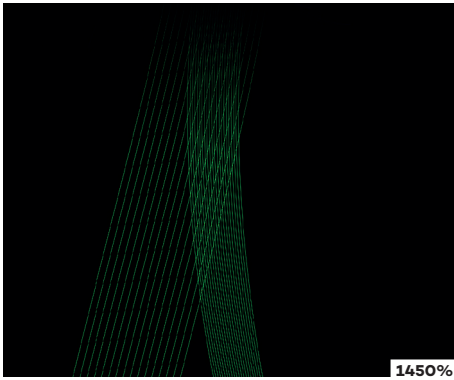
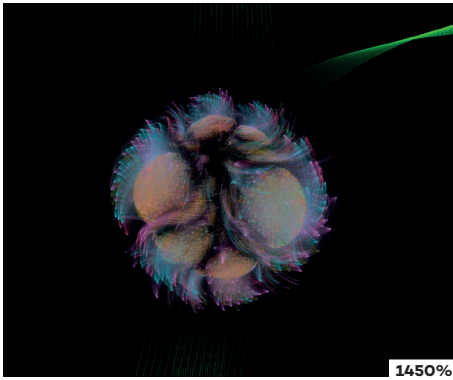
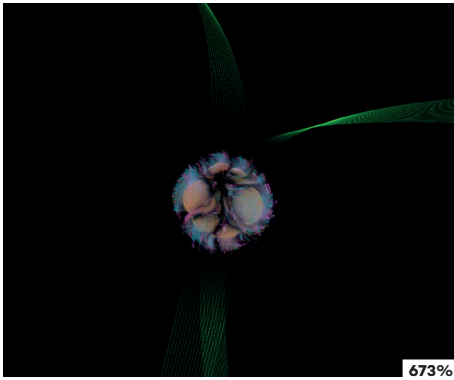
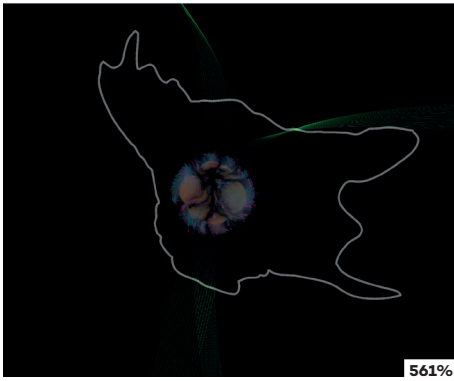
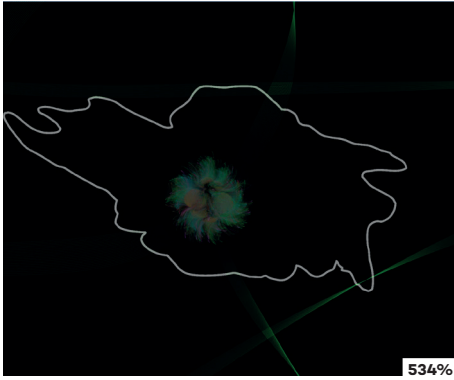
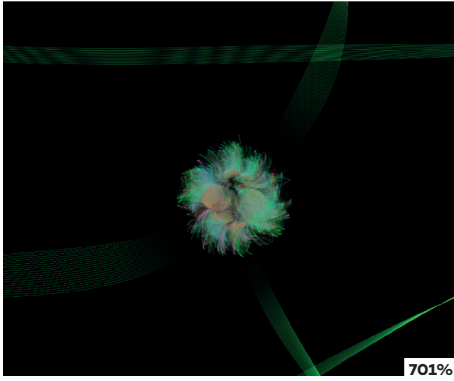
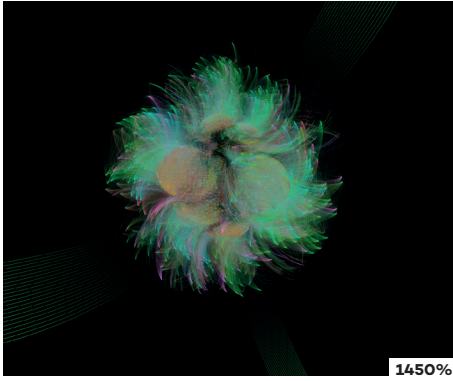
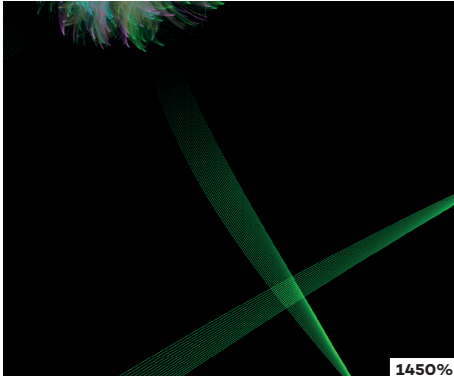
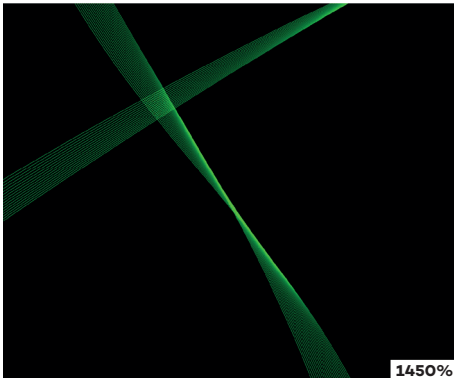
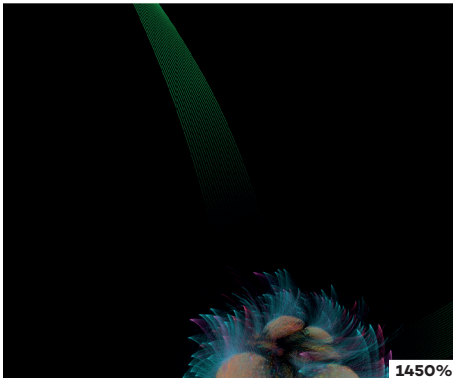
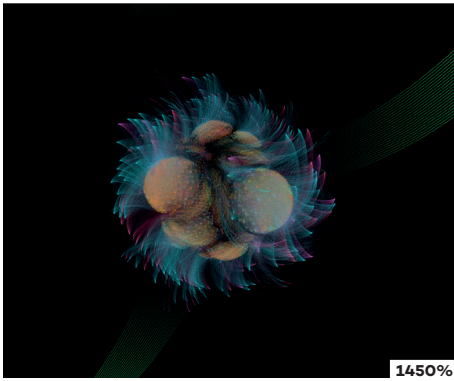
As a scientist, the objective of this experiment was to collect scientific data on the human microbiome, the dynamics of contamination of my microbiome in contact with the microbiome of others. As a bioartist, it was more the notion of individuality that appealed to me, a philosophical concept that I 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.

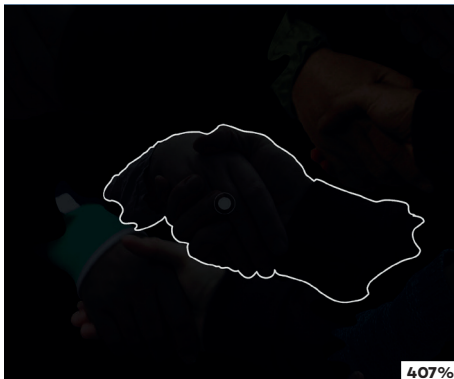
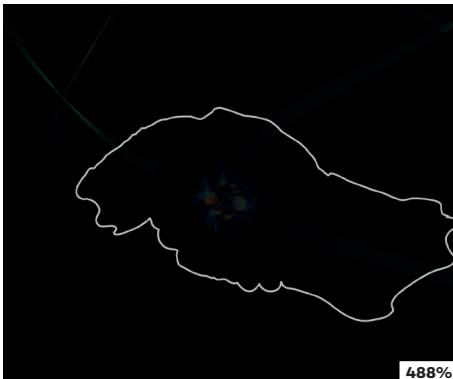
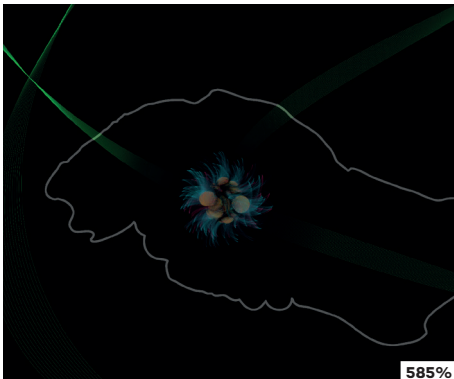
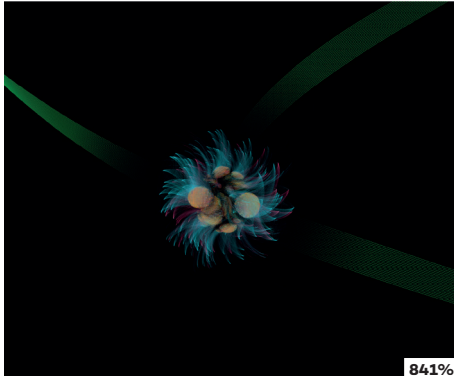
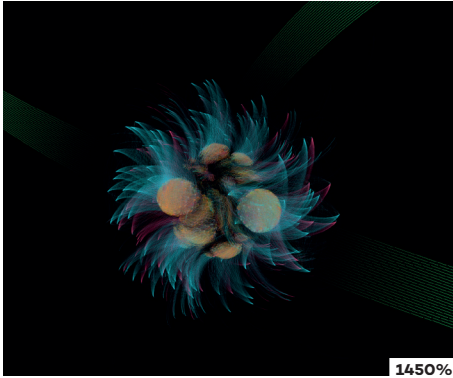
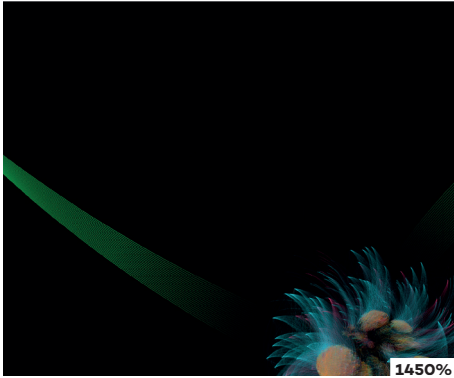
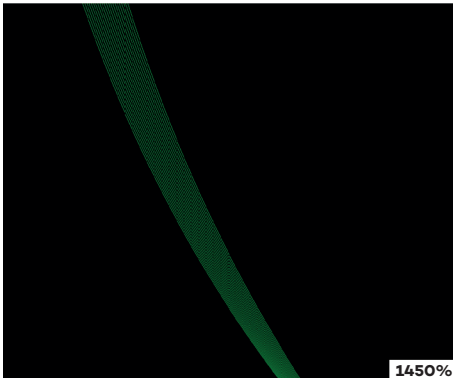
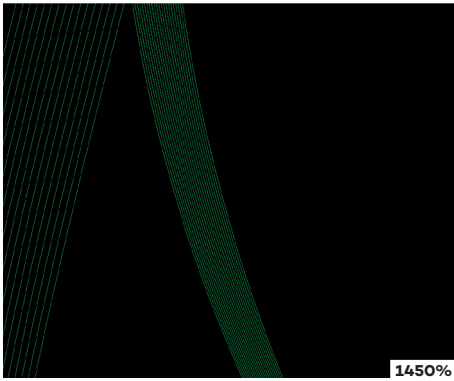
This mundane action of the handshake comes to us today in a new light amidst a global pandemic exacerbated by social distancing. The limits of my body are not those of my skin. I touch therefore I am. I carry traces of your microscopic identity with me. I am a network of microbial cells that dance with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







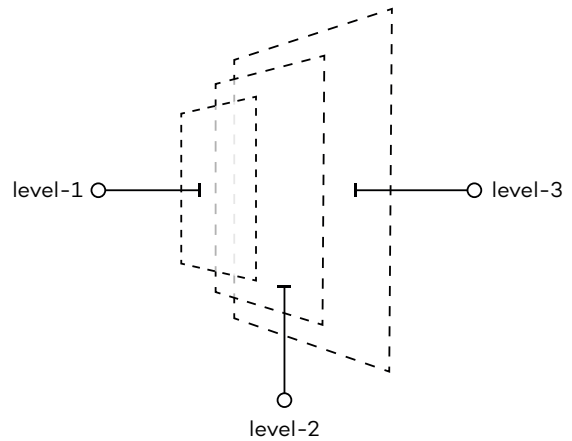




This contribution was published on www.able-journal.org in a zoom.able format:

www.able-journal.org/en/1001-handshakes

The user can zoom in or out of the content by scrolling and pan the image in any direction. By zooming in, layers appear successively in depth.



credits

author: François-Joseph Lapointe, biologist and bioartist, Professor & Researcher at Université de Montréal.

editorial mediation: Gwenaelle Lallemand

graphic designer: Bertrand Sandrez

photo credits: François-Joseph Lapointe

acknowledgments:

Copenhagen: Adam Bencard, Louise Whiteley (curators); Linda Fønss, Anna Simone Kofoed-Kristiansen, Lea Korsholm, Louise Kristensen, Maria Loroño Leturiondo, Anne Sofie Pinstrup Jørgensen, Elin Rosenbek Severinsen, Mika Rosenberg, Emma Strip, Lisa Sutherland, (assistants)

Berlin: Christian de Lutz, Regine Rapp (curators); Alanna Lynch (assistant)

Montréal: Geneviève Dubois, Virginie Lemieux-Labonté (assistants); Cindy Bouchard, Etienne Lord (photo/video)

Baltimore: Margaret MacDonald (curator); Anne Estes (assistant)

San Francisco: Alexandra Carmichael (assistant)

Paris: Gwenaelle Lallemand (assistant); Olivier Kruzer (video)

Perth: Carley Ternes (assistant)

supported by: Fonds de recherche du Québec – Société et culture

about the author

François-Joseph Lapointe (PhD) is an artist and biologist. Director of the Laboratory of Molecular Ecology and Evolution at the University of Montreal and full professor in the Department of Biological Sciences, he also holds a PhD in Art Studies and Practices. His artistic practice is inspired by models of molecular biology, genetics, and genomics.

<https://fjlapointe.com/art>

<https://recherche.umontreal.ca/nos-chercheurs/repertoire-des-professeurs/chercheur/is/in14108/>



rights and references

illustration rights and references

Copyright 2022 by the author.
Reproduced with permission.

François-Joseph Lapointe, *Microbiome Selfie*, 2014–2020. Photo and data visualization.

bibliography and references

Gimbert, Carine, and François-Joseph Lapointe. 2015. "Self-tracking the microbiome: where do we go from here?" *Microbiome* 3: 70, <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40168-015-0138-x>.

Hutter, Thiago, Carine Gimbert, Frédéric Bouchard, and François-Joseph Lapointe. 2015. "Being human is a gut feeling." *Microbiome* 3: 9, <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40168-015-0076-7>.

Lapointe, François-Joseph. 2017. "De la transformation expérimentale du microbiote cutané." *Images en Dermatologie* 10: 202–205.

Lapointe, François-Joseph. 2017. "Je touche, donc je suis." *Inter, Art Actuel* 125: 56–57. <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/84838ac>.

Lapointe, François-Joseph. 2019. "La performance artistique comme dispositif d'expérimentation scientifique." In *Art, performance, manœuvre, coefficients de visibilité*, edited by M. Collet and A. E. Létourneau: 195–202. Dijon: Les Presses du Réel.

Lapointe, François-Joseph. 2020. "Autoportraits au microbiome." *Pour la science (hors-série)* 109: 28–31.

Lapointe, François-Joseph. 2021. "Die experimentelle Veränderung des menschlichen Mikrobioms als künstlerische Praxis." In *Naturkultur — Alles ist Interaktion*, edited by M. Schneider, 61–68. Berlin: Steidl-Verlag.

Parke, Emily C., Brett Calcott, and Maureen A. O'Malley. 2018. "A cautionary note for claims about the microbiome's impact on the 'self.'" *PLoS Biology* 1, no. 9: e2006654, <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pbio.2006654>.

Rees, Tobias, Thomas Bosch, and Angela E. Douglas. 2018. "How the microbiome challenges our concept of self." *PLoS Biology* 16, no. 2: e2005358, <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pbio.2005358>.

to cite this article

Lapointe, François-Joseph. 2023. "1,001 handshakes." *able journal*: <https://able-journal.org/en/1001-handshakes>

MLA EN Lapointe, François-Joseph. "1,001 handshakes." *able journal*, 2023. <https://able-journal.org/en/1001-handshakes>

ISO 690 EN LAPOINTE, François-Joseph. 1,001 handshakes. *able journal* [online]. 2023.
Available from: <https://able-journal.org/en/1001-handshakes>

APA EN Lapointe, F.-J. (2023). 1,001 handshakes. *able journal*. <https://able-journal.org/en/1001-handshakes>

