Multiple Interactive Labeling by Antibody Neodeposition (MILAN)

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Method Article

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Abstract

Multiplexing, labeling for multiple immunostains the very same cell or tissue section in situ, is of considerable interest. The major obstacles to the diffusion of this technique are high costs in custom antibodies and instruments, low throughput, scarcity of specialized skills or facilities. We have validated and detail here a method based on common primary and secondary antibodies, diffusely available fluorescent image scanners and routinely processed tissue sections (FFPE). It entails rounds of four-color indirect immunofluorescence, image acquisition and removal (stripping) of the antibodies, before another stain is applied. The images are digitally registered and the autofluorescence is subtracted. Removal of antibodies is accomplished by disulphide cleavage. In excess of 50 different antibody stains can be applied to one single section from routinely fixed and embedded tissue. This method requires a modest investment in hardware and materials and uses freeware image analysis software.

Introduction

Staining a section with multiple antibodies satisfy two different requirements: - to assess multiple analytes when the limitation is the number of sections (e.g. a single one) - to classify single cells in tissue by high-dimensional methods, typically >15 markers. Both requirements are accomplished by this method, which relies on controlled antigen retrieval conditions (once, at the beginning), antigen retention over the staining cycles, six-color immunofluorescent staining, bringing the total amount of stainings into the dozens. It employs unconjugated primary antibodies, commercial secondary antibodies and IF microscopes and scanners. It has thus the power to bring the two requirements mentioned above to a vast public of scientists, investigators, clinicians, etc. ****2ME/SDS staining and stripping method****

- 1 perform ARx on dewaxed sections affixed to positively charged glass slides
- 2 allow to cool to about 50C or lower
- 3 acquire the AF image for all the channels deemed necessary (optional)
- 4 perform the first IF stain in 100 mM Trehalose-containing dilution buffer
- 5 mount with 60% Glycerol in PBS, 0.2% N-propyl Gallate and 584 mM sucrose mounting medium containing DAPI
- 6 label the slide, acquire the images for all channels including DAPI and AF if not acquired before
- 7 unmount the slides in buffer/distilled water
- 8 transfer to Tris buffer
- 9 immerse for 30 min in pre-heated (56C) 2ME/SDS buffer with agitation
- 10 transfer to Tris buffer and wash extensively with TBS-Ts buffer
- 11 repeat from #4 with additional positive and/or negative antibodies
- 12 store in 50% glycerol at -20C/-80C for extended storage, before returning to #4 or proceed as below
- 13 perform H&E or insoluble stainings if final

A different stripping method, based on Guanidinium Hydrochloride and heath-mediated refolding may be used (see Reference below). (From Bolognesi MM, Manzoni M, Scalia CR, Zannella S, Bosisio FM, Faretta M, et al. "Multiplex Staining by Sequential Immunostaining and Antibody Removal on Routine Tissue Sections. Journal of Histochemistry & Cytochemistry." :<http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1369/0022155417719419> 2017 Aug;65(8):431–44; Figure 1)

Reagents

****CHEMICALS**** 100x Tris-EDTA buffer, pH 8 \(\Sigma\sigma\sigma, T9285) Trizma HCL \(\Sigma\sigma\sigma T3253) MW 157.60 Trizma base \(\Sigma\sigma\sigma T6066) MW 121.14 NaCl \(\Sigma\sigma\sigma 793566) MW 58.44 Sucrose \(\text{refined granulated sugar; }_{NB} \text{ check for vegetable particles, e.g. in cane sugar})_{MW} 342.30 Tween-20 \(\Sigma\sigma\sigma P1379) NaN₃ \(\Sigma\sigma\sigma 71290) MW 65.01 Bovine Serum Albumin \(\Sigma\sigma\sigma A2153) NB may substituted with gelatin. Trehalose \(\Sigma\sigma\sigma 90210) MW 378.33 Glycerol \(\Sigma\sigma\sigma G9012) N-propyl gallate \(\Sigma\sigma\sigma P3130) MW 212.20 N,N-dimethylformamide \(\Sigma\sigma\sigma D4551) Phosphate buffered saline, tablets \(\Sigma\sigma\sigma P4417) 2-mercaptoethanol \(\Sigma\sigma\sigma M6250) MW 78.13 Sodium dodecyl sulphate, dust-free pellets \(\Sigma\sigma\sigma 74255) DAPI dihydrochloride \(\Sigma\sigma\sigma D9542 \Sigma\sigma\sigma) MW 350.25 Primary unconjugated antibodies \(\text{see attached table "Primary antibodies"}) Fluorochrome-conjugated secondary antibodies \(\text{see attached table "Secondary antibodies"}) Purified immunoglobulins \(\text{see attached table "Immunoglobulins"})

****SOLUTIONS, PREPARATIONS AND BUFFERS**** ****Washing Buffer \(\Sigma\sigma\sigma TBS-Ts)**** pH 7.5 stock solution 10X 1000ml Tris-Buffered Saline - Tween20 sucrose - 63,5 g Trizma HCL \(\Sigma\sigma\sigma 403 mM) - 11,8 g Trizma base \(\Sigma\sigma\sigma 97.4 mM) - 90 g NaCl \(\Sigma\sigma\sigma 1.54 M) - 342,3 g Sucrose \(\Sigma\sigma\sigma 1 M) - 2 ml Tween-20 - NaN₃ 0,1% - 1000ml Distilled H₂O Dilute in distilled water 1:10 to 1X before use. **_NB:** do not use this buffer for Peroxidase-based IHC because the NaN₃ will inhibit the reaction. OK for AP-based IHC. **_What these chemical are there for?** Tris is for buffering the solution; Salt is to weaken non-specific molecular interactions; Tween-20 is to reduce surface tension and evenly wet the slide, preventing section margin drying; sucrose is to prevent dehydration \(\Sigma\sigma\sigma 6]

****Antibody diluent 1x**** \(\Sigma\sigma\sigma 100ml): - 2 g BSA - 90 ml Distilled H₂O - 50 mg or 1 ml NaN₃ 5% \(\Sigma\sigma\sigma stock) - 3,8 g Trehalose \(\Sigma\sigma\sigma 100mM) - 10 ml TBS 10X **_NB:** Dissolve the BSA in distilled water first; then add the other chemicals. ****Mounting fluid**** 100ml 60% glycerol / 40% distilled water x DAPI - 60 ml Glycerol - 10 ml PBS 10x pH 7.5 - 10 ml Sucrose saturated \(\Sigma\sigma\sigma 200 g in 100 ml dist., 5.84M) - 20 ml Distilled H₂O Add 0,2% n-propyl gallate from a 20% stock solution, prepared by dissolving the compound in N,N-dimethylformamide \(\Sigma\sigma\sigma store at -20C) **_N.B.:** Other \(\Sigma\sigma\sigma hardening) mounting media cause antigen re-masking \(\Sigma\sigma\sigma 3]

****To dissolve DAPI****, use DAPI dihydrochloride \(\Sigma\sigma\sigma D9542 \Sigma\sigma\sigma, 1 mg size, 2.85 μ M). Resuspend in 285 μ l of Dimethylformide. The solution \(\Sigma\sigma\sigma DAPI 10 μ M) will be turbid and yellow. Mix equal volumes of DAPI in DMF and "methanol":http://cshprotocols.cshlp.org/content/2007/10/pdb.rec11127.full?text_only=true : the solution \(\Sigma\sigma\sigma DAPI 5 μ M) will become clear transparent. Dilute to 2-10 nM in either TBS-Ts or mounting fluid. **_NB:** concentrations above 10 nM on FFPE material will be A) unmanageable for exposure \(\Sigma\sigma\sigma too short), B) DAPI signal will bleed into the Autofluorescence, FITC, and TRITC filters \(\Sigma\sigma\sigma in order).

****Stripping buffer**** 100ml 2x - 20 ml SDS 10% - 12,5 ml Tris HCl pH6,8 \(\Sigma\sigma\sigma 0,5M) - 67,5 ml Distilled H₂O - 0,8 ml 2-mercaptoethanol Dilute 1:1 with distilled water **_NB:** Work under a fume hood ****Storage Buffer \(\Sigma\sigma\sigma Glycerol 50%****: 100ml 1x - 50 ml glycerol \(\Sigma\sigma\sigma G9012) - 10 ml Tris buffer 10x pH 7.5 - 10 ml 50% sucrose \(\Sigma\sigma\sigma half-saturated solution; 5%=300mM). - 30 ml Distilled H₂O ****NaN₃ 100x \(\Sigma\sigma\sigma 5%) stock solution**** - 12,5 mg NaN₃ - 250 ml distilled H₂O ****50% Saturated Sucrose**** - 100 ml Distilled H₂O - 100 g sucrose - 0.5% NaN₃ refrigerate

Equipment

- "Kartell slide boxes \(\Sigma\sigma\sigma 50-100 slides)":<https://www.kartelllabware.com/en/products/plastilab/microscopy-and->

Procedure

****Step 1: GLASS SLIDES**** Standard $75.5 \pm 0.5 \times 25.5 \pm 0.5$ mm "microscope slides": https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Microscope_slide are required for all histopathology studies. _NB: Do not use slides with rounded smoothened corners because they tend to slip out of the scanner stage._

****Step 2: SECTIONS**** \ (Figure 1) [See figure in Figures section](#). Sections for multiplexing of 3 ± 1 μ m thickness need to be placed on positively charged slides \ (the ones used for immunohistochemistry) one section per slide, positioned toward the slide end opposite to the frosted end for label, at least 2-3 mm from the slide border. The scanning speed is maximal across the slide, thus prefer a transversal or oblique, rather than a longitudinal placement of the section. place sections on coated/charged glass slides Bake overnight in an upright position in oven 40°C or lower Dewax in Xylene \ (2 changes 10 min each) -> graded alcohol \ (99%-95%-70%-H₂O) _NB. An Hexane overnight step before the xylene has been recommended for complete paraffin extraction\ [1]: hexane is volatile and may dry the sections before entering xylene. An advantage in immunoreactivity is antigen-dependent and modest._

****Step 3: ANTIGEN RETRIEVAL**** [See figure in Figures section](#). Perform antigen retrieval with 10 mM EDTA in Tris-buffer pH 8; use 800 ml distilled water in a MWO-proof glass container, to which add 8 ml of a 100x Tris-EDTA buffer, pH 8. - Insert the slides in a radiotransparent slide holder \ (Figure 2) - Place in a household microwave oven \ (MWO), set to "high" or 850W: should boil vigorously in 8 min. - Reduce power to "low" or 300W and allow 20-30 min. of intermittent radiation to maintain boiling. _This overcomes pH dependent retrieval\ [2]_ - Cool to 50°C or below to allow antigen refolding before transferring to ****washing buffer \ (TBS-Ts)****, by checking with a kitchen thermometer. \ (Figure 2) _Take precautions: hot fluid._ - Slides can be stored in 50% glycerol-sucrose-TBS at this step \ (storage buffere) \ [3]

****Step 4: IF STAINING: Primary and Secondary Ab dilution and incubation**** [See figure in Figures section](#). Dilute all primary Ab's to 1 μ g/ml \ (or equivalent by titration) in ****Antibody diluent**** \ [3] Dilute all secondary Ab's to 5 μ g/ml \ ($\sim 1:200 - 1:300$). _NB. Fluorochrome-conjugated antibodies used in double indirect IF \ [3] have different concentration/signal curves. Alexa 488 conjugates tend not to increase signal above 5 μ g/ml, because of self-quenching; Rhodamine RedX and Alexa 647 do increase. BV480 conjugates tend to have an exponential increase of signal with increased concentration above 2-3 μ g/ml; however, anti-isotype conjugates are much brighter than species-specific ones. If using BV480, beware of A) non-specific background increase, B) spillover of BV480 signal into Autofluorescence and FITC channels._ By using unconjugated primary antibodies in indirect immunofluorescence, the following combinations are permitted, based on species- or isotype-specific secondary antibodies and a filter combination as depicted in Fig. 5: - One each of rabbit, mouse, rat and goat antibodies - One rabbit Ab plus one each of the mouse IgG1, IgG2a, IgG2b or IgG3, up to one Rb + 3 mouse Abs. _NB: anti-isotype secondary antibodies are invariably raised in goat or rabbit; use secondary abs raised in donkeys or lamas for the first combination exemplified \ (Rb, Mo, Rat, Gt)._ ****Humid chamber Incubation**** \ (Figure 3) [See figure in Figures section](#). check with a level/iPhone for perfectly horizontal placement of the chamber: this will prevent antibody solution slipping during prolonged incubations \ (e.g. O/N). Do not let the slides touch

each other. Use a closed container \(\text{Kartell}\)[4] with distilled water, Sodium Azide and a tissue to prevent floating. use a minimum of 100 μ l of antibody for a section of 1x1 cm or less and the volume multiplied accordingly for larger sections. _NB: you can recover and re-use the antibody from the slide, however the small volume of antibody and the relatively larger residual fluid on the slide after washing may alter the Ab concentration uncontrollably. This will not happen with the mailers \(\text{see below}\)._ ****Vertical 5-slide mailer Incubation**** \(\text{for high efficiency}\) \(\text{Figure 3 and 4}\) [See figure in Figures section](#). Fill a standard 5 slide vertical mailer \(\text{"Kaltex"}:\text{https://www.kaltex.it/en/histology/slides/slide-mailers-2/}, \text{"MLS"}:\text{https://www.mls.be/products/?lang=en\&category=08\&subcategory=8.1.1.9 or others}\) with 12 ml antibody solution. You are supposed to stain five slides simultaneously, so that the fluid can completely cover each section. This setup can be re-used for a total of approx. 10 rounds of staining \(\text{= 50 slides total}\)[3]; thus 12 μ g of antibody is enough for one 50-slides experiment and 1 vertical mailer.

****Procedure**** - Incubate in primary Ab overnight at room T \(\text{manual}\) or at +4C \(\text{mailers}\). _NB: overnight incubation will increase the staining efficiency [3]._ - Wash 2x in 15 min. with ****TBS-Ts**** in a coplin jar - Incubate in secondary Ab 30 min. - Wash 2x in 15 min. with TBS-Ts in a coplin jar - Incubate in negative primary Ab $\rightarrow$ double indirect staining _NB: double indirect staining will double the fluorescence yield [3]. In order to save primary antibodies, use isotype- and species- matched irrelevant negative purified Ig._ - Wash 2x in 15 min. with TBS-Ts in a coplin jar - Incubate in secondary Ab 30 min. - Wash 2x in 15 min. with TBS-Ts in a coplin jar - Stain with DAPI \(\text{2-10 nM}\) in TBS-Ts by immersing 1 min in a vertical mailer, then rinsing in TBS-Ts. If DAPI is in the mounting fluid, skip this step. - Mount slides with ****mounting fluid**** and 24x50 coverslips. Remove excess fluid from the edges, otherwise will interfere with the re-positioning of the slide on the stand. - Remove the disaccharide-containing fluid from the bottom of the slide with a distilled water-soaked pad, for smooth mechanical operations \(\text{may be performed just before step 10}\). - Affix a label containing a 2D barcode for file name reading by the instrument and with other metadata \(\text{date, experiment \#, etc.}\)[3] ****Step 5: STRIPPING**** [3, 5] - Coverslip removal by soaking in coplin jar with washing buffer or distilled water \(\text{either one, OK}\). This is one of the steps where scratching of the tissue sections may occur when re-positioning back the slide in the presence of a coverslip. Act in a continuous vertical motion, expose the whole slide, transfer to a new coplin jar with buffer if the coverslip detached, reposition if unmoved, slip gently the coverslip if partially displaced with a continuous motion. - Transfer to Tris buffer pH 7.5, in order to remove disaccharides. - Preheat vertical containers with ****stripping buffer**** to exactly 56°C in closed, shaking water-bath. _Cave: tight temperature range for effective stripping!_ _Stripping buffers contains chemicals with offensive odor; work under hood!_ - Strip for 30 min. at 56°C with shaking - Transfer to TBS-Ts - Wash at least for one hour with washing buffer with several washes in the first quarter of an hour. ****Step 6: STORAGE**** Store at any step. If slides are not used for > 3 days store @ -20°C in ****storage buffer**** Prefer storage of unstripped slides after the last staining; stripping will get rid of autofluorescence or background formed during storage.

Timing

****Step 1-2:**** Tech Lab cutting time ****Step 3:**** approx. 100 min. ****Step 4:**** 1 overnight incubation plus approx. 4 hrs. ****Step 5:**** 2 hrs. ****Step 6:**** N/A

Troubleshooting

Inadequate or failure to remove antibodies \ (stripping) may occur because of these causes: - failed temperature control during stripping - dehydration \ (may not be obvious on inspection, see the Ref Boi G. et al) - light-source induced chemical modification and protein precipitation during exposure, particularly with powerful lasers \ (see the "Science":<http://science.sciencemag.org/content/361/6401/eaar7042.long> paper) A repetition of the stripping, preceded by 1 min boiling in the AR solution may help. Errors when investing a substantial amount of reagents in the vertical mailers method may be prevented by running a less crucial set of slides first. Best to test with the MILAN IF method primary antibodies used before only in immunohistochemistry: enzymatic IHC is a non-linear, signal thresholding method quite different from the linear quantitative IF method, on which MILAN is based. And in case of errors: ****strip and repeat\!**** With this method you can do it.

Anticipated Results

You should be able to sequentially stain a single FFPE section with antibodies raised in the same species, directed against close epitopes, on the very same subcellular structure, provided you space each staining by a stripping cycle. Examples can be seen in the literature references provided.

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Figures

Fig. 1: slide setup for MILAN multiplexing

Figure 1

Slide setup for MILAN multiplexing.

Fig. 2: AR setup for MILAN multiplexing.

Figure 2

Antigen Retrieval setup for MILAN multiplexing

Fig. 3: bench setup for MILAN multiplexing

Figure 3

Bench setup for MILAN multiplexing

Fig. 4: vertical mailers setup for MILAN multiplexing. Each mailer contains four 1st Abs, 2nd Abs and isotype- and species-matched negative Abs. Note the grid to record the number of 5-slide runs each mailer has undergone. Max runs for 2nd Abs is five (2 passages each). This mailer is wrapped in aluminum foil.

Figure 4

Vertical mailers setup for MILAN multiplexing Each mailer contains four 1st Abs, 2nd Abs and isotype- and species-matched negative Abs. Note the grid to record the number of 5-slide runs each mailer has undergone. Max runs for 2nd Abs is five (2 passages each). This mailer is wrapped in aluminum foil.

Figure 5

Six-color filter combination for multiplexing The figure represents filter combinations, housed in two 6-filter wheels and three turrets, to allow six independent fluorochrome acquisitions. The reference instrument is a S60 scanner from Hamamatsu. The composite panel represents the excitation filters and fluorochrome spectra (top) and the emission filters, dichroic mirrors and fluorochrome spectra (bottom). Excitation spectra are represented by a dashed profile, emission spectra by a solid profile. The filter

profiles are represented by solid lines, the dichroic ones by a dashed line. *1*: DAPI (359/461) [exc/em]; *2*: BV480 (437/478); *3*: Alexa 488 (499/519); *4*: Rhodamine RedX (570/590); *5*: Alexa 647 (652/668). The filter combination depicted are *DAPI*: 387/11- 435/40 [exc/em], *BV480*: 438/24 - 483/32; *FITC*: 480/17 - 520/28; *TRITC*: 556/20 - 617/73; *Cy5*: 650/13 - 694/44; *AutoFluorescence (AF)*: 438/24 - 617/73. The dichroic mirrors are: FF403/497/574-Di01 (triband), 458-Di02 and FF655-Di01. These filters can be obtained by companies like Semrock or Chroma. Alexa ® dyes are a Life Technologies patent. BV480 dye is a BD Biosciences patent. The spectra images are obtained with the Searchlight Semrock web application.

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