1 **A non-invasive photoactivatable split-Cre recombinase system for genome**
2 **engineering in zebrafish.**
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14 **Short running title: Photoactivatable split-Cre recombinase in zebrafish.**
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16 **Highlights**
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18 ● zPA-Cre is a novel zebrafish transgenic optogenetic split-Cre tool
19 ● zPA-Cre allows loxP-mediated DNA recombination in various tissues and cell types
20 ● It enables light-induced DNA recombination at different developmental stages.
21 ● It allows spatio-temporal DNA recombination in a specific tissue region with high
22 resolution

49 **Abstract**
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The cyclic recombinase (Cre)/*loxP* recombination system is a powerful technique for *in vivo*

cell labeling and tracking. However, achieving high spatiotemporal precision in cell tracking

using this system is challenging due to the requirement for reliable tissue-specific promoters.

In contrast, light-inducible systems offer superior regional confinement, tunability and non-

invasiveness compared to conventional lineage tracing methods. Here, we took advantage of

the unique strengths of the zebrafish to develop an easy-to-use highly efficient, genetically

encoded, Magnets-based, light-inducible transgenic Cre/*loxP* system. Our system relies on

the reassembly of split Cre fragments driven by the affinity of the Magnets and is controlled

by the zebrafish *ubiquitin* promoter. We demonstrate that our system does not exhibit

phototoxicity or leakiness in the dark, and it enables efficient and robust Cre/*loxP*

recombination in various tissues and cell types at different developmental stages through

noninvasive illumination with blue light. Our newly developed tool is expected to open novel

opportunities for light-controlled tracking of cell fate and migration in vivo.

Keywords
Lineage tracing; Zebrafish; Optogenetics; Split-Cre recombinase; Magnets.

74   **Introduction**
75
Cell marking by genetic recombination is a powerful technique for noninvasively tracing cell

fate and migration in rapidly evolving contexts such as embryonic development[1,2]. Various

recombinases have been used in zebrafish studies[3,4], however, the Cre/*loxP* system remains

the primary method for genetic lineage tracing in this species[2]. The Cre recombinase, derived

from the bacteriophage P1, specifically targets two pairs of 34-bp sequences known as *loxP*

sites[5]. Due to its simplicity and efficiency, the Cre/*loxP* system has been widely used in

applications such as lineage tracing and genome manipulation in transgenic animals[1].

Typically, the Cre recombinase is expressed under a tissue- or cell-specific promoter and can

be combined with chemical-inducible systems such as tamoxifen to achieve temporally

controlled genetic recombination[1,6,7]. By crossing transgenic lines containing both Cre and

loxP-STOP-loxP constructs, Cre specifically activates the reporter in tissues or cells expressing

the promoter by permanently removing the STOP cassette, thereby enabling the tracing of

their progeny[1,2]. Nonetheless, these conventional Cre/*loxP* recombination approaches have

some limitations. For instance, it can be challenging to target and trace cells or tissues that

lack a specific promoter during development and/or regeneration. Furthermore, the

temporal induction of the Cre/*loxP* system using chemicals may have undesirable effects,

including cytotoxicity and cellular perturbation[8,9]. Moreover, a critical limitation of

conventional Cre/*loxP* recombination systems is their inability to selectively target specific

sub-regions of tissues or cells with similar gene expression patterns.

In contrast to conventional lineage tracing approaches, light-inducible systems offer a

significant advantage by enabling noninvasive photoactivation in deep tissues with high

spatial and temporal resolution[10,11]. Consequently, several attempts have been made to

develop optically controlled Cre systems in zebrafish, as reported in previous studies[12–16].

Despite these remarkable advancements, current light-inducible systems tested and used in

zebrafish suffer from low efficiency, leakiness in the dark, the need of prolonged exposure to

UV light resulting in cytotoxicity, the requirement of advanced microscopy setups, the

addition of exogenous chromophores, or the use of harmful chemicals such as caged

biomolecules or tamoxifen[10,12–17].

On the other hand, a highly efficient genetically encoded photoactivatable Cre recombinase

(PA-Cre) has recently been reported in mammals[18,19]. This PA-Cre is based on the split Cre

complementation and the Magnet dimerization systems[18,20]. In this new system, Cre is split

into two fragments that individually lack Cre catalytic activity, and their complementation is

driven by two photoswitches named positive Magnet (pMag) and negative Magnet

(nMag)[21,22]. The Magnet system has also been shown to be efficient in inducing light-

controlled genetic recombination *in vitro* and *in vivo* when used with Dre and Flp

recombinases in mammals[23,24]. Furthermore, it has been recently reported that the Magnets-

based photoactivatable split Gal4 system enables rapid and robust spatiotemporal gene

expression control in *Drosophila* in vivo[25]. However, to date, there are no stable transgenic

zebrafish models for optogenetic-based Cre/*loxP* recombination. Therefore, we aimed to

develop a PA-Cre system to enable light-inducible lineage tracing *in vivo*, leveraging on the

unique strengths of the zebrafish model.

In this study, we evaluated the functionality of the PA-Cre system in zebrafish. We

demonstrate that the original PA-Cre system previously used in mammalian cells[18], induces

efficient Cre/*loxP* recombination in zebrafish embryos upon simple LED-mediated blue light

illumination. We further developed and assessed the performance of the PA-Cre system

under various zebrafish-specific promoters. We illustrate that our new system exhibits no

phototoxicity or leakiness in the dark and enables efficient *loxP*-mediated DNA recombination

in vivo. Finally, we generated a new transgenic zebrafish line in which the expression of the

PA-Cre system is under the control of the zebrafish ubiquitin (*ubb*) promoter [26]. By utilizing

this *Tg(ubb:PA-Cre)* line, we show that our system allows for efficient and robust Cre/*loxP*

recombination in diverse tissues and cell types through noninvasive blue light illumination.

Collectively, our newly developed versatile tool is anticipated to pave the way for light-

controlled tracing of cell fate and migration *in vivo*, opening up new opportunities for

zebrafish research.

Results

The PA-Cre system enables *in vivo loxP*-mediated DNA recombination in zebrafish embryos.

To assess the efficacy of the PA-Cre system (Figure 1A) to induce *loxP*-mediated DNA

recombination in zebrafish, we injected the original PA-Cre construct[18] (Figure 1B) into

zebrafish eggs. The PA-Cre construct, in which expression is driven by the cytomegalovirus

(CMV) promoter[18] (Figure 1B), was injected into *Tg(-3.5ubb:loxP-lacZ-loxP*-eGFP; *cry:GFP)*

(referred to hereafter as *Tg(ubb:HULK)*[27] embryos at one-cell stage and then subjected to

global blue light illumination with from 6 hours post-fertilization (hpf) to 18 hpf (Figure 1C)

utilizing a simple low-cost LED light. It has been shown that The *Tg(ubb:HULK)* zebrafish

exhibits ubiquitous green fluorescence protein (GFP) expression only upon Cre-mediated

recombination[27]. In injected embryos, blue light illumination at 6 hpf resulted in Cre/*loxP*

recombination and generated a mosaic GFP expression in various tissues throughout the

embryo body (Figure 1D). All embryos that were injected and exposed to blue light

illumination showed mosaic GFP expression. Importantly, we observed no GFP expression in

embryos that were injected and kept in the dark(Figure 1D), indicating that the Cre-mediated

recombination is solely driven by blue light illumination and does not undergo stochastic

magnets dimerization. Fluorescence imaging showed that zebrafish embryos exposed to blue

light exhibited a 29-fold induction over embryos that were kept in the dark (Figure 1E). In

addition, we observed no photo-induced cytotoxicity upon blue light illumination, as we

found comparable rates of abnormalities between light-exposed embryos (13.3%) and non-

exposed embryos (15.2%). These results demonstrate that transient photoactivation of the

PA-Cre system in zebrafish embryos allows robust light-induced Cre/*loxP* recombination in

multiple tissues. Importantly, no background DNA recombination was detected in the

absence of illumination and no photo-induced cytotoxicity was observed.

Generation of a stable functional zPA-Cre transgenic line in Zebrafish.

Having established the functionality of the PA-Cre system is in zebrafish embryos, we tested its suitability for generating a stable transgenic line. To this end, we decided to use the zebrafish *ubb* promoter[26] in place of the CMV promoter to control the expression of the PA-Cre system. The CMV promoter has been associated with potential silencing of promoter activity *in vivo*, making it less suitable for this type of applications. In contrast, the *ubb* promoter has been shown to have consistent activity throughout zebrafish development stages and does not exhibit silencing issues[26,28]. Therefore, we created the *Tg(-3.5ubb:PA-Cre; cmlc2-EGFP)* line (referred to hereafter as zPA-Cre) in which the expression of the PA-Cre system is driven by the *ubb* promoter. Additionally, the line features *cmlc2-EGFP* as a transgenesis marker in the heart (Figure 2A).

To test whether the newly developed line is capable of inducing DNA recombination upon blue light illumination, we crossed it with the *Tg(ubb:HULK)* (Figure 2B). In double transgenic zebrafish embryos, blue light illumination from 6 hpf to 18 hpf resulted in a robust Cre/*loxP* recombination, leading to robust GFP expression in various tissues at 24 hpf (Figure 2C) and 48 hpf (Figure 2D-E). All embryos exposed to blue light illumination showed ubiquitous GFP expression, while no GFP expression was observed in embryos kept in the dark (Figure 2C-E), confirming the fidelity of the zPA-Cre line and its inducibility exclusively upon blue light illumination. Furthermore, we did not observe any photo-induced cytotoxicity, as the abnormality rate of blue light exposed embryos (10.47%) was not considerably different from that of non-exposed embryos (10.28%). In addition, fluorescence imaging demonstrated a 248.8-fold induction of GFP expression in zebrafish embryos exposed to blue light compared to those kept in the dark (Figure 2F). Altogether, these findings demonstrate the robust and

efficient induction of DNA recombination *in vivo* upon blue light illumination by the zPA-Cre

line.

zPA-Cre is effective in diverse cell types.

To assess the versatility of the zPA-Cre system, we investigated its capacity to induce DNA

recombination in various Cre-responsive transgenic zebrafish lines. We crossed the zPA-Cre

line with distinct switch lines, in which specific cell types express DsRed under steady-state

conditions and switch to GFP expression upon activation of Cre. These included the

macrophage-specific *Tg(mpeg1:LoxP-DsRedx-LoxP-GFP-NTR)*[29] (Figure 3A), or the

erythrocyte-specific *Tg(α/β$_{a2}$-globin:loxP-DsRedx-loxP-GFP)*[30] line (Figure 3D) or the

lymphocyte-specific Tg(lck:loxP-DsRedx-loxP-GFP)[30,31] line (Figure 3G). In double transgenic

zebrafish embryos, exposure to blue light illumination from 6 hpf to 18 hpf resulted in

Cre/*loxP*, leading to robust GFP expression at 48 hpf in macrophages (Figure 3B) and in

erythrocytes (Figure 3E), and at 120 hpf in thymocytes (Figure 3H). To evaluate the efficiency

of the zPA-Cre system, we quantified the proportion of switched GFP-positive macrophages,

erythrocytes and thymocytes in the *Tg(mpeg1:LoxP-DsRedx-LoxP-GFP-NTR)* line, the

Tg(α/β$_{a2}$-globin:loxP-DsRedx-loxP-GFP) line and the *Tg(lck:loxP-DsRedx-loxP-GFP)* line,

respectively. We found that ~95% of macrophages (Figure 3C), ~90% of erythrocytes (Figure

3F) and ~82% of thymocytes in the thymus (Figure 3I) exhibited GFP expression, indicating the

high efficiency of our labelling system.

In addition, we tested the functionality of the PA-Cre system under the *kdrl* promoter[32,33],

which exhibits expression during gastrulation, in the lateral plate mesoderm, and in

endothelial cells[33–35]. To examine the potential of the *kdrl*-PA-Cre system for erythrocyte

labeling, we injected a *kdrl*-PA-Cre construct into *Tg(α/β$_{a2}$-globin:loxP-DsRedx-loxP-GFP)*

embryos at one-cell stage, as erythrocytes are known to be derived from the lateral plate

mesoderm[36–39]. Following blue light illumination from 6 hpf to 18 hpf in injected embryos,

GFP expression was observed in erythrocytes at 24 hpf, indicating successful Cre/loxP

recombination. Conversely, non-exposed embryos did not exhibit GFP expression in

erythrocytes (supplemental Figure 1). These results indicate that the zPA-cre system enables

DNA recombination in different cell types, and that the PA-Cre system expression can be

driven by distinct promoters. Collectively, our data establish the zPA-Cre system as a versatile

tool for DNA recombination in zebrafish.

zPA-Cre enables light-inducible Cre/*loxP* recombination at different developmental time
points and at a specific region of interest.
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We then evaluated the efficiency of our system in comparison to widely used conventional

non-photoactivatable Cre systems. To this end, we utilized the *Tg(ubb:creERT2)* line, in which

Cre is ubiquitously expressed but its activity is induced only by incubation with tamoxifen,

that allows Cre to enter to the nucleus. We found that *Tg(zPA-Cre; ubb:HULK)* zebrafish

embryos exposed to blue light overnight at 6 hpf exhibited a 23.2-fold induction compared to

Tg(ubb:creERT2[26]*; ubb:HULK)* embryos treated with 4-OH-tamoxifen (4-OHT) (Figure 4A, C),

indicating that our system exhibits superior induction efficiency compared to other

conventional inducible tools.

The use of light-inducible tools in zebrafish beyond the embryonic stages can be challenging

due to limited light penetration in larval tissues. Therefore, we assessed the efficiency of DNA

recombination using the zPA-Cre system at different developmental time points. To this end,

we exposed double transgenic *Tg(zPA-Cre; ubb:HULK)* fish to blue light overnight at 24 hpf,

48 hpf, and 72 hpf, and imaged them at 120 hpf (Figure 4B). We observed GFP expression in

all embryos or larvae exposed to blue light, although at lower levels compared to fish exposed

to blue light at 6 hpf. Of note, control siblings that were kept in the dark did not show GFP

expression (Figure 4B). Moreover, illuminating 6 hpf embryos with blue light for only 2 hours

resulted in robust GFP expression at 120 hpf. These findings demonstrate that while the

highest efficiency is achieved during early developmental stages, our system remains

effective at later developmental stages.

To test the capability of the zPA-Cre system to drive DNA recombination in specific tissue

regions, we used the *Tg(zPA-Cre; ubb:HULK)* embryos and performed photoactivation in

targeted regions of interest at 4 hpf (Figure 4D) or at 48 hpf (Figure 4E) making use of

conventional confocal microscopy. Photoactivation with blue light using a 488 nm laser at

100% laser power (2 mW/mm2) in a specific region (a 25 μm diameter circle) for 5 minutes at

4 hpf resulted in mosaic GFP expression in various tissues later at 19 hpf (Figure 4D). In

contrast, photoactivation of a 25 μm diameter circle within a single skeletal muscle at 48 hpf

using the same laser for 5 minutes resulted in GFP expression in the activated region with

little impact on surrounding tissues (Figure 4E).

Lastly, we utilized the *Tg(zPA-Cre)* line in combination with the *Tg(α/β$_{a2}$-globin:loxP-DsRedx-

loxP-GFP)* line to test if *loxp*-mediated DNA recombination could be induced in a small number

of few erythrocytes present in the posterior blood island (PBI), a transient hematopoietic

tissue in zebrafish. Photoactivation with blue light using a 488 nm laser at 100% laser power

(2 mW/mm2) in few erythrocytes in the PBI (with a 25 μm diameter circle) for 5 minutes at

22 hpf resulted in the presence of GFP[+] erythrocytes in the caudal hematopoietic tissue (CHT),

the fetal liver counterpart in zebrafish[9] (Figure 4F), as well as in the circulation (supplemental

video) at 48 hpf. In conclusion, these experiments demonstrate that the zPA-Cre system

enables efficient and precise spatial and temporal control of *loxP*-mediated DNA

recombination in zebrafish embryos with high resolution.

Discussion

Optogenetic tools play a crucial role in studying development and tissue regeneration in

various organisms, offering precise spatial and temporal resolution. Numerous light-inducible

tools for Cre/*loxP* recombination have been developed utilizing UV light, blue light, or red

light. Consequently, several attempts have been made to develop optically controlled Cre

systems in zebrafish, as reported in previous studies[12–16]. Despite significant advances,

current light-inducible systems tested in zebrafish have been performed in transient, and

suffer from low efficiency, leakiness, require long light exposure resulting in cytotoxicity,

require exogenous chromophores or need harmful chemicals as caged biomolecules or

tamoxifen [10,12–17].

Here, we demonstrated the successful development of a novel stable optogenetic zebrafish

line in which the PA-Cre system is controlled by the zebrafish ubiquitin promoter[26]. By utilizing

the *Tg(ubb:PA-Cre)* line, we provide evidence that our system allows for efficient and robust

Cre/*loxP* recombination in various tissues and cell types through noninvasive blue light

illumination .

As a general rule, it is crucial for a light-inducible Cre recombinase to maintain low levels of

background recombination[10]. In this regard, we show that the *Tg(ubb:PA-Cre)* line exhibits no

background recombination in the absence of light stimulation, while displaying a highly

inducible efficiency of DNA recombination upon exposure to blue light. Furthermore, we

showcase the versatility of our system by demonstrating its ability to induce recombination

at different developmental stages and achieve spatial control within specific regions upon

blue light illumination. These distinctive advantages offered by the *Tg(ubb:PA-Cre)* line pave

the way for *in vivo* zebrafish studies during development with high spatiotemporal resolution.

As shown in this study, the newly generated *Tg(ubb:PA-Cre)* line enables precise spatial and

temporal control of Cre/*loxP* recombination through blue light illumination. This versatile

DNA recombination system holds potential for applications such as fate mapping or the

induction of carcinogenesis in specific cell types upon illumination. Moreover, the utilization

of the PA-Cre system in zebrafish reveals a striking simplicity and efficiency, thus expanding

the repertoire of available genetic manipulation methods.

Our newly developed versatile tool is expected to pave the way for light-controlled DNA

recombination *in vivo* in cells or tissues that may not have a specific promoter, thereby

facilitating studies on lineage tracing, development, and disease. Furthermore, as we

generated a stable transgenic line in which the PA-Cre system is driven by the *ubb* promoter,

it holds a particular promise for investigating the utility of our tool in adult zebrafish. Exploring

the performance and efficiency of the PA-Cre system under different promoters in zebrafish

is also an enticing avenue to achieve more precise cell-specific DNA recombination. Lastly,

with the development of the PA-Dre[23] and PA-Flp[24] systems, it will be become feasible to build

additional optogenetic tools in zebrafish and perform intersectional genetics involving more

than one recombinase.

Taken together, our findings indicate that the *Tg(ubb:PA-Cre)* line is an efficient optogenetic

tool for gene manipulation with greatly expandable applications in developmental biology

research.

Materials availability

Materials and Data availability

All reagents and data sets generated during the current study are available from the
corresponding authors upon request.

Materials and Methods

Zebrafish. Embryonic, larval and adult zebrafish (*Danio rerio*) were maintained at 28°C on a
14-hour light/10-hour dark cycle. The collected embryos were raised in fish water containing
0.01% methylene blue to prevent fungal growth. All fish are housed in the fish facility of our
laboratory, which was built according to the local animal welfare standards. All animal
procedures were performed in accordance with French and European Union animal welfare
guidelines and were approved by the ethic committee of the Curie Institute (Paris, France).
328
329   **Transgenic lines.** The following lines of the AB stain were used*: Tg(ubb:HULK)*[27]*,
330   Tg(mpeg1:LoxP-DsRedx-LoxP-GFP-NTR)*[29]*,Tg(globin:loxP-DsRedx-loxP-GFP)*[30]*,
331   Tg(ubb:CreERT2; cmlc2-GFP)*[26] and *Tg(lck:loxP-DsRedx-loxP-GFP)*[30]*.
332
Plasmids. The original PA-Cre construct driven by the CMV promoter was purchased from
Addgene (Addgene no. 122960). The PA-Cre coding sequence was synthesized by Genescript
and listed in the supplementary note. The (*-3.5ubb:PA-Cre; cmlc2-EGFP)* constructs were
generated by inserting 3.5 kb ubi promoter fragment, together with the coding sequence of
PA-Cre, via Gibson assembly into pTol2 vector that carries cmlc2-EGFP as a transgenesis
marker. To generate the *kdrl:PA-Cre* constructs, the *kdrl* promoter and the coding sequence
of PA-Cre were cloned via Gibson assembly into the pTol2 vector.
340
341   **Zebrafish embryo microinjection.** The *CMV:PA-Cre* and *kdrl:PA-Cre* DNA constructs (25 ng/μl)
342   were injected into zebrafish embryos at the one cell stage using pressure-controlled
343   microinjector and a micromanipulator. After injection, the embryos were cultured in E3
344   embryo medium with methylene blue in the dark at 28.5°C.
345
346   **Generation of transgenic lines.** The *-3.5ubb:PA-Cre;cmlc2-EGFP* constructs (25 ng/μl) were
347   then co-injected with mRNA transposase (50 ng/μl) into 1-cell stage WT embryos[40] and the
348   resulting embryos were grown to adulthood for stable line screening.
349
350   **Photoactivation with global blue light.** Global light induction was performed using a MARS
351   AQUA-YWT-165W LED aquarium hood. 6 hpf embryos were illuminated with constant blue
352   light for 12 h. To ensure all cells were exposed, embryos were periodically swirled during

irradiation. In experiments presented in Figure 4, embryos and larvae at each indicated developmental stage were illuminated with constant blue light overnight. Dark controls were placed in a lightproof box within the same 28.5°C incubator as the light-treated samples.

Regional activation. The blue-light activation was performed on a Zeiss LSM780 confocal microscope. The desired region of the embryo was focused under a 25X lens (Zeiss Plan-Apochromat 25×, NA = 0.8 WD = 0.55), with the background fluorescence signal excited by a 405 nm laser. The desired region was selected under the bleach mode in ZEN software. A 2 mW 488 nm laser was used for activation the region for 5 minutes at 100% laser power. After activation, the embryos were incubated in dark at 28.5°C and then examined at indicated developmental stages.

Fluorescence Microscopy. Zebrafish embryos, larvae and adults were anesthetized with 0.01% tricaine (A5040, Sigma) and mounted in 2.5% methylcellulose in 35-mm imaging dishes (MatTek) as described previously[41]. Fluorescent imaging was performed with either Zeiss Axio Zoom V.16 upright microscope with an AxioCam HRm Zeiss camera and Zeiss Zen 3.3 software or with Leica thunder imaging system with Leica LAS-X software. Fluorescence was detected with mCherry, Texas Red (for dsRed labelled cells), and green fluorescent protein (GFP) filters.

Image Analysis. All images were analyzed using FIJI software [42].

Quantification and statistical analysis. Statistical analyses were performed by the GraphPad Prism software (Prism 9). All experiments with only two groups and one dependent variable were compared using an unpaired t-test with Welch's correction. Statistical data show mean ± s.e.m. Each dot plot value represents an independent embryo, and every experiment was conducted three times independently. The corrected total cell fluorescence (CTCF) was calculated using the formula 'Integrated density whole – (area whole embryo x mean fluorescence background)'. This formula is loosely based on a method described for calculating cell-fluorescence [43]. To calculate the CTCF percentage for DsRed+ cells, the CTCF value of DsRed was divided by the total summation of CTCF values for both DsRed and GFP in each larvae. The same was done for calculating CTCF percentage for GFP+ cells. For fluorescence intensity quantification, the same parameters (excitation/emission, gain for detectors, lasers intensity) were applied for images and fluorescence intensity was measured using FIJI.

Acknowledgments

The authors would like to acknowledge the Cell and Tissue Imaging Platform – PICT-IBiSA (member of France–Bioimaging – ANR-10-INBS-04) of the U934/UMR3215 of Institut Curie for help with light microscopy, in particular to Olivier Leroy for his help for achieving region-specific photoactivation. We also thank the members of the animal facility of Institut Curie for zebrafish care. We also thank Yohanns Bellaiche and all the members of the Hernandez lab for thoughtful and valuable discussions. We are grateful to Zilong Wen for providing all the immune and blood lineage switch lines used in this study. We are also thankful to Filipo Del Bene for providing the Hulk line. This work was supported by the Institut Curie, INSERM, CNRS, the Ville de Paris emergence program (2020 DAE 78), FRM amorçage

399 (AJE201905008718), ATIP-Avenir starting grant R21045DS, ERC-StG Cytok-Gut 101041422,
400 and the Laboratoire d'Excellence (Labex) DEEP (ANR-11- LBX-0044, ANR-10-IDEX- 0001-02
401 PSL). R.E. was supported by the Springboard postdoctoral fellowship form Institut Curie and
402 Labex DEEP.

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Author contribution

406 Conceptualization: R.E and P.P.H.; Methodology and data collection: R.E., A.M., P.D. and G.G.;
407 Writing - Original Draft: R.E.; Writing - Review & Editing: R.E. and P.P.H.; Funding Acquisition:
408 P.P.H.
409

Conflict of Interest

411 The authors declare no competing interests.
412

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515
516
517

A

B PA-Cre

C

Hulk *(-3.5ubb:loxP-lacZ-loxP-eGFP;cry:GFP)*

D

Injected

24 hpf

E

Figure 1: PA-Cre mediated genetic recombination in zebrafish embryos.

(A) Schematic representation of the optogenetic PA-Cre system. CreN and CreC are respectively fused to nMagnet and pMagnet tandems. These fusions are monomers in the dark state (inactive PA-Cre). Upon blue light photoactivation, dimerization of nMag-pMag leads to complementation of CreN-CreC and thus induction of genetic recombination and activation of gene expression (active PA-Cre). nMag, negative Magnet; pMag, positive Magnet; CreN and CreC: two pairs of split Cre fragments.

(B) Schematic representation of the PA-Cre genetic construct. The PA-Cre system is driven by the CMV promoter. P, promoter; nMag, negative Magnet; pMag, positive Magnet; NLS, nuclear localization signal; CreN59, split Cre fragment (residues 19–59); CreC60, split Cre fragment (residues 60–343); P2A, *2A self-cleaving peptides*.

(C) Schematic representation strategy used to induce genetic recombination in zebrafish embryos. *Tg (ubb:Hulk)* embryos were injected at one cell stage with PA-Cre construct, photoactivated with blue light at 6 hpf for 12 hours and then imaged at the desired developmental stage.

(D) Representative fluorescent images at 24 hpf of injected *Tg(ubb:Hulk)* embryos kept in dark (left) or exposed to blue light illumination at 6 hpf for 12 hours (right). GFP signal are shown in various tissues. Scale bar, 100 µm.

(E) Quantification of fluorescence intensity at 48 hpf of embryos injected with PA-Cre construct and kept in dark (n=5) or exposed to blue light illumination at 6 hpf for 12 hours (n=5). 29x represents the fold induction of the PA-cre system. Mean ± SEM of the fluorescence intensity is shown. Unpaired t-test with Welch's correction was used for this analysis. **$p \leq 0.01$. A.U., Arbitrary Unit.

Figure 2: The sable transgenic line *Tg(ubb:PA-Cre)* enables light-induced genetic recombination in zebrafish embryos.

(A) Schematic representation of the zebrafish PA-Cre genetic construct (zPA-Cre). The zPA-Cre system is driven by the *ubb* promoter. The green heart is used as a transgenesis marker *(cmlc2:GFP)*. P, promoter; nMag, negative Magnet; pMag, positive Magnet; NLS, nuclear localization signal; CreN59, split Cre fragment (residues 19–59); CreC60, split Cre fragment (residues 60–343); P2A, 2A self-cleaving peptides; cmlc2, cardiac myosin light chain 2.

(B) Schematic representation strategy used to induce genetic recombination in zebrafish embryos. The stable transgenic line *Tg(ubb:PA-Cre)* was crossed to *Tg (ubb:Hulk)*. The double transgenic embryos *Tg (ubb:PA-Cre; ubb:Hulk)* were photoactivated with blue light at 6 hpf for 12 hours and then imaged at the desired developmental stage.

(C) Representative fluorescent images at 24 hpf of *Tg (ubb:PA-Cre; ubb:Hulk)* embryos kept in dark (left) or exposed to blue light illumination at 6 hpf for 12 hours (right). Scale bar, 100 µm.

(D) Representative fluorescent images at 48 hpf of *Tg (ubb:PA-Cre; ubb:Hulk)* embryos kept in dark (left) or exposed to blue light illumination (right) at 6 hpf for 12 hours. Scale bar, 100 µm.

(E) Representative fluorescent images at 48 hpf of a group of *Tg (ubb:PA-Cre; Hulk)* embryos kept in dark (left) or exposed to blue light illumination at 6 hpf for 12 hours (right). Scale bar, 100 µm.

(F) Quantification of fluorescence intensity at 48 hpf of *Tg (ubb:PA-Cre; ubb:Hulk)* embryos kept in dark (n=10) or exposed to blue light illumination at 6 hpf for 12 hours (n=12). 248.8x represents the fold induction of the zPA-Cre system. Mean ± SEM of the fluorescence intensity is shown. Unpaired t-test with Welch's correction was used for this analysis. ****$p \leq 0.0001$. A.U., Arbitrary Unit.

Figure 3: *Tg(ubb:PA-Cre)* **enables light-induced genetic recombination with different Cre reporter zebrafish transgenic lines.**

(A) The stable transgenic line *Tg(ubb:PA-Cre)* was crossed to *Tg(mpeg1:LoxP-DsRedx-LoxP-GFP-NTR)*. The double transgenic embryos *Tg(ubb:PA-Cre; mpeg1:Switch)* were photoactivated with blue light at 6 hpf for 12 hours and then imaged at the desired developmental stage.

(B) Representative fluorescent images at 48 hpf of *Tg (ubb:PA-Cre; mpeg1:Switch)* embryos kept in dark (left) or exposed to blue light illumination at 6 hpf for 12 hours (right). Scale bar, 100 µm.

(C) Quantification of macrophage fluorescence intensity was measured at 48 hpf in photoactivated *Tg (ubb:PA-Cre; mpeg1:Switch)* embryos (n=9). Mean ± SEM of the DsRed$^+$ and GFP$^+$ corrected total cell fluorescence (CTCF) percentage is shown. Unpaired t-test with Welch's correction was used for this analysis. ****$p \leq 0.0001$.

(D) The stable transgenic line *Tg(ubb:PA-Cre)* was crossed to *Tg (α/β$_{a2}$-globin:loxP-DsRedx-loxP-GFP)*. The double transgenic embryos *Tg(ubb:PA-Cre; globin:Switch)* were photoactivated with blue light at 6 hpf for 12 hours and then imaged at the desired developmental stage.

(E) Representative fluorescent images at 48 hpf of *Tg (ubb:PA-Cre; globin:Switch)* embryos kept in dark (left) or exposed to blue light illumination at 6 hpf for 12 hours (right). Scale bar, 100 µm.

(F) Quantification of erythrocyte fluorescence intensity was measured at 48 hpf in photoactivated *Tg (ubb:PA-Cre; globin:Switch)* embryos (n=14). Mean ± SEM of the DsRed$^+$ and GFP$^+$ corrected total cell fluorescence (CTCF) percentage is shown. Unpaired t-test with Welch's correction was used for this analysis. ****$p \leq 0.0001$.

(G) The stable transgenic line *Tg(ubb:PA-Cre)* was crossed to *Tg (lck:loxP-DsRedx-loxP-GFP)*. The double transgenic embryos *Tg (ubb:PA-Cre; lck:Switch)* were photoactivated with blue light at 6 hpf for 12 hours and then imaged at the desired developmental stage.

(H) Representative fluorescent images at 120 hpf of *Tg (ubb:PA-Cre; lck:Switch)* embryos kept in dark (left) or exposed to blue light illumination at 6 hpf for 12 hours (right). White dashes mark the thymus. Scale bar, 100 µm.

(I) Quantification of thymocyte fluorescence intensity was measured at 120 hpf in photoactivated *Tg (ubb:PA-Cre; lck:Switch)* embryos (n=18). Mean ± SEM of the DsRed$^+$ and GFP$^+$ corrected total cell fluorescence (CTCF) percentage is shown. Unpaired t-test with Welch's correction was used for this analysis. ****$p \leq 0.0001$.

Figure 4: *Tg(ubb:PA-Cre)* enables light-induced spatial and temporal genetic recombination.

(A) Representative fluorescent images at 120 hpf of 4-OHT-induced *Tg (ubb:creERT2; ubb:Hulk)* larvae or *Tg (ubb:PA-Cre; ubb:Hulk)* larvae kept in dark or exposed to blue light illumination at 6 hpf overnight (left panel). Scale bar, 100 µm. Schematic representation strategy used to induce genetic recombination in zebrafish *Tg (ubb:creERT2; ubb:Hulk)* or *Tg (ubb:PA-Cre; ubb:Hulk)* larvae (right panel).

(B) Representative fluorescent images at 120 hpf of *Tg (ubb:PA-Cre; ubb:Hulk)* larvae exposed to blue light illumination at 24 hpf over-night, at 48 hpf over-night, at 72 hpf over-night and at 6 hpf for 2 hours (left panel). Scale bar, 100 µm. Schematic representation strategy used to induce genetic recombination in zebrafish *Tg (ubb:PA-Cre; ubb:Hulk)* larvae at different developmental stages (right panel).

(C) Quantification of fluorescence intensity at 120 hpf of 4-OHT-induced *Tg (ubb:creERT2; ubb:Hulk)* (n=10), *Tg (ubb:PA-Cre; ubb:Hulk)* larvae kept in dark (n=6) or exposed to blue light illumination at 6 hpf over-night (n=13). 23.2x and 295.7 x represent the fold induction comparison between the different groups. Mean ± SEM of the fluorescence intensity is shown. Unpaired t-test with Welch's correction was used for this analysis. ****$p \leq$ 0.0001. A.U., Arbitrary Unit.

(D) Schematic representation strategy used to induce local photoactivation with blue-light laser at 4 hpf. A 25um diameter circle were targeted by a 488 nm laser for 5 mins. Representative fluorescent images of *Tg(ubb:PA-Cre; ubb:Hulk)* embryo kept in dark (left, n=2) or exposed to blue light laser (right, n=3) at 19 hpf. Scale bar, 100 µm.

(E) Schematic representation strategy used to induce local photoactivation within a single skeletal muscle using blue-light laser at 48 hpf. A 25um diameter circle within a single skeletal muscle were targeted by a 488 nm laser for 5 mins (n=6). Representative fluorescent images of *Tg(ubb:PA-Cre; ubb:Hulk)* showing GFP[+] skeletal muscle at 72 hpf. Scale bar, 100 µm.

(F) Schematic representation strategy used to induce local photoactivation with blue-light laser at 22 hpf. Few cells in the PBI (a 25um diameter circle) were targeted by a 488 nm laser for 5 mins (n=6). Representative fluorescent image of *Tg(ubb:PA-Cre; globin:Switch)* embryo showing GFP[+] erythrocytes in the CHT at 48 hpf. Scale bar, 100 µm.

Injected

24 hpf

Supp. Figure

Representative fluorescent images at 24 hpf of *Tg(globin:Switch)* embryos injected with the *kdrl*-PA-Cre construct at the one-cell stage and kept in dark (left) or exposed to blue light illumination at 6 hpf for 12 hours (right). Scale bar, 100 µm.

48 hpf

Supp. Videos

Real-time imaging in *Tg(ubb:PA-Cre; globin:Switch)* at 48hpf. A 22 hpf embryo was used to induce local photoactivation by a 488 nm laser for 5 mins within a 25µm diameter circle in the posterior blood island (PBI). Lateral view; anterior to the left and dorsal to the top. Scale bar, 100 µm.

Supplementary Note. Nucleic acid sequences of PA-Cre used in the this study.

accacc**atg**gccacctctgatgaagtcaggaagaacctgatggacatgttcagggacaggcaggccttctctgaacacacctggaagatgctcctgtctgtgtgcagatc
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tgaacattgtgatgaactacatcagaaacctggactctgagactggggccatggtgaggctgctcgaagatggggac**taa**