

Background on Watermarking

The internet as a carrier of digital media changed how we share music, books, video and other media. The integration of digital watermarks is becoming more and more popular to fight the fast-paced spaces opened to share pirated material. The research on watermarks is currently being shaped to strengthen watermarks, embedding robustness with respect to compression, image-processing operations, and cryptographic attacks (Shih, 2017). We now understand watermarks as being both digital and physical, but they are not new phenomena and it is relevant to understand where they come from.

The art of papermaking has its roots in China in the 1st Century. The process was first documented in China in 105 A.D. and ascribed to Cai Lun (Basbanes, 2014). Watermarks only appear later in 1282. The process of watermarking happens while making a sheet of paper whilst the paper is still wet. Watermarks are a result of changing the thickness of a certain part of the paper creating a highlighted area and its shadow. We trace the beginning of watermarks in the town of Fabriano (Hunter, 1987). It is important to acknowledge the historical importance of the Italian city of Fabriano. From the name “Fabriano”, in Latin “faber > Făbrīcius”, meaning “craftsman, artificer, maker” (Latin Dictionary and Grammar Resources - Latdict, n.d.). The practical skills in forging metal and shaping wire were key to building the frames used to remove excess water, gather the pulp and to start forming the first sheets of paper.

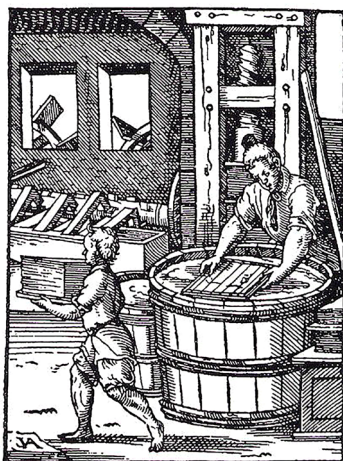


Figure 01
Illustration of paper mill by Jost Amman. Frankfurt, 1568

Watermarks analogue Intention

The history of watermarks is still relatively obscure. We are not able to fully trace back their ancient significance. A few different theories have been discussed on what was the actual purpose and use of these venerable watermarks. One that I came across with was to help with the production of the sheets of paper. Using them as a way of identifying the size of the frames and the sheets of paper produced by these. (Hunter, 1987) Another hypothesis is that the craftsmen that were working in the production of the paper were illiterate. Watermarks were then a strategy of appealing with pictures or symbols. This way to communicate an idea would lead to a smaller chance of creating misunderstandings. The first applications of watermarks compel these possibilities, but it is also possible that in parallel these may be an artistic production of the papermakers. These can also be no more than a fashionable imprint left by the artists making the frames, as a way to identify themselves, creating then an aesthetic enhancement or a signature of quality. (Watkins, 1990)

Watermarks are now seen as a way to establish provenance to manufacturers of papers, paper mills and manuscripts. These are also able to provide evidence about the movement of paper across Europe, Africa and the Middle East. We now comprehend how the use of watermarks was a key factor in the recognition of paper quality contributing to the increasing desire of specific papers. We can not establish the provenance of a book immediately to a specific place only based on the watermarks because of the commercial trades of paper. While an Italian watermark may be found in a particular paper, this would only set provenance to where the paper was manufactured and not its afterlife. Watermarks embody graphics such as animals, plants and sacramental imagery but also were representations of geographical territories and in general representations of Western culture. In Umbria, Italy, for example, the Benedictine monasteries endorsed the 3-hilled mount topped with a cross as their symbol. Developed by the French and Venetians we identify watermarks imagery of the tre lune/three crescent moons. These strategies were adopted because of Muslims in the Ottoman market. They were expected to choose in favour of papers with these kinds of imagery rather than a Christian cross or other similar motifs. (makingmanuscriptsblog, 2017)

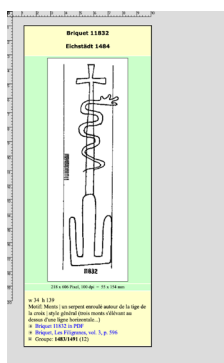


Figure 02
Western Watermark imagery. 3 Mountain Hill, Snake and Cross. Eichstätt, 1484

Connecting watermarks and library stamps

One can create a strong link between watermarks and the introduction of library stamps. Both creating a body of evidence when trying to establish connections in a collection. Library stamps are also perceived as an imprint left, visible and sometimes glued. Able to question ownership and acquisition. In libraries, books were stamped to mark ownership of the book. The relation was created between the physical medium and the library adding traces of provenance to the collection. Library stamps would not be relate to the readers of a book nor they were intended to do so. These connections would happen connecting circumstance and date of acquisition, and creating relations in the library itself.

Though library stamps are helpful when trying to determine the time frame and history of an item in a collection, the process of adding the stamps is not necessarily performed when a book enters a collection, this can happen later on. Unlike watermarks where it is unlikely that the act of tempering the paper fibres doesn't happen in simultaneous to when a paper sheet is made, stamps were commonly applied later from the date of an item acquisition. This lead to mistakes that are now commonly recognized. Along with stamps, to build a body of evidence for determining both the circumstance and date of acquisition clues may be found on bindings, bookplates or inscriptions. (Duffy, 2013)



Figure 03
Left: Oval hand stamp for manuscripts with the words *BRITISH LIBRARY*.
Centre: India Office hand stamp for non-small 'claim material' items. These items were treated as part of the British Library collection.
Right: Library stamp from previous Oriental and India Office Collections. Use of this stamp ceased on 1 September 2005

Watermarks got more important with the introduction of paper currency. One of the big shifts I identify is when they are first applied to a banknote paper in England, by a papermaker named Rice Watkins in 1697 (Mockford, 2014). Watermarks were added as a way to deter counterfeits, and making the act of forging more difficult, enabling easier targeting to the ones who were doing it. In England in 1773, the death penalty was extended to those who would create watermarks with the name of the Bank of England.

Just as in paper money, watermarks are now used to establish authenticity and their digital implementation, started to get more popular. Emil Hembrooke patented the first digital watermark, "Identification of sound and like signals", US Patent 3,004,104 Filed 1954, Issued 1961. In the US patent, we can read: "The present invention makes possible the identification of the origin of a musical presentation and thereby constitutes an effective means of preventing such piracy" (J. Cox and L. Miller, 2002).

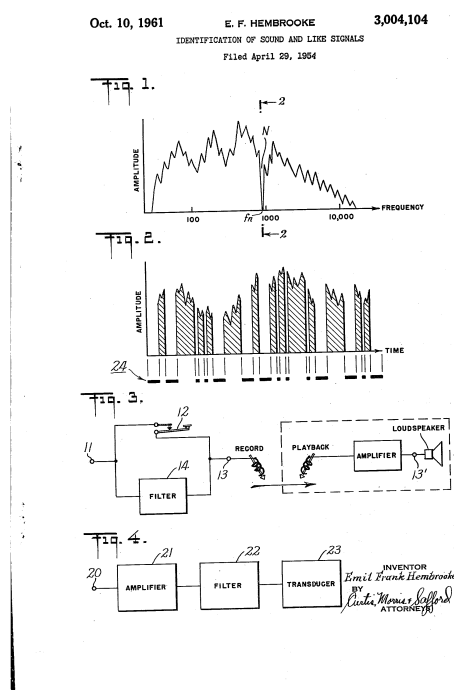


Figure 04
Identification of sound and like signals Patent <https://patents.google.com/patent/US3004104>

In the 1990's the interest in watermarks increased drastically. Currently one can find them in various forms of copyrighted watermarks material. Nowadays, as most information and data are stored in digital formats and not in physical ones, being able to provide legitimacy and to prove authenticity is progressively representing a more important task. (Shih, 2017) Digital watermarks are mostly known as being visual. The normalization of their use in photographs, on video stored on DVDs is a reality by now. In trial software, these also appear often. Instead of restricting the use of software, what happens is when we are exporting our work watermarks are appended to them. Personally, I read these action almost as an arrogant way of advertisement and capitalizing on the users. We are held responsible for using software and at the same time we are targeted as a commodity. It might be read as a message where we are made aware that money will be made from their users in any way possible.

Another big shift on the use of watermarks happens with their appropriation in the publishing market. Watermarks are now used to create a body of evidence on users, adding traces that relate to the subject. More precisely with geolocation, IP addresses, mac addresses, email addresses, etc. A good example of this is phenomena is Verso Books publisher. They sell their books in an online ebook store. In this store, Verso books appends a new page in the begging of each book with the downloaders name and his' or her's email address, it also appends a watermark with the IP address of the downloader in the footer of the first page of every chapter.

During my research, I came across with an article about different forms of DRM. In this article, the writer starts by giving a disclaimer where he starts by portraying himself as "a supporter of milder types of DRM like digital watermarks". What caught my attention was how the mode of address changed when he started to identify all the unnecessary strategies implemented by Verso Books in their ebooks. More important we can understand that their watermarks didn't pass unnoticed to the store users. A source interviewed states: "Personally, I felt like I was constantly being sent a stalker's note saying, 'I know where you live.' It put me off reading the books entirely." (Hoffelder, 2014) The way we are leaving imprints that identify us as downloaders and printers is alarming. Verso Books are calling out their users as pirates and companies, such as BooXtream are making this possible, using us as an asset to capitalize on.

During my research, I came across the company that develops the watermarks to Verso Books. This is a Dutch DRM company called "BooXtream®". It is worrying how they portray themselves, the first quality that they promote on their DRM methods is traceability. We can read in a bold font: "A publication that has been BooXtreamed can be traced back to the shop and even to the individual customer." (BooXtream, n.d.) Watermarks are now perceived as something to fear. And used to make us feel uncomfortable. Surveillance might be quickly spotted as it commonly happens with CCTV because we can establish a physical connection with it, we can see it, we can choose a different path to walk from it or even try to disguise ourselves. We were able to accept that digital surveillance is a reality but we didn't feel a close connection to it yet. I consider that digital watermarks are a vehicle establishing this direct connection. It is still difficult though to predict what will be the impact of these techniques if users are afraid to share an ebook that they bought and paid for.

Surveillance in publishing not only manifests itself in visible ways. Another article that I came across was from the Electronic Frontier Foundation raising awareness to the Machine Identification Code. First published by the PC World as "Government Uses Color Laser Printer Technology to Track Documents" in 2004, this code is formed by a pattern of dots that are appended to every printed page. It is added by the printer software in the process of printing. These are almost imperceptible yellow dots carrying information as the date of print, time and the serial number of the machine. Similar technology is used when you try to scan a banknote. A sequence of yellow dots in the printed in the paper triggers the printer to add a striped pattern on the top of the copy, preventing you from copying it.

I delved into trying to understand if they were still in use and I had to be able to prove their existence for myself. I started by using methods to identify them, such as UV lights, different printers, from HP to Canon and from Inkjet to Lasers printers. Almost when I was giving up, disappointed with all the time invested in this, I started to reverse engineer this machine identification code and implementing my own. While creating messages, printed in a very small font size and scanning these printed pages, I was starting to understand better how to make them visible. With

a new scanner with a resolution of 1200 dpi and after inverting the colours, they suddenly appear. Just as by magic, a mesh of my messages and the tracking dots started to emerge. In the end, I was able to identify them in all the printers provided by the school in the Blaak building. It is worrying that this hidden code is infiltrated in documents and can be seen by anyone. They are not only used in case you are a suspect of a crime, but they are also available for anyone at all times. Being able to come across them made me rethink what did it mean to publish in print, how safe is it, and how it might affect the ones who depend on printed forms of publishing.

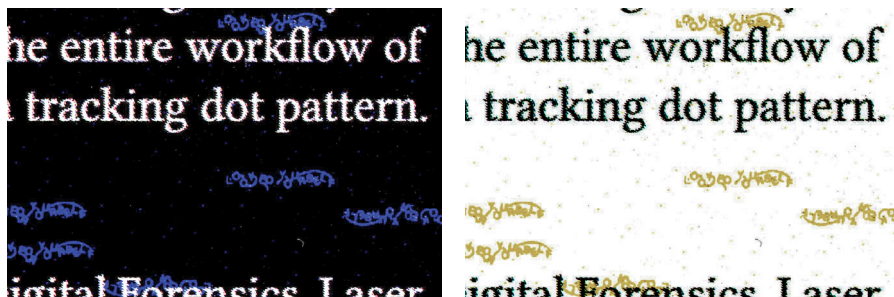


Figure 05
Tracking Dots found in the university printers

During this second chapter, I explored the progression of watermarks. From their background, until their appropriation, as an asset to incite fear, self-awareness, and to remotely control and constrain user actions. It was important for the development of my project to emphasize how ancient watermarks are valued at this moment. During the next chapter, I will expand my research from a point of view where I consider the early framework of watermarks crucial to prevail. I desire to demonstrate that what lies at the heart of their use is their ability to portrait crucial suspended actions and moments in history. From giving insights into hidden processes of fabrication documented in the sheets of paper, while carrying clues to comprehend their artisans, historical timeframes and different imagery. I will then extrapolate on how the use of digital watermarks can still be prominent apart from what I recognize as their misappropriation, exploring that the current attitude towards digital watermarking is not the only valid. This led me to focus my research on how the discourse around all these reinforcements of copyright can be flipped around. I will delve into how tactics that seem mainly negative can be re-appropriated.

Introduction to my creative response

With Tactical Watermarks, I describe ways of living within and resist a culture of surveillance in publishing. It is relevant to understand and explore what is like living in a culture of increasing and constant tracking rather than aiming to solve the many problems of surveillance. During my use of watermarks and more specifically, with my creative response, the main objective was to create a positive discourse around the act of watermarking. This is done while using them to create a top layer of information, able to embed traces of provenance in different texts. By provenance, I intend to express all the traces not used to surveil users but the ones able to trace historical importance to texts and that facilitates precise documentation of an archive or library. Tactical watermarks is not only a system but I will also delve into how it can be deployed, comparing it to what other projects or approaches I have encountered and reflect over their influence in my project.

While challenging centralised distribution channels, I ventured on how the process of adding stains can be twisted and revived. Stains are what I will call user patches or marks that are difficult to remove and that do not play an active role in archives. While exploring the process of adding imprints different discourses were arising from this. As a way to obscure previous ones, of commenting on the situation and encouraging behaviours, to create relations and communities, augmenting the sense of solidarity in archives, for aesthetic enhancements, marks of quality, etc.

I aim to link my creative response on the case of digital watermarking to what has been happening in parallel within different cultures, from graffiti culture to “crack intros”. Crack intros appeared for the first time in the ’80s, they were not commissioned for a commercial purpose, these were introduced by a programmer or a group of coders, graphic artists, and musicians that were responsible for removing the software’s copy protection and that made this crack public (Green, 1995). Watermarks may form a discourse around topics such as anonymity, borders, archives, and provenance. While rethinking watermarks, exploring their hidden layers and aspect of surprise, visibility or invisibility, on different forms of communicating. I find important to acknowledge that watermarks have the power to infiltrate and perform different roles and to create a parallel stream of information in different texts. When it comes to publishing, how can watermarks create a critical discourse around the right to access knowledge and represent the ones that fight for it?

It is important to consolidate how the term provenance will be used. By provenance, I aim to unify all processes that give clues and evidence on, from the moment of its origin until the life span of a medium is. It refers from being able to get information on what might be the source of a text, such as, its place of origin. Until the history of its ownership and even the motivation why an individual made it public. All this stream of empathy, decisions, hidden tasks and actions provide.

Just like I have delved into the first chapter, the flow of texts, downloads and users are always constrained by the politics of platforms that grant access. It is important to acknowledge that these platforms more often than not share documents and versions of the same file in between them. With Tactical Watermarks I aim to create also documentation to make this process visible. With watermarks and without compromising on the users' identities, I aim to set ground to what I find important. Such as finding ways to translate the flow of users and texts within this complex mesh architected in a rhizomatic identity structure.

By adding memory to a collection, and to the invisible natural connections formed by platforms' uses I feel also essential to integrate the hidden processes behind the upload of a new file to these. This being by materializing the hidden tasks of digitizing a book, the processes and motivation behind selection and all the actions taken.

2 – As a means to expression

Within this framework, and throughout the act of watermarking, I aim to create a space to publish undercovered personal, political and other kinds of messages. With my creative response, I consider that users commenting and publishing their thoughts disseminated hand to hand with the actual circulation of a file is relevant. Having the power of saying that I am here and I disagree with how paywalls, borders and how rules are structured and reinforced is powerful and pertinent. These messages must be published and made public.

This being, we can compare these ideas commenting as a strategy of contemporary political resistance to what has been happening in cracks of software, such as Adobe Zii. Adobe Zii or Adobe Zii Patcher is a one-click software program patcher or activation tool for Mac. The developers of this software inserted the quote "why join the navy if you can be a pirate" during the actual process of patching the desired software. It is striking how this intention differs from the one in Crack Intros, creating a reference, not to the one who released this patch but creating a relation to the actual act of copying, commenting on the situation and encouraging provocative behaviours.

I believe that using watermarks as a way of commenting on power structures, dissemination of knowledge and other equivalent situations and opinions will also function as a political mirror to what has been happening to free access to knowledge and information. While achieving this through digital watermarking, we are not only able to reach the ones that are already fighting within this culture, but also the ones that might be unknowledgeable users of shadow libraries and other grey publishing platforms, creating awareness to such topics.

Tactical Watermarking is not only a system about revealing hidden layers and creating a memory to an archive. It is also about creating strategies to suppress unwanted information. It is valuable to stress that in the contemporary panorama of digital watermarking calling out user identity is the ultimate goal. While recognising the intention to remove this layer of information I felt like it was relevant to create parallelism to the project SecureDrop. This project was first released under the name DeadDrop, designed and developed by Aaron Swartz and Kevin Poulsen. SecureDrop is a free software platform that enables safe communication between whistleblowers, journalist and different organizations. In this platform, whistleblowers, which are the sources, submit documents and data while avoiding most common forms of online tracking (Ball, 2014). During this process sources are also assigned a random user name, allowing a journalist to contact and privately chat with them.

The connections I intend to make between my system and SecureDrop are that both main intentions are the creation of spaces to anonymously publish files that are not intended to be part of the public sphere. This happens by creating a parallelism between how either private or public organizations protect secrets and how publishers protect copyright material. In their core, the key aspect to them is how they facilitate the anonymization of files. In SecureDrop by using private, isolated servers, and using encryption and decryption tools, in Tactical Watermarking using watermarking as a way to obscure existing watermarks, by overlaying existing marks found, and by re-writing new subjective metadata to documents, obscuring user traces aimed at making them accountable. This is explored in the previous chapter of my thesis.

4 – *Signatures*

In Tactical Watermarking I also purpose that digital watermarking may be used as a signature, just as we can spot in the graffiti culture or crack intros.

Just as freely distributing copyrighted material and cracking software, graffiti is a controversial subject. It has a rich background dating back to several cultures like the Egyptians, Greek or Romans, where writing or drawing in walls or other surfaces was common to be found. Graffiti nowadays is seen as a form of artistic expression without permission. Just as in crack intros where we can find pseudonyms to protect identities and thwart prosecution, in graffiti, a subculture to challenge authority, the same thing happens.

In Crack intros, such signatures referred to as “crack screens” were customarily included in-game title screens displaying the game name, the logo of the producer, and a graphic that provided the player with a glimpse of the game theme. The signatures were originally simple statements, such as “cracked by ...,” sometimes intentionally misspelt as “kracked by ...” (Reunanen et al., 2015). The main difference I aim to emphasise between graffiti and crack intros is the is text screen is in many ways similar to graffiti, although the so-called crack-intros invaded the private sphere and not the public space. (Cubitt and Thomas, 2009)

A very strong link to all these formats of signatures is found in ancient ways of watermarking. Craftsmen would explore pseudonyms, in this case, in the form of imagery built in the paper frames. This opens a path of exploring digital watermarking to almost an arrogant way of identifying us as liable of the process and decisions without carrying any liability whatsoever. Tactics as using pseudonyms will be reappropriated to challenge authority and challenging digital identity and accountability.

During the first chapter, I have explored how different media are used to publish ideas through alternative forms of publishing. This used to happen through zines, the underground press or other forms of publishing as the Samizdat. Currently, parallel streams of publishing exist mainly in the form of online platforms, opened to publish all sorts of copyrighted and/or forbidden materials. Within the context of Tactical Watermarking seems relevant to delve further into strategies that facilitate communication especially the use of steganography.

Even though several forms of communication responsible for avoiding regular methods of surveillance are largely achieved by writing an encoded message and by the use of a decoding system when it reaches its target, with steganography this happens differently. The message is hidden in plain sight as the key strategy. Steganography allows two parties to broadcast a message deceived or disguised within other data. Watermarks and steganography both happen in digital and analogue formats. While both terms can be applied to the transmission of information hidden or embedded in other data, they are often wrongly merged and is important to clarify them. Steganography relates to undercover point-to-point communication between two parties. (Katzenbeisser and Petitcolas, 2000) Watermarking has the extra demand of robustness towards potential attacks (Katzenbeisser, 1999).

Steganography is an important subdiscipline of information hiding. In the book, *A Cookbook of Invisible Writing* from Amy Suo Wu, alternative forms of communication are published in the format of recipes documenting techniques reused from spies to prisoners, but not only old tactics of steganography exist. In China, researchers understood that while digital communications and data security are becoming more sophisticated, there is still the need to develop ways to securely send hard copy messages. These have developed a printing technology only be read with a UV light over the printed medium (Davis, 2019).

All this set of parallel techniques of communication led me to explore which strategies can we reappropriate using watermarks as a way of annotation. How can we open space to communication between users of a system while maintaining their anonymity? One might have felt the thrill when a downloaded file from Libgen or similar library still contains traces of previous users. It is quite amusing this relation established with someone we are not related with. You feel part of a movement, as you had a glimpse of a moment, stuck in time.

With Tactical watermarks, I want to open spaces to dialogue, to publish displays of interest, as well as, displays of solidarity. This can be done, just as writing a message in a paper, drop it in a public space and wait for someone to find it. By dropping messages in files we assume that someone will be thrilled to find it. In a big picture, I do not plan to make this something you may find by chance but I aim to explore what are the possibilities of making it a compulsory or a regular habit.

At last, I propose that digital watermarks still have space to produce sensorial enhancements. Enacted through watermarking and with a background in the practice of graphic design I reckon that we are able of establishing different rhythms and hierarchies within a narrative. Just as introduced earlier in this text, watermarks might have had their origin concerning manufacturing processes but they might have been an artistic method of expression by papermakers aswell. With Tactical Watermarking, digital watermarks may substitute digitally the impact that graphic design has in the process of creating books as a physical media, where they can be recognised as an object by themselves. In graphic design, choices such as the paper, the binding, or even how different chapters are separated become part of an endeavour to heighten the narrative. Interestingly, mixed attitudes can exist towards this process. Either by trying to respect the text, without overpowering it, but also, as a way of exploring it as a medium where restructuring may form new ways of reading and understanding. Two constants are then present, the exploration of repetition and absence of it, and the experimentation regarding reading flows.

The main drive during my research was to explore how can analogue techniques be appropriate and transported to digital watermarking. I find particularly amusing unconventional strategies, such as the use of scented paper in print. Such a technique allows us to rethink the flow of information and takes part in shaping the perception we have from texts. Through this scented technology, we explore the vision and the scent at the same time, transporting us to different realities, creating a stimulus that we don't usually experience while reading. In digital files, I compare this to the feeling of encountering graphic elements that exist outside the main narrative. While most digital files lack personality, with new graphic elements appended I aim to incite new sensation while building new experiences through paratextual components.

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