

20 - FÄLSCHUNGERSCHWERENDE SCHRIFT



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Following a spike in automobile thefts through the early 1970s—many of which involved tampering with stolen tag numbers to elude police detection—the German government commissioned a new license plate typeface. It was December 1977, and Germany was still raw from a recent rash of hyackings, murders and suicides associated with the Red Army Faction. [...]

Born awkwardly between eras—drawn by hand in order to be better read by machines—the falschungerscherende Schrift font bears the marks of both 19th-century quild-enshrined handcraft and 20th-century anonymous automation. And like any technology, if ts bound by the political determinants of its design: while ifs original “tamper-proof” premise may have proved a MacGuffin, these weird-looking letters are an early product of our contemporary surveillance state. What reads to us as a clumsy lack of formal continuity ts exactly what makes it legible fo a computer. It is an alphabet whose defining characteristic is precisely that it has no defining characteristic, other than having no defining characteristic.

– “Falschungerscherende Schrift,” Benjamin Tiven, Bulletins of The Serving Library #3, 2012

German car licenseplate,
Fälschungerscherende schrift, c. 1980,
11.3 x 46 cm