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Letters

Ipsa facto

The American Bar Association report on
computer crime ("New data increase computer
crime concerns," SN: 6/23/84, p. 390) exagger-
ates the magnitude of the problem.

Largely this is due to the breadth of their def-
inition. Defining the theft of computer compo-
nents as "computer crime," for example, strikes
me as absurd. Television sets are stolen on a
daily basis, yet no one complains about the
epidemic of "TV crime." Theft is theft, and
should be treated as such by the law.

Similarly, embezzlement, regardless of the
means, is still embezzlement. The fact that it
may have been carried out via computer is ir-

This Week

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- 104 Diagnostic DNA
Cover: A new diagnostic technique can identify cells infected with a
virus, as well as a variety of microbial and genetic diseases. The DNA
probe technique here marks in purple the human cells in tissue culture
that are infected with adenovirus. (Micrograph: Enzo Biochem, Inc.)



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relevant.

As for the "unauthorized use of computers for
personal activities," this hardly strikes me as
criminal behavior. There seems to be a wide-
spread belief that computer time is precious,
something to be jealously guarded. This may
have been true in the '50s and '60s, but now-
days it is common practice for office computers
to be left powered up but idle when employees
go home at night. Carpenters and mechanics
bring personal projects into the shop to work
on during their off hours; why not programmers
and accountants as well? No one is harmed by
such activity.

Granted, the alteration or theft of computer
data is a form of crime that may not be ade-
quately addressed by existing statutes. But to
call for federal legislation regulating a broad

spectrum of activities, many of which are al-
ready illegal, seems excessive.

I conclude that asking the ABA "Is legislation
needed?" is rather like asking the Pentagon "Do
you have enough bombs?"

Gregory P. Kusnick
Sonora, Calif.

Weapons wording

Janet Raloff wrote so well on "Ultimate
Weapons" (SN: 7/21/84, p. 42) that I regret to cite
two aberrations from excellence: 1) A wave-
length of one micron is approaching the *visible*,
not the *ultraviolet*; 2) A material that protects
by being melted away is *ablative*, not *oblativ*.

H. M. Davis
Chapel Hill, N.C.

AUGUST 18, 1984

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