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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.)



### Departments

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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.

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