

WORKING

THE OFFICE AS FORTRESS

Something for the executive who lives dangerously: A New York-based company builds customized desks that function as security and surveillance command centers.

Ben Jamil, a spokesman for Communication Control Incorporated, says that the counterespionage desk console "was designed for the person who has everything and wants to keep it." Especially popular with foreign royalty and American oil magnates, the desk incorporates more than a dozen 007 features: A telephone scrambler and wiretap alert keep communications strictly confidential. A microwave video system can police locations up to 30 miles away. A voice stress analyzer and body response monitor are said to help assess the character of office callers. A bug alert foils electronic spying, and an infrared detection and alarm system warns of unwanted visitors.

If all this equipment fails to do the job, pushing a panic button will automatically dial a preset phone

number and deliver a recorded message, or sound an all-out alert. Prices range from \$3,000 for the basic console to a top-of-the-line \$280,000.

EQUAL OPPORTUNITY FOR THE UNHEALTHY

The pre-employment physical may be on the way out.

The Federal Government recently ruled that its grantees and contractors could not use physical examinations to discriminate against people with health problems. That may signal the beginning of the end of a new form of discrimination: refusing to employ people on the basis of risk to their health. Physical exams may be conducted to identify such people in order to hire more of them, however.

"An employer can no longer deny someone a job solely on the basis of high blood pressure," says Larry Velez of the Department of Health and Human Services, "unless he can prove that high blood pressure renders that person unfit for that particular job—and the burden of proof falls on the employer."

BRINGING WORKERS TO THEIR KNEES

Sitting down on the job may never be the same. Norwegian designers worked closely with physiotherapists



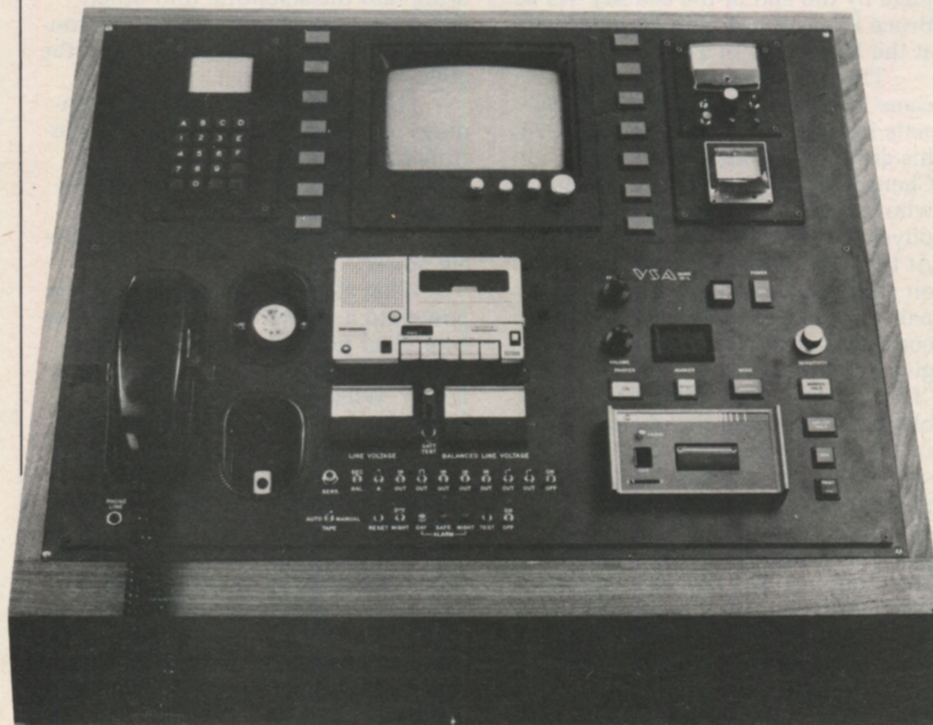
Balancing Act: Will these chairs shape office posture of the future?

to come up with a tonic for the desk-bound backache: the Balans chair. Already in use in Europe, the chairs were introduced a few months ago in the United States.

Sitting in one is more akin to kneeling. Instead of back support, the chair has a seat that tilts forward, thrusting the weight of the body onto the knees, which are supported by a cushioned pad. The designers say that the chairs automatically make sitters balance their torsos by straightening their backs and cause them to open their diaphragms for easier, deeper breathing. A benefit not mentioned by the manufacturer: People seated in such chairs will undoubtedly spend less time lost in contemplation of the ceiling.

WORK—DON'T RUN—THROUGH AIRPORTS

Executives may not have to sprint, hurdle or fly through airline terminals to get back to the office anymore, despite car-rental company propaganda. The office—complete with secretarial help, telexes and word processors—is coming to meet them



Electronic Moat: A desk console with everything but a trapdoor button.

WORKING

at the airport, courtesy of The Headquarters Companies of San Francisco.

A new facility called "The Business Center" recently made its debut at Los Angeles International Airport. Resembling a glorified photocopy shop, the center provides services from telecommunications and Xeroxing to dictation-machine rental for business people on the move. About the only thing not provided is actual office space, but that, according to Headquarters, will be coming next.

THE HANDWRITING ON THE WIRE

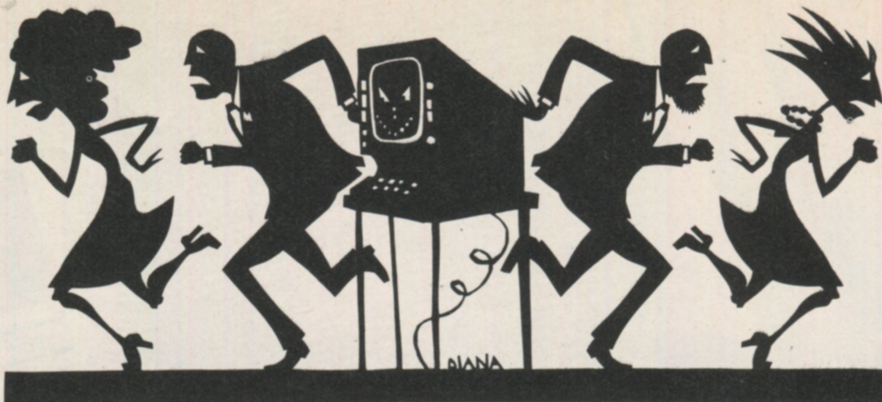
Now, another way to avoid exercise on the job: Get a Telexpad.

When a person wants to send a message, instead of walking all the way across the office to the telex machine, he merely reaches for the desktop Telexpad and writes the message on the paper provided. The Telexpad translates the handwriting into electrical impulses (to computers, that's digital data) and sends it over the wires. The receiving machine spells out the message on a digital display, so a note written in Denver can be read seconds later in Houston.

Delpa Systems of London is the firm behind this latest contribution to the sedentary life in executive suites.



Make No Mistake: As soon as the message is written, it's delivered.



Diana Bryan

COMMUNICABLE TECHNOLOGY . . .

"Computer-aided design and manufacture is like the plague," says Bela Gold, author of a National Research Council report on the new technology. He means it as a compliment. Computer-aided production—a factory system that uses computers to coordinate design and manufacture, and thus improve efficiency—tends to spread contagiously in work places once installed. But the comparison also fits in another way: American managers shy away from the system as if from a disease.

"A good many people are using this thing in bits and pieces," Gold says, "but there are very few comprehensive installations."

What accounts for this reluctance? According to Gold, managers take too shortsighted a view of the benefits. Most production people, he says, know little about the system and are too afraid of it to persuade management to forge ahead.

Will computer-aided production ever become epidemic in American factories? Undoubtedly, says Gold. Such systems connect design and manufacture so efficiently, and make the factory so flexible, that acceptance, he believes, is inevitable. "This is the damn problem," he says, noting Japanese advances in use of the system: "American industry will turn to computer-aided design and manufacture, but will we do it fast enough to catch up with our competitors?"

. . . AND SOME WHO ARE ALLERGIC

One reason American managers are slow to invite computers into their businesses is a modern disease known as cyberphobia—fear of computers. NEXT talked with Sanford Weinberg, a professor at St. Joseph's College in Philadelphia, who studies people so afflicted.

NEXT: What causes cyberphobia?

WEINBERG: I think it is an outgrowth

of math anxiety—people come up against something they don't understand and feel threatened. The result is that some people avoid computers, while others genuinely fear them.

NEXT: How do you help them?

WEINBERG: Basically with behavior-modification techniques. For instance, first we have a patient solve a mathematics problem with pencil and paper, then give him a mechanical hand calculator, then an electronic calculator, and finally a computer.

NEXT: Computer use will certainly spread. What will it mean if we have a cyberphobic society?

WEINBERG: That's an interesting problem. What is happening is that young people are getting used to computers—I have a three-year-old daughter who uses one—while older people aren't. I think that we'll reach the point where the people who run society will be non-computer-oriented, while the young people on the way up will be totally accustomed to them.

NEXT: Anything else we should worry about?

WEINBERG: Cyberphrenia: excessive love of computers. Some people get so hooked that they can't be torn away from the terminal.

ON THE HORIZON

● Corporate bonus babies. Cash payments ranging from \$1,500 to \$60,000 are being offered to business executives as incentives to accept new positions. Such pre-employment bonuses may become more common; many executives are now demanding recompense for benefits forfeited when they change jobs.

● How to break up a convention. Jo Matheny of Washington, D.C., is leading conventioners out on "recess." On the convention floor playground, Matheny encourages "creative movement, nonverbal exchange and physical expression" to break up the monotony of meetings. Could it replace the alcoholic beverages now used for that purpose? ■