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SCS 26: A Reply to an Editorial

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J.D. Lawson

SEMINAR ON CONTINUITY IN SEMILATTICES (SCS)

NAME	Scott	DATE	M	D	Y
			11	30	76
TOPIC	A REPLY TO AN EDITORIAL				
REFERENCE	Hofmann SCS 11/19/76				

1. References: I object in the strongest possible terms to the material in the SCS memos being referenced directly in published papers. They are not technical reports. In no way! These are private communications distributed among interested workers in a small group and should be treated as *correspondence*, not as papers for citation. We often show our letters to one another, or even supply a photo-copy to save time in explaining something to someone else. The idea hatched in June '76 at Darmstadt was an excellent one, because Hofmann's friends, colleagues, and students were widely separated. By making the tone slightly more formal, by making the style a bit more like a report at a weekly seminar meeting, we could exchange memos with a minimum of explanation. There is a perfectly well-known and accepted way of making reference to information of this kind obtained by correspondence, telephone, telegraph, or word of mouth: one writes, for example, "K.H. Hofmann, private communication." I *urge* the seminar use this standard form (with a date, if such be thought essential). I also urge that author's approval be sought for any such references as is usual in such circumstances.

2. Preprints: If one feels that his ideas are clear enough, he often writes a preliminary version to show around before sending the paper off to a journal; or, if he is very sure he has what he wants, he distributes a copy of the manuscript at the same time it is sent to the editor. *All such manuscripts should be clearly marked PREPRINT, should definitely be dated with the author's name and address on the front page, and should perhaps indicate the journal or place of probable publication.* I recommend being fairly rigorous about such headings, because I see so many idiotic bibliographies with references that are incomplete and can never be followed up. (Also, I have many "orphan" preprints in my files, because it is much easier to lose the last page than the first).

Now the problem with our SCS is that we often wish to distribute preprints as part of our current seminar reports. Fine. Let us continue to do so. However, I suggest that the solution to the "status" question raised by Hofmann's editorial is this: always give preprints (if that's what they actually are) an independent existence. DO NOT type them with SCS paper; rather, make a short *covering letter* on the SCS heading giving us, who are in the know, a few words about how the paper fits into what we have been discussing. Those words are private to the group. The paper (which is distributed as an appendix to the covering letter) is a paper; and, if it is particularly preliminary, then mark it PRELIMINARY VERSION: TO BE REVISED rather than calling it a preprint. Some people also put at the

top PRELIMINARY VERSION: DO NOT QUOTE. Put whatever you wish in order to protect your good name, but I think it will save many headaches to say that papers are papers and letters (or reports to the group) are *private*.

I emphasize that I do not want to discourage longer reports that may develop into papers. On the contrary: But, nevertheless, when speaking to friends I do not want to imagine an anonymous public (or an editor!) looking over my shoulder. When I write a paper, I have to, and it affects very much how I write (to say nothing of the speed). Why should we spoil a good thing by over formalization of procedures? Also in SCS reports there is no need to be original. We ought, of course, to acknowledge ideas, but we should also be allowed to say, "Look, this is what Hofmann really means!", in a style that we might never put in a paper.

As an example, Jimmie Lawson's report circulated with Hofmann's editorial *is* a report: it is written exactly in the style of a seminar talk (and an excellent one) with some new ideas, some old, some references, some proofs, some remarks, some hints, some suggestions. It is *not*, I submit, a paper and it should *not* be quoted as such; and, if I did want to quote it, I would write to Jimmie personally first.

3. Students: I am afraid thesis students always are in competition with the combined brain power of the mathematical community. How can we keep others from thinking? (Aside from working in secret, which Hofmann points out is no insurance). So why not form time to time, as Hofmann suggests, have a report in the SCS saying who the students are and what they are working on? Someone might even be able to make an interesting or helpful suggestion. Or better, someone might point out that the problem is solved, or too easy, or wrong, thus saving much time for everyone. If we know what people are doing, we can act with community spirit and help, not hinder, progress.

Hofmann is right that it is hard to ask for a moratorium: underground testing always continues. If someone misbehaves in grabbing a problem away from a student, he ought to be punished enough by the fact that, through a SCS memo, everyone will know about it. Maybe we could try to compensate for the danger to students by periodically rounding up good problems and putting them in a memo.

4. Priority: These problems always arise. We just have to be friendly about it. After all, we are all gaining a lot by keeping in touch. When someone profits *a very great deal*, however, he has to acknowledge where the help came from. He should, as a participant in the group, ask the others if they feel his acknowledgement in his proposed paper is sufficient: We ought to be able to keep this all on congenial terms and not have to risk the Mississippi morning fog.

5. A Newsletter? If Hofmann really is keen to publish, then he should start an occasional thing called, say, "The Continuous Algebra Newsletter". There is a "Recursive Function Newsletter" in *Logic* that has been very helpful in giving abstracts of recent results. It probably goes to about 100 people. Sometimes it even includes short papers. It is referenced in the literature, and it was meant to be. It was intended to be semiformal, and it has the advantage over the *AMS Notices* of being concentrated on one area. It has many disadvantages too, the primary one being that it is too expensive to produce without institutional support. (Postage alone kills most little publications these days - even some big ones).

Perhaps *Algebra Universalis* could be convinced to have every second issue or so a "Continuous Algebra Mailbag"? Someone would have to edit it and get someone to write an expository introduction to get people interested. From time to time it would be very helpful to have a bibliographic listing of recent papers in the subject (possibly weakly classified). But we would need some central place (and person!) to collect things. Probably no one has the time to do it.

I tried to get North-Holland interested in "Recursive Function Newsletter" for their *Annals of Mathematical Logic*, because I felt it deserved a bigger readership; but alas the publishers and the editors could not reach an agreement.

As for abstracts in a special area, the AMS special sessions are very good. The only trouble is that they do not take place very often. Perhaps we could, from time to time, collect several abstracts around some theme to submit by title all in a bunch - provided that the *Notices* editors were not too horrified by our flooding the market.