HASHASHASHASHASHASHASHASH
Hash Under a Bushel

It seemed probable one day, but not so soon – Hash's secret is out – Hash is dead, long die Hash!

It began with a letter from Dr. T.R. of Edinburgh University: 'I regarded Hash as a rather inept attempt at humour until the striking consistency of the ineptness struck me. Further analysis showed a coherence of construction in the Hash articles which was unusual if not impossible for a human author. I showed the articles to a colleague who is concerned with the analysis of psychotic prose. He reports that the text statistics are significantly non-normal, but unlike any he has met before. So, the obvious question, am I making a fool of myself (in which case my curiosity to meet the author is immense), or is Hash a computer program?'

Two days after this letter was received, Mrs. L.U., of a London-based advertising research company wrote: 'The writer with the pseudonym of Hash disturbs me. All my life I have had the capability to reconstruct clearly the characteristics of an author from his prose. My success in my work has been entirely related to my capability to construct prose evocative of a person you would trust to recommend a product. However, Hash disturbs me – after reading the first article I had a clear impression of a sewing machine. The second article reinforced this impression so strongly that I felt impelled to write to you. It may seem ridiculous, but is Hash a machine?'

No Dr. T.R. you are not a fool – no Mrs. L.U. it is not ridiculous – Hash is a machine, or a computer program to be exact.

Only you were not supposed to discover it, and many people were to be fooled before Hash's secret was let out. Much ingenuity went into Hash's construction, and not only the hearts (or minds – we are scientists) but also the pockets of Hash's progenitors have been smitten by the detective work of BT readers. It was intended that the Hash program be offered commercially as a tool for the construction of prose; a computerized essayist. Perhaps, at some future time, a descendant of Hash will achieve greater success, and even generate a new concept of scientific importance or, more probably, a colloquial cliché. However, for the present, Hash is dead, and we retire with shattered dreams, but our faith in the inherent strength of the human race considerably enhanced – if there are Martians among us, look out for Dr. T.R. and Mrs. L.U.

Appendix-Technicalities

A few remarks on the Hash program will serve to dry the curiosities of the more technically orientated. HASH V6B, to give him its full title, does not produce English sentences, but instead a structure of connected concept-relationships in the form of a graph. This graph can be turned into prose by traversing it in a particular manner. Different routes through the graph generate different sentences with the same or consistent meanings.

Thus the ouput:

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++ CONSTRUCT 9

(CONCEPT (HATE (QUALIFIER

(REDUNDANT)) (APPLICATION (COMPUTER

(QUALIFIER (CONCEPT (SIZE))

(QUALIFIER (TIME)))))

(REFERENT (CONSTRUCT 7))

(COMPARE (ANIMAL (QUALIFIER

(DEATH))))))

--END 9
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is a trivially simple example of a HASH 'construct' or unit of discourse. It might be interpreted as 'The increasing size of computers may lead them to the same end as the dinosaur'. Referent 7 might be a context setting for a paragraph on computer evolution.

You will note that in the interpretation, some class-words are replaced with particular instances. HASH V3A from which this output comes was implemented on a small machine and has only 300 class words altogether. HASH V4A is similarly limited but also indicates the direction of specialization required for each word, and the output looks more complex. HASH V6B is implemented as an interactive program on a large machine and has a basic vocabulary of some 2,000 class words.

The output of HASH V6B is by no means natural language, and indeed would look far from it to the initiated. It constrains the interpreter far more strongly than did the early HASH programs, however, so that the final output is more truly unadulterated HASH.

We do not regret the attempt to pull the wool over the eyes of the readers of BT. We regret only that HASH was unable to take his place as a legitimate and accepted member of the human race, at least in so far as his thought and linguistic processes are concerned. One day HASH will return, but next time, be assured dear readers, you will never know it!

Editorial Note

It is clearly of interest to determine how many of our readers actually saw through Hash before reading the exposé above. We would like to hear from others who, at least, suspected that the Hash author was not all he seemed. We would also wish to make it clear that all other articles in BT, to our knowledge, were subscribed by human authors.