How The Computer Will Save Poetry

Christian Harder, an undergraduate student at Virginia Tech, wrote an article this past summer entitled "How The Computer Will Save Poetry." In the article, Harder discusses the emergence of "conceptual literature," and more specifically, "conceptual poetry."

> *On the Internet, conceptualist literature takes on kaleidoscopic form, completely alien to the severe world of print: Pieces often feature aural experimentation, kinetic text, and diverse visual display. Commonly, viewers will guide a poem rather than simply reading it, becoming investigators -- rather than bystanders -- of art. These various digital combinations of form escape all reductive definitions of medium, and invite a reconsideration of literary practice.*

Specifically, Hader presents the argument that, because the internet is "free from the politics of publishing," the author is able to expand their artistic scope in a way that fosters a reconsideration of the entire creative process.

> *Instead of asking, "What can I write?" the digital author asks: "How can I write?" In an age where popular print novels are bland regurgitations of romantic forms, this question has become invaluable.*

Or, perhaps as better put by Kenneth Goldsmith, whom Hader cites as a "figurehead of conceptualist poets:"

> *Language as material, language as process, language as something to be shoveled into a machine and spread across pages, only to be discarded and recycled once again. Language as junk, language as detritus. Nutritionless language, meaningless language, unloved language, entartete sprache, everyday speech, illegibility, unreadability, machinistic repetition. Obsessive archiving & cataloging, the debased language of media & advertising; language more concerned with quantity than quality. How much did you say that paragraph weighed?*

With all of this as a backdrop, I would like to discuss the relationship between "conceptualist poetry" and digital technology: to what extent can we separate the intellectual movement that underpins "conceptualist poetry," from the "tangible" or "practical" nature of technology? Is technology the sole inspiration for the movement? Or is technology only a means through which the movement, in and of itself, is being expressed?