

World Oral Literature Project

voices of vanishing worlds

Occasional Paper 4



From oral literature to technauriture
What's in a name?

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The cover image features the late poet Bongani Sitole, South Africa.
Image by Bronwyn McLean, March 2011.

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Preface

The World Oral Literature Project is an urgent global initiative to document and make accessible endangered oral literatures before they disappear without record. The Project was established in early 2009 to support scholars and community researchers engaged in the collection and preservation of all forms of oral literature. The Project funds original fieldwork and provides training in digital collection and archiving methods.

Through our series of Occasional Papers, we support the publication of research findings and methodological considerations that relate to scholarship on oral literature. Hosted for free on our website, the series allows scholars to disseminate their research findings through a streamlined, peer-review process. We welcome expressions of interest from any scholar seeking to publish original work.

As our fourth Occasional Paper, we are delighted to present Andre Mostert and Russell Kaschula's discussion of the impact of technology on the vitality and transmission of oral traditions. Their choice of topic is timely, as we have entered an era in which technological developments affect more than ever before the ways that societies interact. Through their deep understanding of the challenges faced by indigenous cultures in Africa, Professor Kaschula and Mr Mostert's work helps us to imagine ways for new digital tools to be harnessed for the benefit of communities with rich traditions of oral performance.

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May 2011*

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What's in a name?

Russell H. Kaschula & Andre Mostert

'Oral poetry is not an odd or aberrant phenomenon in human culture...destined to wither away with increasing modernisation'

(Finnegan 1977: 3)

1. Introduction

Oral traditions and oral literature have long contributed to human communication, yet the advent of arguably the most influential technology—the written word—altered the course of creative ability. Despite its potential and scope, the development of the written word resulted in an insidious dichotomy. As the written word evolved, the oral word became devalued and pushed to the fringes—particularly in Africa, where attitudinal problems regarding the use of indigenous languages persist to this day, and where there is a dire need to foster a sense of pride and belonging for these speech forms (Alexander 2002: 151). Oral poetry and, by extension, oral tradition is, as Finnegan (1977) observes, intrinsic to the human cultural mosaic. The written word is nothing but the oral in another form. In fact, the written word *sans* an oral context is not possible. The converse is obviously not the case, nor was it true for much of human history. For many people, the written word has come to dominate, with orally-based societies being viewed as quaint but unsophisticated. But for many orally-based cultures, the

spoken word continues to carry much weight and is a pillar of this social mosaic (Alant 2006). There is a growing belief that, despite the obvious technological benefits that have flowed from the written word, the undervaluing of the knowledge of orally-based societies has significantly contributed to the malaise that modern humanity, whether written or oral, is now facing.

One of the unfortunate consequences of the transition to writing has been a focus on the systems and conventions of orality and oral tradition. Although of importance, a more appropriate focus would be on ways of supporting and maintaining the oral word, and its innate value to human society, in the face of what has become rampant technological development.

Having said that, it is ironic that technology is creating a fecund environment for the rebirth of orality. Through the use of web networks and web platforms, oral performers are now more globally visible and able to market their literary talents. Furthermore, intellectual and academic sites that discuss, analyse and preserve material electronically are emerging. Recent examples are the World Oral Literature Project, <www.oralliterature.org>, based in the United Kingdom, and the poetry website <www.poetryinternationalweb.org>. Such websites contribute to a new critical discourse, which, in our opinion, falls within the domain of what we have termed *technauriture* (Kaschula 2004;

Kaschula & Mostert 2009). A theoretical paradigm is now required to better understand this mixing of genres and technologies, building on the seminal works of Walter Ong (1982), Ruth Finnegan (1988), Brian Street (1995) and others.

This paper offers a brief overview of the debate surrounding the relationships between oral literature, the written word and technology, and then suggests that the term *technauriture* may offer a suitable encompassing paradigm for further engagement with the oral word and its effective application in modern society.

2. The naming debate

In one of her seminal works, Finnegan offers a comprehensive argument for the use of the term oral literature. In reference to oral poetry, she observes that it ‘essentially circulates by oral rather than written means’, and is thus ‘a form of “oral literature” —the wider term which also includes oral prose’ (Finnegan 1977: 16). Finnegan concludes, while recognising the contradictory nature of the term, that ““oral literature” and “unwritten literature” as terms are useful and meaningful in describing something real, and have come to stay with us’ (1977: 16). Beidelman (1972) disagreed with Finnegan’s use of the term oral literature, and argued that ‘folklore’ cannot be viewed as literature as this would diminish the sociological and anthropological significance of the genre. Scholarly arguments regarding literary terminology and points of reference are clearly nothing new.

Finnegan opens her work with a number of poems drawn from various sources, and points out that such poems are not customarily included in what she calls ‘mainstream literature’, given their obvious oral nature. The orality of the material may hinder its inclusion as ‘literature proper’ (Finnegan 1977: 1), a concept that implies written substance. Yet it can be argued that prior to writing, poems and literature ‘proper’ were purely oral. This discussion

discloses the fact that for many scholars, technology is the defining aspect of the properness or otherwise of literature. In the contemporary context, technological advances have afforded phenomena such as ‘twitterature’ (Acimen & Rensin 2009). Many such developments are simply orality in a more sympathetic written form. For example, Twitter and text messaging are more fluid in terms of their ability to reflect the immediacy of the spoken word, and are indicative of the ubiquitous influence that digital technology has had on the written word. It is not an unreasonable stretch of the imagination to foresee references to ‘e-mailature’ and ‘virtualature’, with the prefix being linked in each case to a new technological advance or paradigm.

Ong offers a poignant view of the power of the written word:

‘(W)riting, commitment of the word to space, enlarges the potentiality of language almost beyond measure, restructures thought, and the process converts a certain few dialects into “grapholects”. A grapholect is a transdialectal language formed by deep commitment to writing. Writing gives a grapholect a power far exceeding that of the purely oral dialect’ (1982: 8).

Ong also highlights the challenge of studying oral cultures and orality, as all oral speeches have been primarily studied as written texts. He states: ‘The impression grew that, apart from the oration (governed by written rhetorical rules), oral art forms were essentially unskillful and not worthy of serious study’ (1982: 10), and his critique of the terminology is forceful:

‘scholarship in the past has generated such monstrous concepts as “oral literature”... aware of how embarrassingly it reveals our inability to represent to our own minds a heritage of verbally organised materials except as some variant of writing, even when they have nothing to do with writing at all’ (1982: 11).

Ong's attack on the use of the term oral literature must be viewed within the context of his technological era: pre-Internet and before many of the other technological advances that have subsequently opened up new vistas. This is not to dismiss his observation, but rather to contextualise it and to recognise that twenty years ago, the options were limited: 'Thinking of oral tradition or a heritage of oral performance, genres and styles as "oral literature" is rather like thinking of horses as automobiles without wheels', he concludes (Ong 1982: 12).

As both authors accept the innate value of oral cultures and oral tradition, Finnegan and Ong in some ways represent two sides of the same coin. While Ong suggests that '(h)uman beings in primary oral cultures...learn a great deal and possess and practice great wisdom, but they do not "study"' (1982: 9), Finnegan is emphatic in her recognition of the role of oral poetry and, by extension, orality, and its innate value to human society:

'It is difficult to argue that they [*oral poets*] should be ignored as aberrant or unusual in human society, or in principle outside the normal field of established scholarly research. In practice there is everything to be gained by bringing the study of oral poetry into the mainstream of work on literature and sociology' (1977: 2).

Finnegan's statement could now be adapted to include not only work on literature and sociology, but also research on technology.

In the 1970s, the East African scholar Pio Zirimu conceptualised the term 'orature' in an attempt to mediate between 'oral literature' and 'written literature', and to address the fissure highlighted in the debates in terms of the contradiction associated with the term 'oral literature'. On the one hand, at the time that the term 'orature' was coined, Finnegan had recognised the innate artistic qualities of oral performances and aspired to 'upgrade' oral genres by using the term literature (oral genres as art and not only as lore). On the other hand, focusing on

the consequences of viewing orality and literacy as different technologies, and emphasising the dichotomy, Ong saw the development from orality to literacy as inevitable (1982: 175). Today, orality or 'orature', literacy and technology co-exist, and while many societies wish to embrace literacy, this does not mean that 'orature' is necessarily rejected. The term 'orature', and the resolution it brings to earlier dichotomies, may then be seen as a precursor to 'technauriture'.

For us, the 'tech' of technauriture includes all existing and foreseeable aspects of the evolving nature of orality and its written counterparts. While there is a risk of the term becoming blunt in an attempt to embrace what is a rapidly evolving technological framework, the main aspect that technauriture addresses is the dialectic between primary and secondary orality¹ and technology, placing orality on an equal footing with the application of technology.

3. Technauriture as paradigm

The term *technauriture* was coined in response to the intersection of orality, the written word and digital technology (Kaschula 2004). Regarding its etymology, the 'techn' represents technology, the 'auri' derives from the word *auriture*, and the 'ture' represents literature. *Auriture* alone, as used by Coplan (1994: 9), implies the use of a range of senses in one's appreciation of the oral word: hearing, speaking and the more abstract aesthetic analysis of a word. *Auriture* has been suggested in place of *orature*, *orality* or *oraural*, the latter a rather clumsy term introduced by Kishani (2001: 27).

Technauriture attempts to embrace the dichotomies acknowledged by Ong and Finnegan, and to firmly place the debate regarding orality and oral traditions in a 21st-century discourse

¹ Here, primary orality refers to the initial utterances received by those present, while secondary orality relates to contexts where a recording and/or written renditions are received by an audience. Secondary orality is by definition more passive than primary orality.

that implicates contemporary modes of technology. As a term, technauriture locates orality in a transdisciplinary paradigm that promotes the capture, nurture and harnessing of orality and oral traditions. It furthermore allows approaches that are not constrained by a narrow focus on the nature, definition and applicability of orally-based knowledge systems.

Technauriture must pass through a number of stages before it is accepted as a new analytical paradigm. These stages accord with Broadie's observation that there are a number of states that any new idea goes through in terms of public reaction and acceptance. He refers to this as the birth of a new paradigm (1996: xxi–xxii):

1. **Complacency/Marginalisation** – The new ideas are treated with little interest or pushed to the fringes.
2. **Ridicule** – Complacency fades, and is replaced by ridicule, as the new idea refuses to fade.
3. **Criticism** – As the new idea gains traction, the opponents who have vested interests in the old paradigms become more aggressive in the face of the challenge to their belief. For example, Broadie notes that Darwinism is still under attack from various quarters today.
4. **Acceptance** – Eventually, enough people become aligned with the new paradigm, which leads to intellectual acceptance. Peer pressure starts to work for it rather than against it.

Kaschula (2004) and Kaschula and Mostert (2009) define technauriture as an attempt to capture the 'three-way dialectic between primary orality, literacy and technology', moving the debate beyond what has essentially been a dichotomous tension between the oral and written word, to a discourse that includes the implications of technology as a general and alternative category. Here, the term technology is used in its widest sense to include all technologies that are relevant to orality and oral traditions, and implicates the consequences of

the application of technology to contexts that need to be characterised by a sympathetic perspective towards orally-based cultures. These technologies could include all forms of digital recording, from the unobtrusive hidden recording device to elaborate holographic technologies that could transport the poet into another physical context. Such technologies have the potential to fundamentally alter the nuances of a performance and will have an impact on the immediacy of audience feedback. Such examples point to the multiple considerations that must come into play as digital technologies are developed, a point that is fundamental to the very idea of technauriture.

A consideration of the impact of technology is not an attempt to bypass written materials, but to recognise that contemporary culture is dynamic and more aware of the implications of technological advances. In contrast, during the evolution of the written word, cultures tended to assess their value in terms of their ability to advance religious and political objectives. The written word was seen as superior as a result of being accompanied by advances in technology. Cultures that were written tended to have more effective tools for waging war and supporting the plunder of resources, giving conquering written cultures a sense of superiority, and instilling in the orally-based cultures that were conquered a sense of awe for the written word.

Technauriture allows researchers to assess the potential of harnessing technology to reverse the demise of oral traditions and the knowledge systems embodied in such spoken contexts. For the purpose of this paper, technauriture acts as a referential paradigm to facilitate the effective transmission of *in situ* production into meaningful resources that mobilise the innate potential of orality and oral traditions to support cultural identity and cultural maintenance. This is key to revaluing the human knowledge that remains embedded in traditional cultures through orality, because oral tradition, as Alant has noted, is 'a vehicle of social cohesion' (2006: 201).

The challenge that researchers now face is the effective contextualisation of orality within a post-modern milieu that has—outside of certain institutional structures such as parliaments and courts—historically undervalued the spoken word. Technauriture offers a vehicle by which orality is able to bypass the written phase and directly harness the potential of new technological structures and solutions to capture and disseminate oral performances. Kaschula's term includes literature, the written word and technology. This opens up a wider debate and at the same time closes a chapter, taking us from oral literature to technauriture, and begging the question: what's in a name?

The answer, of course, is everything. In developing technauriture as a paradigm, it is essential to avoid the pitfalls that have become evident with the term *literacy* and the wider implications of the compound term *technological literacy*. 'Even though it still does mean "the ability to read and write", the word "literacy" has long taken on more ambitious dimensions—of reason, rationality and progress' (Alant 2006: 201). When Alant asserts that 'literacy is a function of language', a corollary for technology could be that 'technological literacy is a function of language and the human/machine interface'.

Highlighting the problems of a technologically determinist approach to debates about orality and literacy, Alant underlines the importance of a coherent approach to context and contextual factors, as 'it is the situation that gives the oral text its meaning, rather than the medium—orality—through which it comes to pass' (2006: 202).

One researcher's oral literature is another's utterance, of little or no use beyond its performative value. However, when that performance has been committed to the written word, it is fundamentally altered and can no longer be considered to be primarily oral. Through writing, the ability of the performance to evolve has been stunted and has become part of a static history. It is through technauriture (which includes the use of technology to record, archive and disseminate

audio or audio-visual content) that a performance can keep aspects of its primary character and yet be allowed to develop within a nurturing and coherent paradigm that sees the written as only part of a dynamic process that is sympathetic to audience, artist and future contexts.

Another aspect central to the currency of orality is 'symbolic power', which Thompson defines as the 'capacity to intervene in the course of events, to influence the actions of others and indeed to create events, by means of the production and transmission of symbolic forms' (1995: 17). Symbolism runs deep in all oral cultures, and technauriture provides the capacity for symbolic influence beyond the *in situ* production, with the role of the media becoming paramount. Bourdieu (1996) expands the concept of symbolic power to a 'symbolic system' in which the university and early religious systems had the power to classify social space. Such a symbolic system needs to be developed for oral material in a manner that will make the media delivery as neutral as possible, allowing the original message to carry its 'symbolic credibility' and to be resonant across contexts, in respect of the transmigration from primary to secondary. As discussed above, the technological advances that are being harnessed are widening the reach of orality. However, a concomitant enhancement in terms of 'symbolic credibility' is still lacking.

Developing the paradigm of technauriture requires a vigorous analysis of the migration of context to ensure that the medium of delivery does not become an end in and of itself. New technological developments are presenting practitioners with opportunities to reverse the alienation that the written word has visited on oral cultures. In order to achieve this, it is incumbent on researchers to engage with the question of what knowledge is, how knowledge is valued and how it can be effectively mobilised.

In summary, it is necessary to identify and develop a strategic framework that will 'work to introduce/affirm/re-inscribe knowledges'

of various kinds (Sefa & Simmons 2009: 17). Through the proposed digital models built around technauriture, we hope that a structure will emerge to value the diversity of human knowledge and to mobilise its potential for human society. A case in point is the recording of the life and work of a South African oral poet, the late Bongani Sitole.

4. The Sitole project as an example of technauriture

In late 2004, with a project team from elearning4Africa, the School of Languages at Rhodes University undertook to collect, collate and digitise oral literatures and traditions, beginning with Bongani Sitole's oral poetry. Through local, national and international linkages, it was envisaged that an open source platform would make Sitole's materials accessible to the widest possible audience: from learners in schools across South Africa who might use the material as a learning resource, through to graduate students documenting oral traditions, and again through to tourists learning about the 'real' history of the places that they planned to visit.

Through an open source structure, it was further envisioned that contributions would be made in the following areas: cultural identity; indigenous knowledge systems; the development of African languages and history for post-graduate study; the creation of a platform to support cultural tourism (initially in the Eastern Cape); the expansion of open source digitisation options across partner organisations; the creation of robust community-based initiatives to promote the ongoing development and sustainability of the platform; the establishment of an international model for harnessing indigenous knowledge systems for the classroom and the distribution of learning material.

The digitisation project, still in its early stages, is being stewarded by the African Language Studies Section in the School of Languages at

Rhodes University to ensure that all aspects of the platform's potential are built within an institutional framework to support replication and sustainability. The co-author of this paper, Andre Mostert, is now documenting and analysing the process. The digitisation of Sitole's material has been supported by a grant from the Foundation for Human Rights, and the first undertaking of the Rhodes University Oral Literature Project team has been the development of resources relating to Bongani Sitole's praise poems. The project developed learning materials, uploaded resources to the Oral Literature Project platform, donated books to pilot schools in Qunu, Port St Johns and Grahamstown, created a download option for accessing the poetry book, disseminated the project internationally and established a network to support the second phase of the project.

In the contemporary study of oral literature, digital technology allows one to capture not only the textual content, but also the visual performance in order to classify, describe and comprehend the aesthetic qualities of the event. The next step, in working with Sitole's material, will be to upload video clips to the existing website.

5. Why technauriture?

The Sitole project reinforces the relationship that has been developing between orality, literacy and technology. Performance poets are taking advantage of this new form of technologised orality, supporting the idea of a technauriture that encapsulates technology, auriture and literature.

Use of technology is dependent on the individual performer and where they find themselves on the oral-literacy-techno continuum, as well as the extent to which they choose to allow orality and literacy to interact with modern technology. Isabel Hofmeyr (1993) points out that there is an 'appropriation' of the oral into the literate, with the extent of this process depending on the indi-

vidual performer. These days, this appropriation is often taken one step further, into the arena of technology. The extralinguistic elements that are often lost in the transmission of orality into literacy can be re-captured through technology when sound bites and video-clips are uploaded. The reaction of the audience, the performer's intonation, voice quality and emphasis, the effects of rhythm, context and speed of performance are lost when written, but can come alive once again through a digitised version. The result can be a performance of different impact and intensity, a performance based on technauriture.

Differences between individual poets and performers can complicate the debate about appropriate forms of literary criticism of transcribed oral texts (Yai 1989: 62–3). To this we may now add literary criticism that incorporates aspects of technology. The dialectic between print, popular performance, technology and primary orality (the initial utterances) differs in terms of individual performers as well as in terms of specific characteristics of culture, for example those of the amaXhosa community of Bongani Sitole's world.

Other examples of work in technauriture include the *Verba Africana* series developed at the University of Leiden in the Netherlands as part of an e-learning project. The aim of this project is to document African oral genres (poems, narratives, songs and so on) for teaching and research, with materials including DVDs and a website on Ewe stories and storytelling, as well as Taarab and Ngoma performances. The technauriture being developed at Leiden goes beyond the output of a single, individual performer, and raises questions regarding the future of the medium. Perhaps a number of centralised sites will be established in various parts of the world, at select institutions that specialise in documenting, preserving and disseminating various aspects of technauriture. This would facilitate better interaction between local and global literatures through a coordinated system.

Noting the *Verba Africa* series at the University of Leiden, we should recall that '[n]owadays,

the study of African Oral Literatures faces new research challenges due to expanding technologies of audio-video recording and their increasing popularisation and mass-diffusion'.² It is these research challenges that technauriture seeks to address. There are only a small number of experimental projects in which new technological documentation and research methodologies are being explored (for example, see the research database on Hausa popular literature).³ Further examples of such research initiatives are the comparative studies on creativity and the adaptation of new media in Southern and East Africa, currently being undertaken by Veit-Wild (Humboldt University) and Fendler and Wendl (University of Bayreuth), through which scholars are looking at artistic, cinematic and literary practices in the digital age.

The interaction of South African national literatures with global literature is also becoming more apparent from the technauriture available online. The Internet domain <www.litnet.co.za> hosts sites such as *Isikhundla Sababhali* ('The Writer's Den') and *Phezulu* ('From Above') that publish isiXhosa and isiZulu works, including traditional poetry, although only in transcribed written form. Alongside these sites incorporating indigenous work, there are critiques of Afrikaans and English literature, bringing local and global contributions together through technology.

Technauriture is even supported by software companies that now make use of oral poetry, allowing for its absorption into modern digital tools. In 1999, Microsoft and the late Bongani Sitole signed a contract through which he sold the rights to some of his orally-produced isiXhosa poetry. A recorded 45 second snippet of a praise poem in honour of Nelson Mandela was sent to

2 From Leiden University, Multimedia Research and Documentation of African Oral Genres: Connecting Diasporas and Local Audiences <<http://bit.ly/leidenoralgenres>>. Accessed on 10 May 2009.

3 SOAS research database on Hausa popular literature and video film <<http://hausa.soas.ac.uk/>>. Accessed on 11 October 2010.

Microsoft on tape, for which Sitole was paid \$350 (personal communication).

Increasingly, and through globalisation, technology is opening up and commercialising the field of oral literature. With the advent of technauriture, it is ever more important that the performers' rights are contractually protected. This is a field that requires urgent exploration, particularly in relation to oral poetry. Regarding the Sepedi oral tradition of Kiba song and dance, Sello Galane concludes that:

'Dance and drum designs are not...protected by any copyright law...Kiba and other forms of classical art and culture are continually being recorded by various radio stations....The royalty accrued on these songs should be paid back to the communities through a foundation or directly to the group that has performed the recorded and broadcast text....The institutional memory of South African...communities needs to be protected' (2003: 147–9).

While the proposal of a 'foundation' should be commended and certainly warrants further exploration, the real question is whether one can place a financial value on the oral, recorded word—even more so the oral, recorded, technologised word.

6. Expanding the knowledge base

Let us juxtapose, for a moment, the nature of orality and all of its modalities with the events of the Sokal affair. In 1994, mathematical physicist Alan Sokal submitted an article to *Social Text* proposing that quantum gravity was a social and linguistic construct. When the editors accepted and published the paper, Sokal exposed his article as a hoax. He explained that his *Social Text* article had been 'liberally salted with nonsense', and in his opinion was only accepted because '(a) it sounded good and (b) it flattered the editors' ideological preconceptions' (Weinberg

1996: 11). Sokal argued that his motivation was to expose the lack of academic rigour that had started to afflict the social sciences and humanities, and the fact that the academic community had become so wrapped up in its own rhetoric that, provided the message was effectively worded, the meaning was of little relevance.

In a sense, these two extremes—orality and Sokal's experiment with post-modernism—represent a nadir for different types of knowledge, the former seemingly having run its course and the latter having folded in on itself. Much can still be done to embrace and nurture the vast swath of human knowledge and orally-encoded experience, and the Sokal case illustrates that some disciplines could benefit from being more in touch with the context in which their knowledge is produced. As Pat Manson observed:

'For the research community, the challenge is also to build new cross-disciplinary teams that integrate computer science with library and archival science (and even with social and historical sciences). We need to ensure that future technological solutions for preservation are well founded and grounded in understanding what knowledge from the past and from today we need to keep for the future' (2010: 3).

7. Conclusion

As technology becomes a defining aspect of all disciplinary investigation, technauriture offers a suitable paradigmatic framework upon which to build a cross-disciplinary approach to orality and oral traditions in the digital age. In a very real sense, the journey from orality through the written word to the virtual utterances of avatars encapsulates the cyclical nature of human culture. Perhaps digital oral poets and shamans will lead the next generation as they build their own performative worlds online that transcend the narrowing of contemporary and traditional cultures.

Orality and the spoken word will continue to be the backbone of human existence, but the integrative nature of technology, while not yet defining our existence, will also work its way into our lives. It is therefore imperative that the oral aspects of our cultures are effectively captured, and technauriture offers the ideal vehicle to ensure that the central role of orality is maintained through the discourse of technological development. Consequently, there is much in technauriture, as it allows for the primary and secondary aspects of orality to engage with technological advances that can and often do overawe the original sentiments or messages.

What's in a name? Much depends on how this name reflects the intellectual delivery, transmission and reception of contemporary thought. Technauriture captures the modalities of these times: a human existence that is increasingly defined by technology.

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- www.litnet.co.za
- www.oralliterature.org





Oral traditions and oral literature have long contributed to human communication, yet the advent of arguably the most influential technology—the written word—altered the course of creative ability. Despite its potential and scope, the development of the written word resulted in an insidious dichotomy. As the written word evolved, the oral word became devalued and pushed to the fringes of society. One of the unfortunate consequences of this transition to writing has been a focus on the systems and conventions of orality and oral tradition. Although of importance, a more appropriate focus would be on ways of supporting and maintaining the oral word, and its innate value to human society, in the face of rampant technological development. Yet it is ironic that technology is also helping to create a fecund environment for the rebirth of orality. This paper offers an overview of the debate about the relationship between oral literature, the written word and technology, and suggests that the term *technauriture* may offer a suitable encompassing paradigm for further engagement with the oral word and its application to modern society. We discuss the late Bongani Sitole, a poet whose oral works were transformed into public and educational resources through the application of technology, and we consider the utility of the term *technauriture* for describing the relationship between orality, literature and technology.

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