
Reconsidering Pascal Bentoiu's Aesthetics in the Light of European Sources, International Synchronisation and Contemporary Application Orientations

LAURA OTILIA VASILIU

“George Enescu” National University of Arts, Iași
ROMANIA*

Abstract. Published in the early 1970s (*Imagine și sens*, 1971, *Deschideri spre lumea muzicii*, 1973, *Gîndirea muzicală*, 1975), Pascal Bentoiu's theoretical works had a paradoxical destiny. On the one hand, they informed many musicians, being included in the mandatory bibliography of courses in aesthetics at conservatories in Romania; on the other hand, substantial proof of the understanding of and capitalization on the works can be found neither in the press of the time nor in the subsequently published scientific literature. The simple explanation is that his romantic concept of idealist philosophy based on readings in Kant, Hegel and Bergson was clearly expressed – despite some attempts (rhetorical tricks) at hiding it – and at odds with the dominant Marxist materialism of the years of publication. This study identifies a few fundamental ideas of his aesthetic concept centered on the psychology of reception, like: 1. The primordial character of a global perception of musical articulation/composition (metaphorically expressed through the term of image) in relation to the analytical process of sonic parameters; 2. the primacy of (creative and receptive) musical awareness before the physical laws of sonic material; 3. the constitution of musical thinking as a logical mental activity operating with “phonic identities” on the axes of time and space, psychologically/metaphysically connected through the formula “spacial-temporal continuum”. Comparing Pascal Bentoiu's concept with his main theoretical source – Ernst Kurth's *Musikpsychologie* (1931) –, in its turn a combination of the Gestalt theory (the perception of the whole) with Schopenhauer's concept of the creative/creator's will and with the phenomenon of the subconscious revealed by Freud, proves the Romanian aesthetician's integration with the main flow of European thinking – a singular case in the Romanian musical culture of the time. Revealing possible parallels with American aesthetic positions – we are referring to Leonard Meyer's originally gestaltist psychological method (*Emotion and Meaning in Music*, 1956) – and the (indirect) consequences of Bentoiu's concepts at the level of contemporary musical education, musicological analysis, the psychology of creation are projected as complementary objectives of this research.

Keywords: the aesthetics of music, the psychology of music, musical thinking, musical image, Ernst Kurth, Leonard Meyer

* laura.vasilIU@arteiasi.ro

1. Introduction

Subsumed to musical aesthetics, Pascal Bentoiu's theoretical works were realised and offered to Romanian readers after a rich activity on the compositional plain. Having taken place among/on the background of increasing modernisation of musical language and artistic notoriety, his compositions will reach a first culmination in 1969 through the opera *Hamlet*, which was finalised before starting work on the volume *Imagine și sens*. The onset of maturity – the author had turned 44 when the volume was published – reveals him as a consistent personality able to assume his own definition of the musical phenomenon. “The thinking with this own mind” (to paraphrase the title of Romanian philosopher Gabriel Liiceanu's latest volume – *Nebunia de a gândi cu mintea ta*) achieves a more pronounced and clearly delineated relief over the next four years, during which Bentoiu, parallel to creating two compositions revealing a return to melody and consonance agreeing with the ideas that animated him at that time (*Cvartetul nr. 2 „al consonanțelor”* and *Symphony no. 2*) reveals a further two books, the volume of studies *Deschideri spre lumea muzicii* and the *sui generis* essay *Gîndirea muzicală*.

The fortunate association of innovative substantial ideation in the Romanian context with the expressiveness, clarity and accessibility of the style transformed Bentoiu's books into mandatory reading for any musician educated in or attending Conservatory. The specialty press reacted enthusiastically and admiringly without, however, performing a comprehensive analysis of the proposed ideation. The reception of Pascal Bentoiu's theoretical works in the years following their publication was met with manifold inopportunity. First of all, his romantic concept of idealist philosophy based on readings in Kant, Hegel and Bergson was clearly expressed – despite some attempts (rhetorical tricks) at hiding it – and at odds with the dominant Marxist materialism of the years of publication. Secondly, the criticism directed against the musical experimentation of the time as part of his explanation of the musical phenomenon from the perspective of reception contradicted the development of composition in Romania in the 1970s and '80s. Not to mention the fact that once structural and semiotic analysis was assimilated by Romanian musicology, Pascal Bentoiu's psychological concept loses ground. Only after 2000 does a direction of reflection on the musical phenomenon develop stimulated by Pascal Bentoiu's concepts (see Garaz, 2002).

The new ideas fundamenting Pascal Betoiu's theoretical vision can be formulated as follows:

1. the primordial character of a global perception of musical articulation/composition (metaphorically expressed through the term of **image**) in relation to the analytical process of sonic parameters;
2. the primacy of (creative and receptive) musical awareness before the physical laws of sonic material;

3. the constitution of musical thinking as a logical mental activity operating with “phonic identities” on the axes of time and space, psychologically/metaphysically connected through the formula “spacial-temporal continuum”.

2. The primordial character of a global perception of musical articulation/composition (metaphorically expressed through the term of image) in relation to the analytical process of sonic parameters

2.1. Pascal Bentoiu and *Gestalt theory*

The formula “musical image” – a central concept of Pascal Bentoiu’s theory – is based on the theory of perceiving the whole through an act of synthesis, a theory proposed and demonstrated by the Gestalt school of psychology. **The whole is more than the sum of its parts** – claim the fans of gestaltism, referring to the phenomenon of perceiving totality. To this end, Ehrenfels, the founder of this direction of thinking, observed that “The intellect [*Geist*] that brings psychic elements into new connections, changes more than combinations; it creates something new” (Tan, 2013, p. 21).

For Pascal Bentoiu, the perceived whole is the musical image, that is “a possible unit of the musical flow, having an increased particular cohesion within the general cohesion” (Bentoiu, 1971, p. 20). The configuration of the musical image during the audition is fundamentally linked to memory and to the structure of the sonic art as articulated in time: “an area from the musical flow, which presents itself to memory as a unit of a happened action” (Bentoiu, 1971, p. 22); “the image can be considered as formed only when we have reached a resting point” (Bentoiu, 1971, p. 24). The primacy of the whole before the parts is clearly expressed: “the form under which any type of materialised structure is registered initially in one’s psyche is that of synthetic image” (Bentoiu, 1971, p. 24).

The Gestalt school of psychology was developed in the academic worlds of Berlin and Vienna beginning with the late 19th century until the mid 1930s, when the authors of the new concept – Max Wertheimer, Wolfgang Köhler and Kurt Koffka – became professors in the United States. The studies on this direction stipulate the filiation of the Gestalt theory from the phenomenology of Husserl who, associated with gestaltism philosopher Christian von Ehrenfels, author of an important work fundamenting the new theory in 1890 – *Über Gestaltqualitäten* [On Gestalt Qualities] –, formulates the idea of a synthesising function in the experience/perception of time (Reybrouck, 1997, p. 60).

Transposed in the area of music, the Gestalt theory supports the receiver’s natural capacity of globally, instantaneously perceiving a sonic space

organised in time, but also of organising the perceived mental space as a homogeneous totality.

We suppose that Pascal Bentoiu's contact with the Gestalt theory took place through the work *Musikpsychologie* (1931) by Ernst Kurth, one of the authors that the Romanian author repeatedly refers to. In its turn, the work *Musikpsychologie* related to the phenomenon of reception of form as a whole through the writings of Christian von Ehrenfels, Max Wertheimer and Wolfgang Köhler.

2.2. Ernst Kurth (1886-1946) – a great thinker of music

Who was Ernst Kurth? We notice that he is less well-known than other great German theoreticians (Hugo Riemann, Theodor Adorno, Heinrich Schenker, Carl Dahlhaus a.o.). The quoted title has not been translated into English, although Ernst Kurth was rediscovered by American psychology at the end of the 1980s. In an in-depth study of his theoretical works conducted by Daphne Tan, a young researcher from *Rochester University*, New York in 2013 (*Ernst Kurth at the Boundary of Music Theory and Psychology*), his appreciation at the highest level in (German-speaking) Europe is documented, as he is considered the most important theoretician after Riemann (Tan, 2013, p. 2)¹. The only Romanian musicologist who had linguistic and conceptual access to Kurth's writing was Gheorghe Firca, who is credited with having defined his contribution to international musical thinking (Firca, 1986, p. 44).

Ernst Kurth will remain in history through the theory of energetism. The phenomenon is based on the gestaltist concept, to which is added Schopenhauer's idea of will and the Freudian notion of the unconscious. The three ideas determine Ernst Kurth to analyse the process of musical creation and discover three levels: 1. will, expressed as kinetic energy, as uninterrupted flow, as living power of music, 2. the game of psychological tensions determined by moving forces of the unconscious and 3. the acoustic manifestation, sound (Bent & Drabkin, 1998, pp. 83-84). At the moment when the three levels are coordinated, there results a line possessing energy and coherence. The dynamics of this line are propagated from the kinetic energy of the melody and from the potential energy of the harmony determining movement through the tendency of the leading tone (*Die Grundlagen des linearen Kontrapunkts*, 1917). Based on the concept of potential energy of the harmony, Ernst Kurth will be the first to explain chromatic harmony, the dynamics of altered chords in Romantic music, especially by analysing some fragments of *Tristan and Isolde* (*Romantische Harmonik und ihre Krise in Wagners «Tristan»*, 1920). Bringing the point of

¹ The quotations from Ernst Kurth's *Musikpsychologie* included in this study have been selected from the mentioned doctoral thesis (Tan, 2013).

view of psychology closer to the area of sonic language, Kurth's energetism will make an important step in the process of understanding the working ways of musical matter.

Musikpsychologie is opposed to the "psychology of sound", the independent study of its perception, as the "music and sound are regarded as proceeding from the composer's being and not from outside" (Kurt von Fischer, *Grove Music Online*). That is why it is very important to understand from the outset that Kurth's work is not scientific in the spirit of the rigours of the discipline, i.e. based on experiment, but rather philosophical, with pronounced anteriority in German idealist philosophy. It claims Schopenhauer, Feuerbach and especially Dilthey and Bergson as its sources, rather than the rationalistic psychology that formulates conclusions out of the unmediated character of experience (Tan, 2013, p. 35). The commentators of his work also related him to I. Kant, as Kurth uses the German philosopher's vocabulary and ideation (for instance, the theoretician repeatedly claims that sound is not a "thing in itself" – "Ding an sich"). A connection to phenomenologist Sergiu Celibidache is apparent: "Sound is movement. Sound is vibration" (Celibidache, 2012, p. 14).

2.3. The musical image in Ernst Kurth's thinking

Defining the musical image with Kurth is a discursive process, as the essence of the sonic phenomenon for the German thinker is movement. "As a principal problem, the question emerges of whether motion can appear as an *image* and then as *afterimage*, where, at the same time, the word *image* may not have the meaning of visual impression (e.g., as the basis of a transcription) but rather, in a more general psychological sense, **of a simultaneous realisation of entire, yet temporally flowing contents**" (Tan, 2013, pp. 143-144).

At the end of his argumentation, the author concludes that "the transformation of motion into «image» is a **basic psychic function** whose outcome is to be recognised from various angles" (Tan, 2013, p. 147). Thus, as opposed to the Gestalt psychologists, who formulated a general theory of perception in order to fundament the transformation of the temporal flow into spatial configuration, only using music as an example and remaining at the elementary level of observations, Kurth is the first to integrate the Gestalt theory with music.

Stimulated by Kurth's thinking, Pascal Bentoiu extrapolates on the idea of image, constituting a system in which the image is decomposed down to its extrapsychological strata (the structure, updating, configuration) and analysed as a defining unit of musical development, a process supported by a multitude of musical examples (Bentoiu, 1971, pp. 20-63).

<p>1. Stages of knowledge</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ initial synthetic perception▪ decomposing the image (analysis)▪ recomposing the image <p>2. Extrapsychological strata</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ structure (score)▪ updating the structure (interpretation)▪ configuration (mental pattern) <p>3. The features of the image:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ dense – rarefied▪ continuous – discontinuous▪ fixed – mobile▪ concrete – abstract▪ subjective – objective

Table 1 Pascal Bentoiu – The system of the musical image

3. The primacy of (creative and receptive) musical awareness before the physical laws of sonic material

3.1. The *afterimage* phenomenon

More than the phenomenon of perceiving musical images, which is continuously proven in our experience as listeners, readers of the volume „Gîndirea muzicală” [Musical thinking] are surprised, maybe antagonised by the fact that the mechanism of every sonic parameter is explained as a psychic function and as a function of memory. This in a context where the issues of the musical language were already being studied systemically and rationally!

Bentoiu departs from Kurth's concept of the *afterimage* (a prolongation of the image) to formulate as follows: “the recorded sonic element [...] tends to extend (for us) its existence beyond its objective limitations. It's like a sort of vibration of the spirit (or: in spirit), independent of the actual acoustic one. We surprise here a probable psychological grounding of the possibilities of musical chaining of any sort and of composing isolated elements in complex images” (Bentoiu, 1975, p. 49).

The minute continuation of the perceived sonic image is debated on not only as a phenomenon of the audition but also as the functioning of sonic matter in compositional thinking: “harmony as potential phenomenon also exists in the purely melodic dimension. That psychic reverberation [...] which commands to a large extent the logic of melodic chaining gives birth essentially to a harmonic phenomenon” (1975, p. 92) Thus, the theory of constituting harmony as a vertical projection of melody, acutely important for the understanding of meta-tonal intonational systems developed by contemporary compositional thinking can also take into consideration the psychological-philosophical arguments.

Ernst Kurth is closer to phenomenology, concentrating the demonstration on sonic becoming: “The progression of motion is a psychic reality of its own formal content, which creates a residuum in memory as an *afterimage*. [...] Such residual hearing, which further operates unconsciously, achieves significance not only for simultaneities but also for the development of successive parts, certainly (albeit not solely) for the retaining of starting chords and with it, **the development of the sense of key**” (Tan, 2013, p. 144).

3.2. Psychic energy – rhythmic pulsation

Bentoiu's most evident relation to Kurth is featured in the explanation of the rhythmic concept based on a new parameter – **Pulsation** – a notion that defines the experience of the rhythmic evolution during audition. Rhythmic pulsation – a temporal reality superior to durations and cells – secretly binds the various sections of the discourse. In Bentoiu's formulation, pulsation is that “temporal unit, which the psyche installs to command a rhythmic flow and by relation to which it interprets any actual appearance. [...] The concept as such is energetic in nature rather than arithmetical. It does not envelop an objective temporal mode, but the tendency of our spirit to constitute (and follow) the rhythmic progression in an active state, somehow on the run – rather than in a state of observant passivity” (Bentoiu, 1975, p. 51).

Bentoiu's merit of having underlined and exploited the phenomenon of rhythmic pulsation – the easiest one to apply in musical reception but also in defining the styles (let's consider both European classical music and the diverse world music, jazz) is all the greater since it was not taken over from Kurth. The German theoretician develops his argumentation in the direction of proving the existence of psychic energy – a phenomenon which is separate from that of the physical forces (gravitational, for instance). Here is a moment from this discourse: “The effect of all psychic forces, their typical courses and forms of impression arise at once in the *object* of music, in all manufactured phenomena, under which the tonal matter lies. These are displayed openly, from the smallest forms to the interpretation – i.e., from their effect on us and from the psychic events in us we reconstruct the psychic occurrences in it.

However, the existence of a force, the experience of all tension forms, etc, is ultimately only given and verified through introspection” (Tan, 2013, p. 108). It is impressive that introspection, the analysis of states, experiences during audition are brought up as fundamental arguments.

Bentoiu quotes Kurth only in relation to the compositional styles based on uniform pulsation and symmetry. Thus, he mentions the concept of *Willensenergie* – energy (concentration) of the will – and continues – “which the great theoretician recognised as one of the fundamental features of classicism” (Bentoiu, 1975, p. 61)

To the same extent as in the case of the musical image, Pascal Bentoiu develops systematically and enriches the idea of the “psychic reflection” of the sonic fact. The specificity of musical thinking, in Bentoiu's vision, derives from the psychic effect of reception at the level of every sonic parameter: “what kind of truth is musical judgement searching to find and to display: an exterior, physical one (he was referring here to natural resonance, n.n.) or an interior, psychic one, which it should attempt to express as convincingly as possible?” (Bentoiu, 1975, p. 81).

4. The constitution of musical thinking as a logical mental activity operating with “phonic identities” on the axes of time and space, psychologically/metaphysically connected through the formula “spacio-temporal continuum”

The relationship between time and space in the process of composing, performing and listening to music represents the philosophical core of Pascal Bentoiu's conception. Without explicitly relating to idealist philosophy, the author's judgements betray his adherence to Kant's system, in which the two coordinates are forms of the spirit cumulating intuition, sensuousness and the intellect. They are *a priori* pure forms independent of experience, in which, however, the facts and their (artistic) expression are subsumed (Hrubaru-Roată, 2014, p. 6). When he is trying to define the space of music, the author calls it the ideal, mental space which imposes a metaphorical musical terminology: “melodic line”, “overlapping of lines”, “the arching form”, “chordal densities”, “orchestral thickness”, “the extension of phrases”, “intervals” (Bentoiu, 1971, p. 15). They are metaphors enabling a transfer from musical temporality into a dimension of virtual, psychological space.

The idea is also debated upon in Ernst Kurth's *Musikpsychologie*, next to the other two phenomena of music – sonic matter and the energy of movement. “Only in the *height* [the vertical] dimension [or pitch space] can we allow tones to move freely up and down, here and there; in the *width* [horizontal] dimension there is no reversal of motion, since in reality this is a temporal process: a backwards move as happens in external space does not exist” (Tan, 2013, p. 129).

By adopting this point of view, Bentoïu will develop the reasoning by applying it to bilateral symmetry in music, which can only be figurative, with no correspondent at the level of reception (another issue ignored by the contemporary study of music).

Comparing Pascal Bentoïu's conception with Ernst Kurth's *Musikpsychologie* has evinced both the undoubtable filiation and the Romanian theoretician's substantial contribution to the development, as well as to the reconfiguration of the psychological direction of understanding music. His merits in this ambiguous field of situating the musical phenomenon can be summarised through the following ideas:

1. realising a system of approaching music by extrapolating the idea of musical image;
2. launching the idea of psychologically connecting time and space through music (or in music), a unification expressed through the defining formula of **space-time-continuum**;
3. imposing the act of sonic perception as a norm of musical thinking:
 "The natural tendencies of connecting irreducible elements belong to our spirit, not to the material. They show up when (and only if) very many concrete experiences have gotten us used to the possibility and frequency of some links" (Bentoïu, 1975, p. 82).
4. the extension of the idea of primacy of reception in treating the style and phenomenon of creation:
 "The internal criteria of the work can only be searched – at a first stage – in ourselves, in us the receivers rather than in the artistic object" (Bentoïu, 1973, p. 48).

5. Involuntary synchronicities of ideation

The studies of German musicology in the first two decades laid the basis for the research of cognitive psychology and musical aesthetics in the second half of the 20th century. For instance, Leonard Meyer, in his works – *Emotion and Meaning in Music* (1956) and *Explaining music* (1973) – resumes and develops the gestaltist theory, according to which music is produced and perceived according to universal laws of *cognitive functioning of the human spirit* (Nattiez, 2005, p. 26). In his first and best known volume, Leonard Meyer relates to the writings of one of the experts in Gestalt psychology: Kurt Koffka (the only psychologist of the movement, out of the German émigrés of the 1930s, who had published in English: *Principles of gestalt Psychology*, New York, Harcourt, 1935). Among Koffka's principles, rules of perceiving form as a whole, Meyer only applies three: – *The law of good continuation*, *Completion and closure* and *Weakening of shape* (Meyer, 1956). The American teacher uses the same path as Bentoïu, creating the link between music theory and psychology, proving, at the same time, the possibility of nearness between

the formalist conceptions on music and the referential or expressionistic ones. To a similar degree as Bentoiu, Meyer also brings the music lovers' perspective (with their preference for emotional conceptualisation) closer to the experts' (with their predilection to conceptualize formally). What is truly significant is that Leonard Meyer's book is analysed and commented upon in multiple writings, is included in the history of musicology and musical aesthetics; moreover, it represents a point of departure for lectures in musical semantics taught at American universities.

6. Applications in musical analysis

Pascal Bentoiu's musicological thinking did not generate explicit application in the Romanian musicology of the following decades, but entered the general process of educating music specialists, an idea resulting from the consistent quotation of his theoretical works in the bibliographies of the most diverse musicological studies. Only after 1990 can a certain development direction in musical analysis be correlated with the theory of perceiving the whole through musical image, an idea that we will later dwell on.

The concepts and the works forming the basis of Bentoiu's books were, however, applied in Western Europe and the United States. The first consequence of the gestaltist theory is the appearance and development of a new method of analysis – Schenker's method, which capitalises on the synthetic, space-like perception of time, using the techniques of reduction. Understanding tonal works, their profound, essentially harmonic structure was advanced spectacularly through Schenker's analysis.

After the era of the essentially positivist linguistic structuralism, the psychological orientation would be recovered at several levels. One of the capitalisations on it is proposed in Fred Lerdhal and Ray Jackendoff's work *A Generative Theory of Tonal Music* (1983). The Authors realize a methodological synthesis, combining Schenker's principles of reduction with the analysis of the (rhythmic, melodic) temporal structure. In the spirit of Gestalt psychology, Fred Lerdhal and Ray Jackendoff "argue that the organisation of the visual field in perception provides an analogy with musical understanding that is at least as good as the analogy with language" (Scruton, 1997, p. 189). This is how maybe the most important law of musical analysis is stated, that is correlating the surface structure (linguistic in nature) with the psychologically phenomenological deep structure.

A sign of awareness of the importance of the perception of totality before the analytical process, expressed by Valentin Timaru (1991, pp. 64-77), author of the most significant treatise on musical forms and analysis in Romania (Timaru, 2002), is the introduction of the notion of musical articulation, signifying a complete and/or unitary section of the form. Musical articulation does not only reflect the evolution on the conceptual and terminological plains

in the methodology of analysing temporal organisation, rather it is objectified in the semiotic cut-out of any sonic work, irrespective of style (Vasiliu, 1999). Thus, one of the methods of analysis developed in Romania, which resurrects the same principle of connecting the external temporal-linguistic form with the internal space-psychological one capitalises on the principle of the musical image stated by Pascal Bentoiu.

At present, the most significant direction of refreshing the Gestalt theory through cognitive science applied to music is being developed in world musicology, as the relationship between psychology and the art of sound, between the phenomenon of knowledge/perception and the science of music is being established through computerised modelling (Leman & Schneider, 1997).

7. Conclusions

Published in the early 1970s, Pascal Bentoiu's theoretical works are both scholarly and personal in drafting a new mode of thinking on the musical phenomenon. At the time of their publication, the writings of aesthetics and musical aesthetics in Romania were limited to a few names and to extremely different titles: Tudor Vianu (*Estetica*, 1934, several editions), Dimitrie Cuclin – *Tratat de estetică muzicală* [Treatise of musical aesthetics] 1933, George Bălan – *Sensurile muzicii* [The senses of music], *Muzica, temă de meditație filosofică* [Music, a topic for philosophical meditation] etc. (mid-1960s). While not being planned as scientific studies, *Imagine și sens*, 1971, *Deschideri spre lumea muzicii*, 1973, *Gîndirea muzicală*, 1975 reflect the author's fundamental readings, some of them mentioned in the texts. Thus, we find out that Ernst Kurth's *Musikpsychologie* is joined by other huge titles of German musicology: Carl Stumpf's *Tonpsychologie* (1890), Hermann Erpf's *Form und Struktur in der Musik* (1967), Nicolai Hartmann's *Estetica* (Romanian translation, 1974), Theodor Adorno's *Philosophie der Neuen Musik* (1949/1958). Despite this cultural and scientific ascendancy, Bentoiu's works denote freedom, courage, an adventurous spirit, being conceived as essays, in the spirit of the motto in *Imagine și sens*: "J'abomine les doctrines et leurs impertinences" (Debussy).

Upon reassessing Pascal Bentoiu's musical thinking, it is not only his appreciation as a particular capacity, generating ideas without a past and a closed future in the cultural space of his life which is revealed to us, but also (much too late, unfortunately), his integration with the first line of reflection on music in 20th century Europe. The huge development of the psychology of music, with its various applications on the analysis, aesthetics, semantics, from the Gestalt theory of the 1920-1930s to the cognitive musicology at the beginning of the new century emphasizes once more musician Pascal Bentoiu's universalist spirit, his exemplary ethical position before artistic truth and its psychologically human component. The destiny of Pascal Bentoiu's writings in

musical aesthetics causes us to reflect on the historical rupture provoked in Romania by Communism, which destroyed the world of humanistic culture by isolating the source of the great ideas – a drama felt by several generations and, after the cultural development in recent years, a loss not to be recovered.

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