

CAC Brétigny

The Weavers

14.01—07.03.20

Press file [1–20]

Contemporary art center of
national interest
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Xavier Antin
in collaboration with
Julien Jassaud and
Camille Pageard

Opening
Saturday, January 18th,
from 5:00 pm

Curator: Céline Poulin

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The Weavers, by Céline Poulin

More than an exhibition, “The Weavers” is an experiment, the temporary outcome of a project launched almost a year ago by Xavier Antin, an artist-in-residence at CAC Brétigny. A text-producing machine, a political experiment, and an arrangement of sculptures in space at one and the same time, “The Weavers” reflects the turning point Antin’s work took several years ago. Fueled by a range of readings and the artist’s grounding in several disciplines, Antin’s practice initially grew along two lines of development, experiencing the production processes of visual and scriptural machines, while also reflecting on the narrative potential of forms. This latter aspect takes shape around a pre-existing story that is linked to the sociopolitical questions of production and is embodied in formal creations, whether images, sculptures, installations, or publications. Antin also began to produce objects, which spring from his research into the industrial manufacturing processes of images and writing, which become themselves the supports of a future story. The narrative is freed and left up to the viewer, the interpreter of the work.

Interpretation and authorship are patterns that run through Antin’s growing body of work and in “The Weavers” these recurrent themes are given a new development. Brought together in the CAC Brétigny exhibition venue, a group of sculptures equipped with AI forms a community that is both a political ecosystem and the site of an experiment in collective writing. The programmer Julien Jassaud, the art historian and publisher Camille Pageard, and the artist himself configured Antin’s sculptures to interact with each other according to preprogrammed scripts that are nevertheless fairly elliptical; the pieces will thus produce throughout the run of the show a narrative made up of several voices. The book that will result from the exhibition will be a transcription of these exchanges, that is, seven weeks of daily discussions between the sculptures, which are called *, **, /, ¶, {, ∞ and). The programming of the sculptures anticipates as far as possible the materiality of the text and the voices it represents. The intention of the writing dissolves and takes shape between what is determined by the tuning of the writing machines, the quotations they draw from a collection of works that allow them to learn French, and the language interactions taking place between them at that particular moment.

It is the group of works itself that answers to the name *The Weavers*, a reference to workers in the textile industry, who have historically been linked to the development of industrialization and the long struggle to improve society and the lot of the working class (the canuts in France, the Luddites in England, etc.). But it is also the name of the weaver bird, an avian species that lives in large groups and is innately able to weave an elaborate nest. Existing at the intersection of a working group and pseudo-organic entities, the sculptures converse by following several scripts that touch on such notions as empathy, memory, and the economy. While their collective and individual identity is a work in progress and will eventually be determined through writing and exchange, different programmatic and material elements serve to define them. Concretely, each sculpture is encoded to act according to philosophical as well as pragmatic directions, which are in a way, and only partly, represented by the structures

and materials making up the pieces. So it goes for a cast bell decorated with hands, a small conveyor belt enclosed in an aquarium, and a sham quantum computer. Thanks to the exhibition, viewers grasp the allegorical dimension of Xavier Antin's work along with how the artist articulates together the group of signifiers, signifieds, and referents he manipulates.

Céline Poulin

Curator of the exhibition and director of CAC Brétigny

Biographies

Xavier Antin (1981, Paris) works and lives in Paris. Studied in graphic design at the Ecole nationale supérieure des Arts Décoratifs in Paris and the Royal College of London, he first worked as an independent graphic designer, and then progressively migrated to an exclusively plastic practice. His work has been showed in many places among which: the Salon de Montrouge, Résonnance Biennale of Lyon, the Triennial of Milan, the Cneai (Chatou), the Parc Saint Léger (Pougues-les-Eaux) as part of Hors Les Murs, FRAC Île-de-France, Villa Arson (Nice), La Halle des bouchers (Vienne) and CAPC (Bordeaux). In 2012, he presented "Learning with errors", his first solo exhibition at the Crèveœur gallery, followed in 2014 by "News from Nowhere" and "An Epoch of Rest" at MABA (Nogent-sur-Marne) and at the Palais des Beaux-Arts in Toulouse. where he was interested in the heritage of the writer, designer and utopian William Morris. His last solo exhibitions in France and abroad include the Crèveœur Gallery, BF15 (Lyon), Spike Island Art Center (Bristol), and Aloft-Fondation Hermès (Singapore). He is presented by the Crèveœur Gallery, Paris.

Camille Pageard is an art historian who teaches at Ensba Lyon. His teaching focuses on the history of art, edition and contemporary poetry. His research is currently focused on poetic writing and politics. He has published several texts in journals and collective publications. After being a member of <o> future <o> (www.f-u-t-u-r-e.org) from 2014 to 2018, now, he co-directs the publishing house, Même pas l'Hiver with François Aubart. He was co-publisher of the Liverpool Biennial Contemporary Art Catalog, *A Needle Walks into a Haystack*, with Mai Abu El Dahab and Anthony Huberman (2014) and collaborated on *Intrus sympathiques* with Urs Leni and Olivier Lebrun. He has worked with Jean-François Caro on translation of two books by David Antin, *Essais sur l'art et la littérature* and *parler aux frontières*, respectively published in <o> future <o> and Vies Parallèles in 2017. A European Research Fellowship allows him until 2021 to work on the sociologist, activist and writer Sicilian Danilo Dolci.

Julien Jassaud is an artist and programmer. After the ESTP, he studied at the École nationale supérieure des beaux-arts in Paris and the Advanced Institute of Art Media and Sciences (IAMAS) in Japan. He mainly works in the design of games, their rules and their parts, and toys with which he tries to articulate the infinitely small and the infinitely large. As a programmer and technician, he collaborated with many artists such as Christophe Lemaitre for CNEAI and Confort moderne, Aurélien Mole for Passerelle Centre d'art contemporain, Marlies Pöschl for CAC Brétigny, Fayçale Baghriche for MAGCP, and Mercedes Azpilicueta for CentroCentro in Madrid, Museion in Bolzano (Italy) and CAC Brétigny.

Interview with Xavier Antin, by Émeline Jaret (June, 2018)

Émeline Jaret: In your work you articulate an idea of sculpture that, in a way, defends a conceptual dimension but at the same time is thought out in its confrontation with technology. This reflection began with a connection to the book-object, when you were a graphic designer. Indeed, in a text from 2013 [Emmanuelle Lequeux, “Xavier Antin : la réappropriation des moyens de production,” *Le Quotidien de l’Art*] you are described as a “conceptual graphic designer” and your work as “conceptual design.” What do you think of these definitions?

Xavier Antin: I suppose that for her the expression was a way of connecting with graphics and design, because of course I was working as a graphic designer at the time. What particularly interested me was designing books, because they were the result of a fairly complex production process and because, in a way, they contain it, they tell its story. To make a book means, first of all, finding a form that can dialogue with the contents—it’s almost like editing it. But it’s also about choosing a mode of reproduction and distribution that extends the discourse, that defines an attitude or constitutes a kind of commentary. I’ve always had the feeling that a book was essentially a concatenation of all these moments of production. In that sense, it is a sculpture whose apprehension is not limited to its form. What can be read and seen are all the stages that brought it about, but also all the things connoted by those silent choices and what they refer to. That certainly conditioned my reading of conceptual art, which is fairly processual and media-based. The culture of design has an essentially programmatic dimension. To design means to draw with a design on something, to produce a series of operations that I can describe with the goal of obtaining something, like a conceptual protocol or a score. Making a book was, for me, above all a way of inventing a space where I could play with a set of parameters in order to say something that is not totally inscribed nor totally formed but is located in the connections that are created.

ÉJ: In that sense, your graphic productions are the first steps towards the artistic practice that you have been developing over the last few years, at the heart of which is this relationship with technology. This often seems to translate into sculptures whose concern lies beyond their materiality, in which the form is, in the end, secondary. This is where you show a way of thinking that connects with post-conceptual issues.

XA: In fact, I think current technology, or at least the way we experience it, has a lot in common with conceptual artists’ urge to dematerialize. In a way, technology seems to have tangibly granted a wish that was formulated in the 1960s and ’70s. Because, in the end, the art that I think of as conceptual is not so much an art of language as an art that engages with the material and remains material, while trying to escape from that and find its limits. Because we are in the field of art, the question of the object does not go away, otherwise it would be pure language, and therefore more like poetry. And it is there, precisely in that idea of rubbing up against the material, that I see a relation between

technology, IT and conceptual art. IT, generally, is hardware that conducts electricity with the aim of transmitting, not energy, but information. In order to use it, we have constructed languages whose specificity is that they are effective. A programming language is a language that is meaningful only when it is executed, when it tends towards a form of materialization. Beyond that, today we can all see that the results of these operations are no longer confined to the virtual, that they constantly inform the real, just as the real informs them.

ÉJ: So you make a connection with conceptual art via this desire for an operative language?

XA: That's one thing, yes. This idea of an operative language makes it possible to relate conceptual protocol to an algorithm, say. *A Wall Drawing* by Sol LeWitt is, just like an algorithm, a series of instructions that you have to execute step by step, without necessarily knowing where it is going, so as to end up with a drawing by Sol LeWitt, in which you are only the operator. In programming, IT creates a material relation to language that did not really exist before. And while this may have been pre-conceived in the 19th century, it was from the 1960 onwards that IT really began to grow and started to become a factor in our societies. It may not be a coincidence that, at the same moment, artists, tired of objects and wanting to get away from them, gave shape to what we call conceptual art—just like Fluxus and the development of performance, which in those days were part of this desire to break free of the material. It should also be linked to the emergence of cybernetics and information sciences in the early 1950s, which were interested more in connections than in objects. What I mean is that, for me, all this fits into a societal context. I am thinking of a piece by Douglas Huebler that I saw in some publication but whose title I can't recall. It's a photograph of a mountain, maybe a postcard, on which a triangle is drawn. With this he put a short text describing the relation between the mountain, the reader and himself, who drew the triangle. The geometrical form of the triangle implies and symbolizes this relation which is at once spatial and temporal and which, in addition, is a relation between media, between a publication, a marked photograph and the reality of the mountain. In a word, I think it demonstrates fairly well this idea of wanting to create a form beyond its material incarnation.

ÉJ: The fact of dwelling more on relations than on the object, as you say, also touches on the reception of conceptual works. That piece by Huebler works only if the receiver understands the value of the triangle and provides an "adequate" reception of it.

XA: I think it also touches on the relation to belief. The power of this relation is only effective if, as the receiver, I believe that Huebler also thought this by design. I need to believe in the authenticity of his artistic approach. In a way, it's the same with the photographs of Richard Long: when you look at one of his photographs in which the compacted grass forms a line, you have to believe that he made this line. It's a belief in the documentary value

of the image that you're looking at. This relation of belief is not mystical but is located in the other person's authenticity and engagement. I need to believe that it's really effectual, to believe in this material and mental relation. That is also what technology has made tangible. It implies a constant back-and-forth between proof and necessary belief in the reality of operations that are invisible and incomprehensible. For example, when I see a solar panel, I have to be able to believe that what I am looking at is a fully active machine that is in the process of producing electricity, even though it is a perfectly static object that looks more like an abstract image than anything else. These are relations to contemporary technology that we have all taken on board, but it's still a kind of rationalized belief, because in the end I don't really know what's going on in the depths of the solar panel. I take something of the same approach with historical conceptual works: I need to believe in the work's agency, to believe that the artist is in effect there and that he has followed his protocol. It is a rationalized belief but also subjective because it is linked to what I as a receiver know about my own culture. To come back to your question of reception, it also depends on a set of relations. In art, things are put before us with a kind of freedom, an almost democratic openness for which reception is said to be "open," when in fact it is conditioned by the whole of the art world, itself made up of criticism, evaluation, judgment; it is inscribed in a field of human relations and in relation to a certain historical reading.

[...]

ÉJ: [Your setups] are closed systems, linked to one another on the inside, but interacting with their external environment. It's also something that is central to the new direction taken by your work, with sculpture-machines directed by artificial intelligence the mission of which is precisely to function in relation to the exterior.

XA: At the moment I'm working on two distinct projects that produce different relations with the interior and the exterior. And there is this more long-term project I'm preparing, which consists of a community of intelligent machines engaged in a tangible dialogue with a view to inhabiting the place where they happen to be. The way they function is somewhere between an ecosystem, an economy and a political community. In parallel, there is another ensemble of sculptures that don't interact with each other, but between a speculative economy and the activity of human beings. I'm currently working on pieces that will be visible in the Fondation Hermès exhibition space in Singapore in late 2018 and will then be redeveloped for an exhibition at Galerie Crèvecoeur, Marseille. These machines are operative sculptures connected to the internet that make money by validating transactions in bitcoin. It is this relation to dehumanized work that interests me, but also the fact of doing something that is problematic in the art world, that is to say, making money in public. My machine earns money by operating on an immaterial market and, for me, this money absolutely has to be spent in something that can't be capitalized, and therefore not transformed but really spent. In Singapore, every time it attains a certain sum, flowers

will be ordered from a local florist and a deliveryman will deliver them to the exhibition space. These flowers will be put on the attendant's desk and will be replaced only when the necessary sum has been attained. This system fluctuates to an extreme extent, i.e., the flowers may be replaced every day or may fade and perish. The interest comes from this notion of expenditure, of speculation, of relation to today's economy, which is to a large extent sustained by nonproductive activities. I recently read *The Accursed Share* by Georges Bataille, which is about these questions and about the fact of considering that classical economic analysis is incomplete. What he calls "the accursed share" is the surplus that is inevitably accumulated by all societies through history, and that they need to spend in order to allow the economy to keep ticking over. This could be the human sacrifices of the Incas or programmed obsolescence in our consumerist society. What interests me, then, is to re-spend, to "burn through," you might say, this money that has been earned, without allowing capital to accumulate. In Singapore I'm going to spend it on flowers, but in Marseille I hope to earn enough to finance activities and exhibitions by other artists. With this project I am taking part, not only in the economy, which today is to a large extent dehumanized, but I am also making my own economy which is grafted onto another economy, that of a gallery. In other words, the gallery will enable me to get my own economy working by paying for the electricity consumed by the machines. That creates autonomy but also allows me to connect with other artists. It is, then, a system that is closed and isolated, while being connected to the outside.

ÉJ: In what you describe, and in what comes out of our conversation, sculpture becomes simply an interface towards a world that is outside it. Do the stakes here lie beyond the sculpture, in its concept and its consequences?

XA: For me, it is above all a game with this conception of objects updated by technology: connected objects, interface-objects, autonomous objects, autonomous objects, between what can be seen and what is played out in an invisible but tangible way, and the relation between the two. Technology and its advances impel me to rethink my practice. I ask myself this question: when the object is above all an interface towards an elsewhere in which the real activity occurs (and we are no longer talking about an imaginary elsewhere), then what does making a sculpture really mean? There is a perfectly simple little sculpture that I made a little while ago, called *a view to remember*. It's a functional Wi-Fi modem from which I removed the plastic envelope and put all the parts back in its cardboard packaging, then I flowed semi-transparent silicon into it (the kind that's normally used to make bio-compatible medical prostheses), allowing the power cable to stay free. The result is slightly translucent, soft block inside which you can make a few electronic elements and the green light of the modem when it's plugged in. With your own phone you can connect up to the Wi-Fi network that it's putting out and that is called a view to remember, but this Wi-Fi doesn't go anywhere. It's not connected to the internet. All you can do is connect both tangibly and psychically to the sculpture formed by the apparatus enveloped in a

jellylike block. This was a first experiment, but the recent advances in artificial intelligence that increasingly autonomizes and automates objects and systems has definitely made me rethink my relation to objects and sculpture. To a certain extent, this can be compared to the way in which painting had to renew itself when the invention of photography questioned or did away with its representational function. Obviously, all these questions were already contained in the conceptual program, but in a way the acceleration of technology has precipitated it and made it tangible beyond an intellectual or poetic relation.

ÉJ: It is here that the conceptual dimension of your sculptures also depends on your concrete relation to technology.

XA: Right, because I think about the relation to technology in terms of this interplay between what is revealed and what is hidden, what is in the order of interpretation and belief. These connections interest me in that there is something that escapes the receiver. They will look at the sculptures and imagine that there is something going on when in fact that may be untrue. I try to understand those kinds of relations other than by producing images of computer “stuff,” which in the end become simple demonstrations of power. But that obliges me to strike a balance between what I reveal and what I hide, in order to keep the sculpture’s poetry. Do I reveal that they are really at work? And if I say so, the receiver has no choice but to take my word for it because, you never know, maybe there’s nothing going on inside this sculpture. In fact, I leave them the responsibility for believing or not.

[Source: Émeline Jaret and Umut Ungan (eds.), *Marges*, no. 27, “Ce que fait le concept à l’œuvre,” Saint-Denis, Presses Universitaires de Vincennes, autumn 2018, 132-140.]

Images



Xavier Antin, *An Epoch of Rest*, Palais des Arts, IsdaT Toulouse, 2014.



Xavier Antin, *Just in Time or A Short History of Production*, installation, London, 2010.



Xavier Antin, *La Dépense avec témoins, Worker (Kevin)*, Crève-cœur Gallery, Marseille, 2019, Image: Jean-Christophe Lett.



Xavier Antin, *The Eternal Network*, Spike Island Art Center, Bristol, 2016.



Xavier Antin, *Wanishing Workflows (des fleurs de Singapour)*, Crèvecœur Crèvecœur, Paris, 2019, Image: Aurélien Mole.



Xavier Antin, *When _i_ met _k_*, prototype (approximation), Crève-cœur Gallery, Paris, 2017, Image: Aurélien Mole.

Agenda

January 18th, from 5:00 pm
Openings

Openings of “The Weavers» and “Tit for Tat” at CAC Brétigny at 17h.
Open to everyone.

Free shuttle is available. Pick up at 5:30 pm at 104 avenue de France, 75013 Paris (the Bibliothèque François Mitterrand metro stop).
Request at reservation@cacbretigny.com

Wenesdays, 2:30 pm and 4:30 pm, and by appointment
Artmaking workshop
“Dessinator”

After looking at the sculptures featured in the exhibition and their exchanges, participants enter the “Dessinator” book factory. The worker-creators make images by following the constraints imposed by their workstation. They try out many original drawing and printing techniques in order to create a book of images that they themselves bind.

From 3 years old. Registration: reservation@cacbretigny.com or +33 (0)1 60 85 20 76.

Saturdays, February 1st, February 15th and February 29th, 3 - 4:30 pm and
by appointment
Family artmaking workshop
“PassGraph”

In this family game young and old draw, transmit and reinterpret the images by other participants. They thus create a collective chain of surprising, funny drawings that they can take home with them.

From 3 years old. Registration: reservation@cacbretigny.com or +33 (0)1 60 85 20 76.

Tuesday, February 15th, at 3 pm, and Wenesday February 26th, at 4:30 pm
Artmaking workshop “Art and Sciences” conceived by Julien Levesque
“Birth of an A.I.”

Participants discover the mysteries of artificial intelligence in a workshop conceived by artist Julien Levesque in partnership with the Siana resources center for digital cultures and the Exoplanète Terre network.

From 8 years old. Registration: reservation@cacbretigny.com or +33 (0)1 60 85 20 76.

The ABCC of CACB, Charles Mazé & Coline Sunier

*, **, /, ¶, {, ∞ and)) are the names of the seven sculptures comprising “The Weavers,” an exhibition by Xavier Antin. Endowed with artificial intelligence, they form a community, at once a political ecosystem and the locus of an experiment in collective writing that will, for the duration of the exhibition, produce a narrative in several voices.

“The Weavers” communications initiative is an opportunity to present these seven characters. The typographic signs *, **, /, ¶, {, ∞ and)) were taken from 21 typefaces produced between 1921 and 2015 and are associated with Claude Garamont, a French typographer and printer of the 16th century. Garamond is the typeface chosen by Antin to compose the publication which will transcribe the daily discussions between the sculptures.

According to the authors and the techniques used over time, these multiple versions of punctuation or mathematical signs vary surprisingly when in fact they are affiliated to the same typefaces, designed in 1592. Similar and distinct at the same time, the 21 versions of the seven signs produce 147 different invitation cards making impossible the “collectionitis” sometimes associated with the ABCC of the CACB*.

*As part of their residency, Coline Sunier & Charles Mazé create an alphabet based on a collection of letters, signs, and symbols from a variety of contexts and time frames involving both CAC Brétigny and the larger territory covered by the art center, as well as artists invited to exhibit their work. This corpus is now embodied in a new typography called LARA. LARA has been activated on each communication supports, which are considered publication and dissemination points for the collection. By associating multiple voices within the same typography whose glyphs continue to grow in number, with writings that are by turns vernacular, institutional, personal, and public, the ABCC of CACB is an attempt to publish the geographic, political and artistic context in which CAC Brétigny is found. The alphabet is online at www.cacbretigny.com/en/lara

“Tit for Tat”, Louise Aleksiejew et Antoine Medes

Louise Aleksiejew and Antoine Medes were invited to produce a three-part exhibition, evolving around the programming cycles of the Théâtre Brétigny: "Si loin si proche" (So far so close, September—December 2019), "La loi du plus fort" (The law of the strongest, January—March 2020) and "Rien ne va plus" (April—June 2020).

Tit for Tat

Cycle 2, 14.01—07.09.20

“Tit for tat!” The expression might spring from the lips of someone accusing another of “having started it,” and therefore of being responsible for a conflict that requires two to last... In this cloud of smoke where feet, hands, teeth and nails are going at it, where an eye (for and eye) and a tooth (for a tooth) are flying to and fro, who indeed started it?

It isn't a question for the schoolyard. Or rather, the fact that it comes up in the schoolyard doesn't excuse it from being taken seriously. Deep within those clouds of smoke, under those circles of stars and sounds of springs, real chairs are being knocked together. What resistance should we mount to the various forms of oppression threatening us, when the voice that taught us that violence doesn't solve conflicts is sometimes the same one that justifies brutality of children among themselves because of thwarted love, or claims that the word of adults cannot be questioned?

If violence doesn't always take the form of either a fist or an insult, it is the same with the solutions we are able to offer. It remains to be seen if they are enough to stop this endless cycle of tit for tat...

Louise Aleksiejew and Antoine Medes

The visual artists Louise Aleksiejew (born in 1994 in Caen) and Antoine Medes (born in 1994 in Mont-Saint-Aignan) have been developing a collaborative body of work since 2014 along with their individual output. Grounded in a reflection on the history of pictorial or narrative representations, in which art history, comic strips, and animation are blended, the work of this artist duo is guided by the drawing they do together. It is a ravenous practice that absorbs, digests, and transforms shared references and mutual borrowings, allowing the two to question the status of the author while renewing the conditions for her or his existence in the era of the digital reproduction of images and their untrammelled circulation on the internet. This graphic output sometimes gives rise to an edition in textile or ceramics, or an installation, in a way of imagining staged displays and presentations that is akin to a page layout. This is seen in solo shows (*Le lac avec des muscles*, Les Capucins, Embrun, 2018), group exhibitions (*Huit heures ne font pas un jour*, Sumo, Lyon, 2018; *Camembert Papanache*, Spatiu Intact, Cluj-Napoca, Romania, 2019; *Le paradigme de l'oasis*, Villa Belleville, 2019), and art festivals and fairs (the Mulhouse Biennial, 2017; *Le 6b dessine son salon*, Saint-Denis, 2017; *Une partie de campagne*, Château d'Esquelbecq, with the OSP Gallery, 2019).

«Tit for tat» is a co-production CAC Brétigny—Théâtre Brétigny.

General informations

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Free admission, from Tuesday to Saturday, 2 pm–6 pm.
 Late openings during evening performances at Théâtre Brétigny.

By RER C:

Brétigny stop. From Paris, train BALI, DEBA, DEBO, ELBA direction Dourdan, Saint-Martin d'Étampes. From Dourdan and Saint-Martin d'Étampes, trains LARA, PARI, DEBO direction Saint-Quentin en Yvelines, Gare d'Austerlitz, Invalides.

From Brétigny station, follow the direction of Espace Jules Verne, take boulevard de la République, continue on Pl. Chevrier, take slightly to the right on rue Danielle Casanova, and at the rotary take left to rue Henri Douard.

By car:

From Paris, A6 direction Lyon, exit Viry-Châtillon, Fleury-Mérogis, then Brétigny center. From Évry, Francilienne direction Versailles, exit 39B direction Brétigny. From Versailles, Francilienne direction Evry, exit Brétigny center. From Étampes, RN20 direction Paris, exit Arpajon-Égry-Brétigny-sur-Orge-Saint-Vrain.

For car-sharing, join the group [BLABLACAC\(B\)](#) on Facebook

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