Cornelia Sollfrank
Winner of the 2025 HAP Grieshaber Prize of VG Bild-Kunst, awarded by Stiftung Kunstfonds

Laudation
Olga Goriunova for the opening on 12 September 2025, Deutscher Künstlerbund, Berlin

Good evening, everyone!
It is my great pleasure to deliver this laudation, appraising and celebrating Cornelia Sollfrank's life-long artistic work and achievement, recognised by the award of 2025 HAP Grieshaber Prize.

The English language is sparing when it comes to praise, and often the most one would get is that recognition is "well-deserved." Cornelia Sollfrank's work spans decades, from the earliest works as part of the group *Frauen-und-Technik* (*Women-and-Technology*) in 1992 to her current exhibition "Nothing comes without its world," and across the formats and modes of action she has engaged, her artistic oeuvre has always emphasized art's work in a social milieu–always political, always in relation to the questions of power and empowerment–and the making of spaces for others to thrive, whether these others are people, ideas, forms or modes of action. In this sense, the body of work Cornelia produced honours collaboration, friendship, and solidarity, which is reflected in the exhibition presented here, and which adds a different dimension to the "well-deserved". The figure of the deserving artist, divinely gifted and hammering away in the isolation of the studio, is here supplemented by working always in social situations, political formulations, with communities, allies, and forces of collective striving. It is this capacity to activate and formulate art and aesthetics as cultural, socio-political interventions, as–always collective–and found in differentiated forms of making, that far exceed the traditional domains of art, that distinguishes Sollfrank's work. The merit of her body of work, which we celebrate today, is hers as situated in the worlds she helps detect, articulate and form. The *well-deserved* goes to Cornelia and seeps through to the networks she created and took part in, the milieus she articulated or hacked into, to collaborators, friends, fellow fighters and thus while we celebrate Cornelia, we celebrate Sollfrank AND (the many collaborators that I can't all list now), which makes it a laudation easier to tolerate without going bright red.

Celebrating Cornelia's work, we celebrate an approach that regards things as historical. This means that there is nothing inaccessible, a priori, unmovable, eternal. Everything is negotiated and enacted and, thus, it is possible for the artist–Sollfrank–to work on changing the conditions for something *else* to unfold, even when the settings of patriarchy, neoliberalism or other forms of power seem so monolithic. Sollfrank's art articulates the mode of aesthetics that is active upon the world, whether this is an organisational aesthetics, aesthetic infrastructuring, or commoning, which may attack established structures, go on to develop in parallel or thrive in an independently carved space.

Before I begin my narrative wandering amongst her works, I want to quote from a little text by Sollfrank which I like very much.[1]

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[1] Cornelia Sollfrank, "Early Influences, Late Consequences or: Why Machines Dit It for Me," *expanded original*, Hatje Cantz, 2009, p. 132.

In the text, she first narrates herself as a girl, a teenager, "The [sports cars] keys were in the possession of others who … snarled at me before driving away saying that I should keep my fingers to myself. Anyway, women and technology."

Then she writes, "…I attended an art academy— which, however, did not prove very useful. … There was also the one or the other computer there. But there was mainly the Old Boys Network there that told me I should keep my fingers to myself. Anyway, women and art, I am somewhat going for the wrong thing."

And then, after all this going for the wrong thing, comes the crescendo, "the general assessment of my work is exceedingly unimaginative and lacking in original ideas ("That is not by her at all—everything comes out of the computer!") This is precisely what it is all about: That which does not look like I made it is by me. That which I didn't make is by me. And everything that I made is not by me."

In this brilliant little text, Sollfrank picks a few threads, and I would say, they are united by a very broad philosophical and critical idea of technology.

- Here is, first, technology as machinery, both industrial (cars) and post-industrial (computers and the Internet). Here, already at this first level, you have networking as both architectures of hardware and software that produce things and also as technologies of relating and relationships. (One immediately recognises Sollfrank's interest in this situation).

- Then if one takes a step back, there is the technology of power, or power as technology. Through which systems, orderings, networks is power amassed or exercised?

- What are the rules, orderings, relations – overall, the technologies of power of art institutions? Of the art world? What are the means, techniques, technologies of artworks? What are technologies – and rules - through which art gets "good" or becomes successful? Let's make them visible. Let's make other ones. (*TAMM TAMM – Artists Inform Politicians*; *Hacking the Kunstverein in Hamburg*, I can list many projects here, including *net.art generator*, etc.)

- What are the technologies of power in patriarchy, or those of making gender? Gender as technology – of dispossession, of specific enforced formation, but it is also of course through countering efforts, other technologies, and their uses that things may thrive. (*Frauen und Technik*, *-Innen, Female Extension, #purplenoise* projects*, performances, re-enactments, lecture performances*).

- What are the legal technologies? How can we intervene here? (*net.art generator* and work on copyright, the PhD research, books, such as *Fix My Code*, articles, videos).

- Technologies are of course organisational – here is mapping, criticising but also mobilising, and creating spaces, organisations, art groups. Technologies of collective forms, of communicative spaces (*Old Boys Network*, *<echo> mailing list, THE THING Hamburg platform*).

- Technologies of the self, of subjectivation, that move beyond possessive individualism, the obsession with one's own, the subject centred by property, defined by neoliberalism –

towards other modes of subjectivation, shared resources, more collaboration, different imaginaries (*Giving What You Don't Have*, *Creating Commons* projects).

In this broadest formulation, Cornelia's work consistently engages with technology, understood in relation to power as it is variously articulated, with technologies of power and ways of countering them. In this sense, Sollfrank's work is always political, even, or maybe especially, when it presents flowers – the Warhol flowers, which, meanwhile, have also become Sollfrank's iconic flowers.

I think this overall characterisation unites different strands of her work, which I will summarise today:
1. Net art, copyright, collective work, and commons
2. Gender and technology
3. Public interventions, infrastructure, and art & politics

Having just said this, I have to add that it is actually impossible to cut Cornelia's work along those lines neatly, as projects start in one theme and travel to another or engage multiple ones at the same time. So, I will talk across these themes, that are now hopefully well framed by the figure of a puzzled and angry little girl destined to be honing the art of making trouble. (This is a title of one of Sollfrank's lectures).[2]

ONE. 1. Net art – but also 2. Gender and Technology, as well as 3. Public Intervention
Of course, seminal projects, which are programmatic for a kind of engagement that simultaneously affects multiple scales are *Female Extension* (1997), and then multiple *net.art Generators* (a series that has been operative since 1998). I start with these because these are the first works by Sollfrank I got to know.

In 1997, the Hamburger Kunsthalle announced a competition for net.art called "Extension" – a virtual extension of the museum. Artists were invited to submit a project that understood "the Internet as material and subject matter" and could not exceed 5 MB in size. As is customary, a competition is expected to result in a winner, or perhaps 1st, 2nd and 3d prize. So, what did Cornelia do? She created *Female Extension* - a project in which she created 300 female artists and remixed websites to create works by them, which she then submitted to the competition. She announced her project at the museum's press conference, where the awardees were to be announced. Where it also emerged that the three prizes were awarded to men.

What a beautiful project! Here is the question of gender, and also of authorship, of what makes an authentic artwork. There is also a forceful critique of an art institution. Did the jury not recognise that the projects are too similar, or simply, did no one look at them, at the 300 no-name artists who all happened to have female names? There was also the story that the museum was very happy to have so many entrants by female artists. And, of course, a somewhat modernist gesture here takes on the collective guise, with an added dimension of the automation of the art generation process, what a piece!

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[2] *The Art of Making Trouble*, DIGIFEM Festival, Theaterfabrik Kampnagel (2019): https://kampnagel.de/produktionen/cornelia-sollfrank-vortrag-the-art-of-making-trouble

Cornelia Sollfrank's *net.art generator*, from 1998 then, which in fact is not one but five generators, numbered from 1 to 5 according to their chronological order, to me, is a logical continuation of *Female Extension*. It is an art work that started as an online software tool, has proliferated into different media and now includes, under the project name *This is not by me,* video, animation, performance, print and painting. In *net.art generator*, the user types in their name (or a name) and a keyword, which the software then uses to do a web search in order to generate a collage. The collage is then archived on the website and if Sollfrank so wishes and she sometimes does, she makes prints of them, signs them as hers/not hers with a sticker which says "This is not by me", exhibits them in a gallery and sometimes sells them.

In which theme would you put these projects? At one level, the work refutes the position of an artist as originator of unique products. In this figure, there are both a trace of divinity and celestial communication of transcendental ideas to the artist, as well as an efficient integration into liberal capitalism, with its questions of production and added value. A peculiar combination of God and Capital all enclosed and practised in the art world. It is an exploration of the logic of the art world, of valorisation, making things articulate their monetary value, and playing with symbolic value. All of these as well are, of course, related to who gets to speak, who gets power, what are the processes of exclusion, and the mechanisms of such exclusion – of which copyright is one.

Layered into these questions of mass, media and digital production and appropriation, thought through art, are modes of work. And next to projects that have a lasting web presence, there are the videos, the interviews, the performances, in the streets and in lecture theatres.

In the project *"This is not by me,"* there are three videos that take an aim at copyright. Sollfrank presents as herself discussing her legal research concerning computer-generated work and joint authorship, or talks to copyright lawyers. And there is, of course, the figure of Andy Warhol, a long-standing interlocutor.

The performative aspect has a major role Sollfrank's work, and her performances are very playful. There is often irony, satire, not necessarily in the "funny" kind of way, but as incongruous bringing together of elements and scales. In 2006, Sollfrank re-enacted Valie Export's dog walking performance, walking a man going by the name Monty Cantsin on a dog leash in Hamburg-Harburg (she in fact, has a whole series of performances, re-enacting early feminist art, *Re-visiting Feminist Art*), and at the ICA in London I saw her lecture performance *À la recherche de l'information perdue*, a technofeminist commentary on Wikileaks and the allegations against Julian Assange). It was a dark kind of fun.

Or, should I have started with TWO, the theme of gender and technology, with the *Old Boys Network*, another project – or a process - in relation to which I first got to know about Cornelia? Which also is and belongs to 1.net art (also the networks and communities), as well as THREE, Public interventions?

Cornelia was part of the group F*rauen-und-Technik* in 1992-1994 who did performances and interactive television shows (for instance, envy-of-penis games, inspired by Freud). She was then a member of *-Innen* (1993-1996). They developed performative interventions and interactive television games (such as the "Narcissism in the media"), and also wrote theory, made installations. Collective approaches to authorship and media-critical analysis were already present then.

The *Old Boys Network* was a cyberfeminist alliance founded in 1997 after a meeting with VNS matrix. They organised the First Cyberfeminist International in September 1997 as part of the Hybrid Workspace at documenta X. Overall, OBN produced three international conferences, as well as various events, publications, performances and platforms.

Today, in times of platform-Internet and platform AI, and when actually, the Internet as an open global network mostly does not work, or is on the verge of non-existence, it's difficult to create a sense of a time when aesthetic work concerned creating communicative spaces, collaborative structures, alternative, independent working methods and technologies through which something could form, come into being, unfold.

I've called such processes "organisational aesthetics", and conceived aesthetics as a machine generating material variants of reality to enable knowledges, practices, and perceptions that constitute themselves and reinforce each other. Organisational aesthetics is not reducible to institutional critique because it starts from before, from cultural, social relations, from unformed –and formed processes–upon and within which artistic work can intervene. At that time, networks, software, hardware created some new options one could work with, integrate with something else, build on.

Now, many people looking back at those times call them utopian. They also say that that kind of artistic practice prepared and somehow was integral to the emergence of what came after – attention economy, the almost total subsumption of all spaces by neoliberal or other forms of capitalism which extracts value from social relations, language, creative impulses, and visuality themselves.

But I think these kinds of work do not necessarily lose their significance simply because of what came after, and do not need to be linked, in some kind of an uninterrupted line of descent, to our necropolitical present. Rather, it can be seen as one amongst many in a long political history, when in specific spaces and periods of time but also in the virtual spaces of ideas and acts, people thought about and created systems of self-governance, of coming to decisions, working together or for others, in ways that rejected the hardened thought patterns that funnel everything lively into deadly forms, transforming and expropriating it. We can take anarchism, for instance, and its critique of the nation state as the concept that appropriates all the love or desire that is amassed in a locale–whether ecological, linguistic, or cultural– for awful ends, with awful consequences. Anarchist forms of organization and action that aim to dismantle such seemingly "natural" concepts and structures have a long tradition. As part of such attempts, we can imagine a variety of organizational forms, including communicative ones, which are all about living well and inventing a good life for everyone.

And what is special about OBN or the other projects, that Sollfrank was involved in and helped shape, such as the mailing list *<echo>* "for art, criticism and cultural policy in Hamburg" (2003), which still exists as the backbone for information on art in Hamburg with 1,600 subscribers? Or *THE THING Hamburg*, "an Internet platform for art and criticism in Hamburg" (2006-2009)?

OBN was much concerned, in the words of Cornelia, with "organisational structure as an expression of feminist principles", whereas *<echo>* is a basic mailman-based list. She says, "Last year there was a call to donate for the admins which was so successful that it was

closed after 3 days because too much money came in. People appreciate the independent infrastructure." And also; "Seen over an extended period of time, the *<echo>* list allows one to understand the repercussions of the participating users' articulations and non-articulations as concrete manifestations of cultural policy developments." In *<echo>* and with *THE THING Hamburg* it is alleged that Sollfrank acted as organiser, moderator, poster, and re-poster, content supplier, but also commentator, irritator, hoaxer, perhaps posting under aliases...

What are these projects and what do they do? These are local but also abstract networks for artists, collaborative spaces, which are also not confined to an enforced locality. They are always communicative spaces, infrastructures –situated, but in which the actors also create situations and situatedness.

Sollfrank speaks about Haraway's notion of situatedness as important to her practice. In this way, Sollfrank's work is profoundly feminist, from "self-organization as young artists to address gender and & tech issues, to cyberfeminism, and later technofeminism ([when] technology is not neutral; technology is a gendered territory), but also include[ing] feminist art history (questioning who defines art and who writes art history)."[3]

Now, we are discussing the projects that are firmly in the THREE, Public Interventions, Infrastructures and Art & Politics.

Here, although I am running out of time, I need to mention at least one project. *TAMM TAMM, KünstlerInnen informieren Politiker* (*Artists Inform Politicians*, 2005–08), which is project – protest. The Hamburg Senate took a decision to provide a municipally owned warehouse in the HafenCity to the former Axel Springer-Verlag board member Peter Tamm for his private collection of militaria and model ships, and also award public funding to the tune of 30 million for the renovation of the warehouse and the exposition of his war-glorifying collection. As Cornelia writes, "This decision caused a great deal of *discontent* among a large number of cultural workers in the city, as Tamm was known for his rightist thinking."
The project Sollfrank came up with was to bring each of the 121 representatives of the Hamburg city council responsible for the decision in conversation with an artist from Hamburg. The contents of the private conversations were left to the participating artists. The documentation of the project consists of the 121 contacts with, or attempts at contact, the members of the city council, and was published in a joint Internet platform founded by Sollfrank.
This new and surprising form of protest, which is really just putting into practice the concept that political representatives taking decisions concerning art and population of artists should talk to that population, caused a massive media campaign forcing the city of Hamburg and the collector to change the museum concept.

ENDING
Sollfrank's material is extremely broad; she has made projects, written articles, edited and written books (most recently, with Felix Stalder, *Contemporaneity in Embodied Data Practices*). Sollfrank has produced a doctoral thesis of artistic research, as well as co-authored the *100 anti-theses* of OBN and the #purplenoise manifestos. She made videos, prints, lectures, and performances. Mailing lists and platforms, infrastructures and

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[3] Quote from an email exchange between Sollfrank and Goriunova in June 2025.

organisations. Actions, spaces for actions and campaigns. Above all, they are unexpected interpretations and interventions of art into the world, broadening what we think the aesthetic register is capable of.

What you can see here, in the exhibition, and also the workshops planned for November about Wikipedia editing and a Mastodon starter pack for the tech*feminist art scene in Berlin under the title *Critical knowledge and communication infrastructure*, continue all of this into the future, now with her exploration of the idea of friendship as a political category for our uneasy times, and, hopefully, beyond them.

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