WOZ
DIE WOCHENZEITUNG

"I decapitated my Barbie"

by January Jirat

The US programmer and artist Addie Wagenknecht says the monopoly of white guys in cyberspace to fight: with feminism, team spirit, punch and humor.

The trauma of the "Full-exactly-seen-becoming": Addie Wagenknecht Installation
"Asymmetric Love" (2013), a chandelier of cameras.
PHOTO: COURTESY OF BITFORMS GALLERY

Edward Snowden, the most famous whistleblower our time would be almost remained an unknown computer. For Glenn Greenwald, the American journalist, to which Snowden turned in December 2012 with its information was not able to encrypt their e-mail communications. Only when Snowden US documentary filmmaker Laura Poitras contacted, secure communication was ensured. She was the key. Without it, the groundbreaking revelation about the global surveillance practices of the US secret service NSA in Summer 2013 had not taken place. In the public spotlight but stood especially Edward Snowden and Glenn Greenwald.

The episode reveals the basic narrative patterns of our digital world: The public actors in cyberspace have kindly white and being male. Which person do you think when you read on your Apple computer a Facebook entry on Wikileaks?

Below the surface it looks fortunately different. There are more and more actors in cyberspace, which challenge the monopoly of white guys. Few makes it so strongly as the American artist and programmer Addie Wagenknecht.

Bill Gates held Ada Lovelace

"The computer world has become only in the eighties to a man's world", Wagenknecht says talking. "Many pioneering achievements in the field of computer development have been provided by women. And for decades, the number of women who were studying computer science, as high or even higher than the number of men. "The turning point came with the introduction of the personal computer. Because this has been marketed very directly to boys and men, so Wagenknecht.

"Computers are something for boys, that was the social narrative that also reached the pop culture soon. In the films of the nineties was always the boy <hacker>, and there were the guys who made war a Gameboy for Christmas. For the girls there were Barbie dolls. "Addie Wagenknecht also has played with Barbie dolls. "I have always cut their hair and pulled her head. Why, I know no more today, "says the 34-year-old. As a result of this funded by the advertising and cultural industry development and the computer game world is dominated today almost entirely of a "male bonding niche". "It is significant that Bill Gates and not Ada Lovelace, who wrote the world's first computer program in the 19th century, the face of our computer history," says Wagenknecht.

The New York-based artist has dealt in recent years intensively with the male dominance in cyberspace - always starting from the question of power: Who is allowed in the public sphere emerge and act at all? Who is allowed to be visible?

"In my view, the dominance of a white and male gaze in the computer world spawned two traumas: the trauma of the non-seen-becoming and the trauma of the whole-just-saw-becoming or of being watched," says Wagenknecht. Women from both trauma are affected, but by no means only. "As for example, the African-American community in the United States. This is in many areas - education, employment, political participation - overlooked, or, rather, discrimination, while it gets above average often targeted by the police and the judiciary "Meanwhile is under the slogan #blacklivesmatter an internationally networked activist movement arose that. social policy standards and monitoring mechanisms challenges in terms of race, gender or religion. "This movement raises an urgent Needful spotlight on how massive these power structures."

The path Addie Wagenknecht has chosen as an artist and a programmer has arisen as a "natural byproduct" of their interests. Even in high school, they have developed harmless computer viruses for fun and those seen as works of art. The computer remained their "natural" work unit, later she studied computer science and multimedia. An art school Addie Wagenknecht was never: "I did not want to be defined or be placed in a specific research or art corner," says Wagenknecht, whose sculptures, installations and paintings are now exhibited in world-renowned art museums.

Her most famous works include a chandelier, consisting of surveillance cameras, a robot that rocks a crib, or animated dildo drones that traverse landscapes. In Vienna they distributed three years ago black bars to pedestrians in Vienna, to protect them from the eyes of surveillance cameras. There are works of art full of punch, which also continue to set on humor in dealing with the balance of power in cyberspace.

Lawyers for visibility

Addie Wagenknecht - motto: "making middle-aged rich men uncomfortable" - is as politically active artist next to the humor on a second weapon: the Community. Three years ago she founded the cyberfeminist collective Deep Lab. This collective belong to seventeen hackers, researchers, artists and journalists. "I was interested to provide a rating based on mutual support environment for experts, a

space to reflect on issues such as privacy, surveillance and anonymity and to develop counter strategies," says Wagenknecht. It is also about gone them to ask the right questions. "Who builds the servers on which store our data? And who programmed the sites on which we build relationships such as Twitter and Facebook? If you build the hardware and the software for it, then you control the culture, you control the online trade, the economy and the government. You have the power to manipulate everything and influence the way you want it. "It is at this point is Deep Lab at.

The highpoint of the cyberfeminist collaboration was a one-week workshop in December 2014 in Pittsburgh, from which various concrete projects and tools have emerged: for example, an SMS can be activated, as simple as possible held manual to install decentralized and secure communication channels. Or a software that converts the pretty unreadable CIA torture report into smaller and usable files that bureaucratic obfuscation language replaced by clear concepts and the report decoded way.

On Deep Lab workshop also new research fields have been filled, a historical analysis of cyberfeminism example or the confrontation with the "data colonization". As such, the general referred to the strategy of the large Internet corporations to connect hitherto little explored regions do not have a public infrastructure, but a private to the Internet. The Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg would not allow free one billion Indians free access to selected online services. The Internet in India would then be no open space more, but a gated community, which is controlled by Facebook.

The various Deep-Lab projects were summarized at the end of the workshop in a great, freely available on the net book. In addition, the collective has released a video that has been created as a manifesto. The message of the video, according to Addie Wagenknecht: "We are the lawyers for the visibility of women and other marginalized groups in our society. And we will stubbornly keep working. "

The House of Electronic Arts Basel is devoting Addie Wagenknecht from mid-September to early November 2016 solo exhibition.