

Singapore's tech-utopia dream is turning into a surveillance state nightmare | Rest of World

By Peter Guest

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On a hard disk somewhere in the surveillance archives of Singapore's Changi prison is a video of Jolovan Wham, naked, alone, performing Hamlet.

In 2017, Wham was arrested for organizing a small protest on a metro train and charged with holding an illegal public assembly. Earlier this year, he was finally found guilty, and offered the choice of an SGD 8,000 (\$5,900) fine or 22 days in jail.

Wham, like the protests he's become known for, is quiet and animated by a kind of contained mischief. Born and raised in Singapore, he has spent most of his adult life as an activist, fêted by human rights groups, but portrayed as a foreign-funded bogeyman by the establishment. He is famous for protests that resemble a kind of performance art in the way they point out the absurdities of Singaporean order; he's been arrested multiple times, convicted of holding a public assembly (on his own) and of scandalizing the legal system on Facebook.

Activism in Singapore is a complex task. The government has been controlled by a single party, the People's Action Party (PAP), since independence.

[...]

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