

**"NEW MEDIA CONFIGURATIONS - CHANGING SOCIETIES? CURRENT RESEARCH
PERSPECTIVES ON SOUTH ASIA, SOUTHEAST ASIA, THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA"**

Panel 5: Converging Media – Changing Practices: What is new about New Media?

Prof PhD Arnika Fuhrmann (Assistant Professor, Cornell University Ithaca, New York, USA)

“Shallow News in Depth”: An Internet Television Intervention in Thailand

Abstract

This paper investigates the relations of new media to emergent political and social formations in Thailand. The centrality of new media to ongoing struggles over the constitution of the public sphere across Southeast Asian locations cannot be overstated. Thus while governments invest extensively into internet control, this realm also represents a primary site of political dissent and challenge to the authority of the state. New media and communications technologies have further engendered novel forms of intimacy, definitions of sexual citizenship, and notions of personhood and collectivity.

Taking the contemporary Thai internet TV program “Shallows News in Depth: Disdaining Your Intelligence” (“Jor Kaw Tuen: Du Thuk Sati Panya”) as its case, this paper investigates how the program’s contentious news critiques dissect current political events and social trends in Thailand. The paper focuses on how the program’s aesthetic and performative choices relate to its political content. It is particularly interested in how Shallow News uses slapstick, jump cuts, cartoon visuals, and other elements from Thai popular media to produce nuanced critical news analyses and make incisive political interventions.

Shallow News’ internet platform, its savvy commercial negotiations as well as its particular brand of humor have allowed it both to evade controls imposed on other media and to engage a broad audience spectrum. My interest lies in how Shallow News’ specific register of humor and its deployment of aesthetic means allow for intervention into a political impasse: how does this program and its hundreds of thousands of viewers allow for the formation of alternate, radically critical platforms beyond the ‘red’ and ‘yellow’ camps that currently dominate Thai political life?

I further draw questions of critical content into relation to the show’s turbulent history of reception: the paper pays special attention to the program’s ‘paradoxical’ history of censorship and promotion and to the relation between Shallow News’ digital platform and the show’s remediation. Ultimately, the paper is interested in how considerations of the deployment of new media aesthetics, platforms, and economies present challenges to the ways in which political dissent and freedom of expression have been studied in Southeast Asia.