YouTube is a mess. YouTube is for amateurs. YouTube dissolves the real. YouTube is host to inconceivable combos. YouTube is best for corporate-made community. YouTube is badly baked. These are a few of the things Media Studies professor Alexandra Juhasz (and her class) learned about YouTube when she set out to investigate what actually happens within new media settings that proclaim to be radically “democratized.” Why is what could be a tool for political change used mostly to spoof mainstream media?

Learning from YouTube, the first video-book published by the MIT Press, investigates these questions with a series of more than 200 texts and videos—“texteos.” In scholarly fashion, it has ten “YouTours” composed of sequenced texteos making lengthier arguments. Unlike other books, however, video holds much of its meaning, many authors—students, YouTubers, and other scholars—share its (web) pages, it is written in a relatively informal voice, it cannot be printed and will appear only online, and content can and will be added. YouTube is its subject, form, method, problem, and solution.

The user can navigate the book by following the YouTours, using tags, or searching. Navigating the book, users will encounter Juhasz “pushing around Henry Jenkins”; holding an online off-classroom class (“what a failure! and it’s all YouTube’s fault!”); being interviewed by Fox News; considering “bad video” and the possibilities of effective political video; and much more.

Alexandra Juhasz is Professor Media Studies at Pitzer College, Claremont, California.

This video-book is the pilot project of an initiative of the Alliance for Networking Visual Culture funded by the Mellon Foundation. It was selected for publication, peer reviewed, and copy-edited by the MIT Press.