TED—TV for Lateral Thinkers

Burned out on unscripted reality television that pits the anonymous against the mean-spirited? Had enough of talk radio that bills itself as "informative" as it tries to hammer flat one side of your open mind?

On a different screen there's an international symposium that offers "inspired talks by the world's greatest thinkers and doers." It's called TED, short for Technology Entertainment Design, and its programming derives from an annual conference whose sole purpose is to gather "Ideas Worth Spreading." The list of past presenters includes people like James D. Watson (Nobel laureate for DNA research), Amy Tan (*The Bonesetter's Daughter*), Jimmy Wales (Wikipedia), Norman Lear (Archie Bunker and others), and Sergey Brin and Larry Page (Google). You can tune in by turning on Firefox, Explorer, Safari, or Opera and then typing in www.ted.com.

Although a ticket to the 2009 TED conference in Long Beach, Calif., is $6,000, it's already sold out. Fortunately, the organizers broadcast past and present programming online. The site has more than 200 speakers, and the categories range from technology to business, arts to global issues. You can watch on your computer or download the presentations as video or audio podcasts.

Listings

In "Open Source Economics," Yochai Benkler explains how collaborative projects like Wikipedia and Linux represent "the next stage of human organization." According to the professor, who is codirector of the Berkman Center for Internet and Society at Harvard University, changes wrought by the networked information environment "go to the very foundations of how liberal markets and liberal democracies have coevolved for almost two centuries."

Internet sociology a little too heavy? Then check "Five Dangerous Things You Should Let Your Kids Do." Gever Tulley suggests that kids should own a pocket knife, and you should encourage them to deconstruct appliances and play with fire. And "The Amazing Intelligence of Crows" is presented by a hacker who built a vending machine for these favorites of Edgar Allan Poe.

The list for this intellectual variety show wanders all over, from lectures to performances—"Great Cars Are Art," "Lightning Calculation and other 'Mathemagic,'" "Sliced Bread and Other Marketing Delights," "The Tragedy of Suburbia," "Can We Domesticate Germs?" and "Toys that Make Worlds."

Erin McKean, editor-in-chief of the *Oxford American Dictionary*, has an amusing talk—"Redefining the Dictionary." "The book is not the best shape for the dictionary," she explains, "[because] paper is the enemy of words."

If you want to spend some time away from rerun TV, take a left at TED.com. ■