

The Tim Ferriss Show Transcripts

Episode 52, 53: Ed Cooke

Show notes and links at tim.blog/podcast

Tim Ferriss: Hello, ladies and gentlemen. This is Tim Ferriss, and welcome to a special episode of The Tim Ferriss Show. I have my dear friend, Ed Cooke, on the line. I grabbed him last minute for reasons I shall explain. He is a grandmaster of memory among many, many other things. At the ripe old age of 23 is when he turned that corner. Ed, where are you at the moment and what are you up to?

Ed Cooke: I am currently sitting in the office where I work, which is a converted Methodist Chapel in Bethnal Green, London. It's Friday night at 10:15 p.m. So like while people with adequate social lives are currently running around town and falling in love. Yeah, I'm here and I'm talking to you, Tim. I'm delighted to be here.

Tim Ferriss: I wanted to actually share with people what we just talked about, doing an audio check before we began recording, where you gave the best answer I've ever heard to a very mundane question which is . . . tell me what you had for breakfast or what did you have for breakfast? Feel free to improvise, but what was your answer, roughly?

Ed Cooke: It was a sound check so I was allowing myself a certain embellishment, but yeah, I was just relating how I had a couple of partridges [SP], a few sausages, some salmon...

Tim Ferriss: Kippers, I think there were.

Ed Cooke: There were kippers. They were peat-smoked kippers, four boiled eggs and two poached eggs, that kind of thing. I actually don't know the English king [SP], but I have a friend who occasionally at breakfast, he just sort of chugged a lot of cans of beer [SP]. I'd be like, "What are you talking about?" He'd be like, "I'm just thinking about what Henry VI had for breakfast every day."

Tim Ferriss: I should give some background for folks who may not realize that you and I first connected several years ago. You were tremendously helpful with The 4-Hour Chef since that was a book about accelerated learning disguised as a cookbook, which, surprise, surprise, ended up being very,

very confusing to almost everybody in the universe who came across it. There were aspects of it including chapters focused on mnemonic devices and other types of memory techniques where you were incredibly helpful. First of all, thank you very much for that.

Ed Cooke: My pleasure.

Tim Ferriss: I was having trouble piecing together how we first came in contact. How did we first meet? I should also, just as context for folks, point out that Ed is in the UK. I'm drinking highly caffeinated tea; he is drinking wine. This is intended to be like a pub conversation.

Ed Cooke: Yeah, so please filter any interpretation or any remarks to the context of a ripe old English pub. We came into contact through my dear friend, Greg [SP], with whom I co-founded the company. Greg was then a PhD student at Princeton, and I think you came to do a couple talks, he got to chatting with you. I think it was through that, that we met.

Tim Ferriss: That's right. For those who are not familiar, Ed is co-founder and the office that he referred to is related to his company, Memrise, memrise.com, which we'll come back to. The concept of being a grandmaster of memory . . . it's not really concept; the qualification. What is entailed in becoming a grandmaster of memory?

Ed Cooke: I'll explain that first, and then we can discuss a little bit just how stupid a term it is, and what a marvelous device for either ending a conversation or beginning one at a bus stop. A grandmaster of memory is a kind of title given out by the World Memory Boards Foundation. Basically you have to be able to remember a 1000-digit number in an hour, a pack of cards in under a couple of minutes, and then 10 packs of shuffled cards in an hour. It's three parts of the World Memory Championship which determine whether you can get this title. It's a great title.

Tim Ferriss: It's a very compelling title.

Ed Cooke: The number of times I've been in a kind of losing situation in a night club, you know, out danced . . . I'm not a symmetrical person, Tim. Sometimes my [inaudible] understates the value of conversation with me. Anyway, [inaudible] he's like, "What's your problem?" I said, "I'm grandmaster of memory." He's like, "Okay. Let me buy you some champagne and then we can talk further about this important qualification." Yeah, it's a very silly concept. The cultural context from which it emerges, namely, people

doing competitive memory competitions, I think is awesome and fascinating.

In 1990, the world record for memorizing a shuffled deck of cards was 149 seconds, which if you could memorize a pack of cards in under 3 minutes and show that to somebody, they'd be very astounded and would think you were cheating. It's not obvious to anybody that the human mind would be capable of that. I remember I was very proud 10 years ago when I first broke a minute, I said, "Oh my goodness. This is extraordinary." Anyway, the world record now is 21 seconds for the memorization of a shuffled deck of 52 cards. Obviously people presumably haven't got like four times faster brains than they did only 24 years ago. The reason for it is, is that there's been this competitive culture in which there's an objective measure of mnemonic speed, if you like.

Over the last 20 years, people have, on each year, done their best to outgun their rivals in their memory, and then very openly and freely shared the techniques and hacks they've used to be able to optimize these fairly arbitrary but nonetheless interesting processes of memorization. The result has been an absolutely continuous linear increase in the amount of stuff people can remember across a very wide range of disciplines in a particular amount of time. This is true of names and faces, random strings of words, crazy abstractly generated images, all the stuff people are being able to think up to test people's memories with. As a result of this community of competition and sharing, people have got almost 10 times faster now in the course of 24 years, memorizing things when it was already very impressive in the first place. I think that's why it's an interesting thing.

Tim Ferriss:

Is that a function of prize money, prestige, social media? I'm very curious about the dynamic that has produced that progress because if you look at mixed martial arts for instance, UFC. You look at the first 10 UFCs, compare the competitors to the competitors, say, 30 UFCs later. Compare those competitors with those of today as the prize money has increased among other things. I think it's primarily the prize money. You see a very quick evolution in terms of whether it's selection bias or just a larger pool of competitors that has gone from, say, top 20% of athletes in the United States to top 10 to top 2 and you're just looking at mutants in many cases now; not to detract from their . . .

Ed Cooke:

[Inaudible] diminish.

Tim Ferriss: Yeah, right. Not to diminish their gentlemanly demeanor and technique in training. But what are the contributing factors to the increases in speed and capabilities?

Ed Cooke: Of the options you've offered up there, you can . . .

Tim Ferriss: You can choose other ones, yeah.

Ed Cooke: I was talking about social media. The total Twitter followers of competitors of the World Memory Championship is 25 or something. It's not money. There's no real money on it.

I suppose that perhaps in 100 years' time if people did still care, the current state of memory sports would be considered still extraordinarily immature. It's like cricket in the 19th century in England where people were kind of working out the basics of technique. In that case historically I believe it was the invention of the steam train which allowed cricket to get good, because teams from further apart in the country could visit each other. The information and press was delivered quicker. There was a sort of general increase in the talent pool who were competing with each other. It was just possible to even travel and sort of compete.

People from all over the world can do it. It's easy to hop on a plane, so that's a contributing factor. I think fundamentally the motivation is it's just so cool winning or doing well in the World Memory Championships. It's purely a kind of slightly comic form of status, I think, which drives it as well as the fact that of course it's phenomenally interesting to take something which every single person there would never imagine they were capable of doing and push it and push it and push it to see how well it can be done. It probably helps that it's quite precisely quantifiable, like the 100 meters or whatever else.

Tim Ferriss: I wanted to grab something you mentioned and come back to, which is what the average person is capable of doing, or what most people are capable of doing. Perhaps you could recount for folks the outcome of one of the experiments that you and I did, also involving your team which was related to The 4-Hour Chef. We wanted to incentivize people to try to memorize a shuffled deck of cards. I was hoping you could talk a little bit about that and the outcome. A lot of people listening will probably assume like, "A thousand digits, I could never even remember a phone number. I couldn't remember 20 numbers." They underestimate what they're capable of doing, so I would love if you could just perhaps recount the results of the experiment that we did related to the book launch.

Ed Cooke: Yes, that was a fun thing we did. At Memrise, we launched a competition with you, Tim, at the same time as the launch of the book. It was a \$10,000 prize, I believe, munificently supplied by you, Tim.

Tim Ferriss: Yup, that's right.

Ed Cooke: I know. I spent it on . . . anyhow, we started this thing. I had this great engineer in the office called Tank, who built this amazing system which was basically a standard memorize course where you would learn to associate with each card in the deck a person. I'd actually propose a group of 52 people where there are ways of changing them to be people that you wanted to have in your set of images. The basic technique underlying this is the cards are boring and unmemorable, sequences are boring and unmemorable. How do you remember them? Well, you turn the cards into images which are more memorable.

For instance, Tim, you are slightly more memorable than the 3 of hearts, say, because you have characteristics, you have a personality. I can imagine you in detail, I can imagine you interacting in situations, so you're inherently more interesting to my brain than a mere card or figure or anything like that. This is kind of an incredibly incoherent explanation, but I'll keep going.

Tim Ferriss: I think you're doing great. The assumption that I have: personality is a bit of a stretch but besides that, you're doing fine.

Ed Cooke: I didn't say that it was inadequate or admirable. Anyway, the basics of memory techniques is that our minds love certain kinds of things, so we're very, very good at remembering spaces. We're very, very good at remembering things which attract our interest. A rule of thumb I'd like to use, and I think it should grab your attention if you were wandering down the street, is the kind of thing which will grab your attention and your memory. Will something grey and written in legal language grab your attention if you're walking down the street? No. But will kind of a small elephant being attacked by lemurs attract your attention? Yes. Will a spectacular naked woman attract your attention? Perhaps. Will a bollard do so? Probably not.

It's the same thing when we perceive within ourselves, which is to say when we remember, the vivid interesting emotion grabbing things . . . again, Tim, I'd like to clarify [inaudible] vivid emotions particularly. I mean, I'm just taking these things up. Anyway, these things grab our attention.

The art of memory is basically transforming information, which is not interesting into forms of information which are interesting. For a pack of cards, the technique which I use myself and which is very popular in the memory community, is to take each card and then rote associate a person with it. If you go with person association, you can do this very quickly. It takes like an afternoon for a normal person to associate with 52 cards 52 people. Having got that code, which is a bit like a language really; you think of it as a language. If I say, "Hola," to you, you'll say, "Hi, Ed." You just learn that arbitrary association between some letters, hola, and a meaning, hi there. It's just like with the cards. It's like a very, very small language, 52 words. When you're going through the cards, you imagine the people you've associated with the cards instead of the cards. Already it's massively more interesting.

The second thing you do to tackle the sequence, which is difficult to remember because it's just a bland sequence, is that you string these people standing in for cards into an amusing story. You might be getting in your doorstep and there's Tim Ferriss and he's desperately trying to impress the Queen and she's not impressed. Slightly down the road, we've got the Pope and he's chatting with Ed Stone [SP], and these people standing in for cards. Because Tim is trying to impress the Queen, it's kind of funny. There's a kind of colonial perverse humor vibe or whatever. It's just more interesting than 3 of hearts, 7 of spades. Anyhow, that's the first technique.

Going back to your original question, we put together a course on Memrise which helped people make these associations. People would play on that for an hour, and they build up this vocabulary of ways thinking about cards so they're just more interesting, more vivid. It attracts more emotion and they're just generally more memorable. And then we've proposed a technique very famous in the memory community, which is to sort of imagine going around a space. Actually for your blog, Tim, I remember embarrassing myself on my local street in a snowstorm trying to wander around demonstrating how to place images in space. I was like, "Oh, look up there, theres..."

Tim Ferriss: I remember that very closely. Yeah, some people did want to search for that, Ed Cooke with an E on the blog to find that video.

Ed Cooke: Anyhow, we did a competition so people learn the technique and they could practice with this cool system on the website. What was astonishing was that a few thousand people entered. Most people basically couldn't be

bothered and give up quite quickly. Basically anyone who did persevere and actually just learned the images and then started practicing, many of them got really good really fast. The girl who ended up winning it whose name is Irina Zayats, she's a fabulous young lady, a programmer who lives in the Ukraine. I tried to recruit her for Memrise actually. She was sort of only dimly interested.

Anyway, she did it in about four days. She just sat on a computer and practiced the thing. Within four days, she basically nailed it and could do it under a second. At the Memrise Christmas party that year, we piped her in live on Skype to prove that she could actually do it and wasn't cheating. It was a party of about 200 people cramming into the church; scenes of unbelievable debauchery, Tim.

Tim Ferriss: Eyes Wide Shut, one of the . . .

Ed Cooke: Well, yeah. It was that, but we've got a chat and better lighting. Anyhow, she just nailed it again live on Skype under the pressure. We told her, I think, that that was how she could actually win the prize. That's just a nice example. It is very doable. I had another interesting experience where I went to the US Memory Championship, I think, in 2005 with my friend. This has been a sort of diversion but I'll tell the anecdote.

I've got this friend called Lucas. He's from Austria, from Vienna, who is an absolutely hilarious and wonderful fellow who . . . before we'd done this, we'd been contacted by Channel 4 and they were like, "We're so interested to hear how memory athletes train." I've always been a bit suspicious, to be honest, with the concept of self-hacking. I've never been quite clear whether that's something I really want to do. Anyway, I said, "We like to get to high altitude and go into complete seclusion." I was kind of channeling an image of Ricky Hatton, the boxer, going into the mountains and sort of going through some . . . anyway, they were like, "Awesome."

Anyway, Lucas and I were headed up into the mountains. We put on a sort of comedy show and this can be found on YouTube, but a kind of image of what a mental athlete's training program would look like, lots of sort of press-ups involving claps and competitive boxing style mutual recitation of binary numbers and stuff. For the sort of 12 or 13 people in your listenership who think that . . . Fuck it, I'm going to an anecdote with [inaudible]. Okay, so we went to America and we went to the US Memory Championships. It was quite hilarious.

At that point, non-American competitors were not really allowed to compete, but we were allowed to compete. Anyway, we came first and second by a margin of about times three because at that point the sport was not very well-developed in the US. There was a journalist there and he was like, "Oh my god. You're a geek or a savant." I was like, "No, mate. We're two young lads who've got an enthusiasm for memory [inaudible]." He was like, "But this is impossible." I was like, "No. I'll train you." I trained him for a year and he wound up the next year . . . by the way, I'm a pretty brutal coach. It's a way for me to transcend my own insufficiencies is to criticize others.

I trained him up for a year. He wound up winning the American Memory Championship. Yeah, it was pretty cool. He wrote a book about it.

Tim Ferriss: That was Joshua Foer, correct?

Ed Cooke: Yeah, that was Joshua Foer who's super cool.

Tim Ferriss: Moonwalking With Einstein. Yeah, book did very, very well. It had a great piece in Wired that introduced me to that as well. Sorry to interrupt; not my intention.

Ed Cooke: No worries.

Tim Ferriss: I brought everything to a standstill.

Ed Cooke: I'm actually quite drunk now, by the way, Tim.

Tim Ferriss: Perfect. I was taking aback by your sudden silence, which I mistook for shyness, but I think it's just drunkenness.

Ed Cooke: I was just sort of taking another slug [SP] on the [inaudible].

Tim Ferriss: Oh, nice. I'll have to get you a camel [inaudible] for our next podcast. Just to put things in perspective for folks, it was Irina, the Ukrainian woman?

Ed Cooke: Yeah.

Tim Ferriss: She learned to memorize a shuffled or randomized deck of cards in less than a minute in four or five days. The previous US record, I guess, a few years ago had been 147 seconds or something along those lines?

Ed Cooke: Yeah, it was...

Tim Ferriss: She beat the US record with four to five days of training. Granted, it was an older record but I think that that just highlights what is possible for

people. The question I'd love to ask you is what are some . . . if people have an afternoon and they are not going to necessarily focus on the pack of cards, is there something else that they can do to prove to themselves that they have greater mental athleticism or memorization potential than they've ever thought possible? Is there something else that they can do?

Ed Cooke: They can make love to a beautiful woman in their imaginations without moving a muscle.

Tim Ferriss: Okay. Why would you recommend that?

Ed Cooke: Well, that was a joke, Tim.

Tim Ferriss: Okay, you got me. You're so dry. It's this dry British humor. We're still dragging our knuckles over here.

Ed Cooke: That was a straight out not funny. I suppose the tinkle [SP] of a thought which underlies every joke there is just . . . really imagination, and our capacity to form images just while talking, just while communicating is already extraordinarily potent. The thing which confuses people is like how can you possibly form an image in a second which you then end up remembering five minutes later? The example I'd like to give is that that's what happens in conversation the entire time. If I say to you . . . I might just describe my office to you, Tim. We'll actually test your memory. I know that you're sort of getting on a bit.

Tim Ferriss: I'm getting a little long in tooth, yeah.

Ed Cooke: A little bit sort of doddery. Yeah, I'm going to describe the office. We've got quite a colorful office. I'm going to begin where I am. In about 15 seconds, I'm going to describe to you the sequence of objects I'm going to see and I'm going to make it a bit more vivid by imagining myself as an amusing character leaping around. Let's say that I am...why don't you name the amusing character, Tim?

Tim Ferriss: Amusing... Mortimer.

Ed Cooke: Mortimer. Okay, so I'm Mortimer and I'm yattering into a laptop. I take a bottle of wine right by me and I fling it into the wall where there's a picture of 25 . . . I don't know what they are but let's just say Yakuza in sort of jock straps and tattoos, Japanese men. I have a picture on the wall. I jump around and then there's this hammock. In the hammock, there are two lambs . . . this is not true by the way, but anyway, two lambs eating cheese. You jump over the hammock and then suddenly there's a grand

piano and there's a young man playing Chopin. He's chopping away at the piano. I move over and now there's a swing. I go to the piano to the swing, this Mortimer. The swing is covered in pink roses. If you kind of trace up the swing up the rope, you'll see at the very top there is a model of a rhesus monkey just dangling from the top of the rope. Jumping back down, you land on the kitchen table where four unfortunate Memrise employees are just trying to sort of have a quiet evening in, reflecting on the vicissitudes of life. There by the big AGA, the big metal oven and the metal oven is emitting heat. On the AGA, there is a pot full of spoons.

Okay, so that was an incoherent narrative lasting about 45 seconds, I'm guessing, in which I mentioned Mortimer's little adventure. The first thing I'd say to your listenership is that just merely by listening to that, you followed it, you've formed the images at the speed of talk which is one or two images a second, and you strung that into a coherent mental concept, or incoherent one. You know, I'm drunk [inaudible]. Anyway, you strung it into a coherent mental concept. In a spectacularly small amount of seconds, it's actually phenomenal if you think that it's even possible to follow that.

Anyhow, Tim, we're now going to test you. I'm on my laptop, Mortimer is there and he's looking at the laptop. What happens next?

Tim Ferriss: He grabs a bottle of wine, which is right next to him. He throws it into a picture on the wall which has 25 yakuza in jock straps, with tattoos. I'm having a bit of recency primacy here. After that, I want to say there are two lambs in a hammock.

Ed Cooke: That's correct, yeah.

Tim Ferriss: I don't recall if they're eating.

Ed Cooke: Eating.

Tim Ferriss: Eating, yeah. They were eating cheese, if I remember correctly.

Ed Cooke: Very good.

Tim Ferriss: And then, jumping out of the hammock to a, I believe it's piano after that.

Ed Cooke: Very good.

Tim Ferriss: There was a gentleman playing Chopin, and chopping away at the keyboard, which was very clever of you to use the C H twice, that helped.

From there, we get to a swing, which is covered in pink roses and oddly enough it has a model of a rhesus monkey hanging at the very top of it.

Ed Cooke: Yeah.

Tim Ferriss: When Mortimer jumps off the swing, he lands on a kitchen table where there were four Memrise employees just trying to go about their business and it's very disruptive quite obviously. Next to them . . . this is where I got tripped up a little bit. The AGA [SP] on the stove top . . . I don't know what an AGA is. But there is a pot on top of whatever an AGA is with spoons in it and then the curtain falls and that's the end of the Mortimer Show as I remember it.

Ed Cooke: That's so well done, Tim. Yeah, just to sort of articulate what you've done there. You go on laptop, bottle of wine, yakuza, 25 of them, jock straps so we've wrapped about six items, hammock, lambs, cheese, piano, Chopin, chopping, swing, pink roses, rhesus, jumping off, landing, kitchen table, Memrise employees, AGA even though you didn't know what an AGA was. It is, by the way, this rather marvelous kind of European oven which is basically a one-ton block of iron permanently heated which acts as central heating and as a cooking mechanism. On top of that, there was a pot with spoons.

It's 20 things you've correctly remembered in sequence there just really by a dint of understanding human language, which you have successfully recounted in order. For that, the narrative helps. It gives one an insight into how these aren't in the same way that for instance firing an arrow through a black bird which is flying through the sky is like a skill you almost have to learn on the top of basic motor skills, but you have to learn it very, very specifically. These sort of memory techniques draw from quite fundamental cognitive capacities. It's quite basic.

I did this other thing where I do these things called "memory walks" where you just get a bunch of random pedestrians, gather them together and say, "Okay we're going to learn whatever," the US presidents, the first pharaohs of Egypt or what have you. You just wander around a town for about an hour. Imagine George Washington there. "I don't know who George Washington is, I'm English," but imagine Jaws the shark washing himself tons. You go, "Okay, very good. They imagine that in the window over there." You're going to wander around and with no prior training whatsoever, you can sort of... unlock is too strong a word. You can just

make use of the fairly phenomenal underlying cognitive capacities that you have at your disposal all the time.

It's not a kind of elusive geek skill, fundamentally. It's basically just a kind of cunning use of what the human brain does best, namely process real meaning, imagine interesting things happening in space, and integrate narratives.

Tim Ferriss: I know. It's something that I feel like . . . this actually touches on sort of a deeper inner conflict that I'm hoping you can help me resolve. I'm very indecisive about my sexuality, no that's not it. I wanted to . . . sexually ambiguous, that has caused me a lot of strife. No, that's also not it.

The question is related to utility of highly refining certain memory capabilities. When I was in college, I read a number of books including, I think it's called Your Memory and How to Improve It, it's like the most generic... I think that's at Higby [SP]. It's like the most generic title imaginable for something that talks about vivid imagery.

Ed Cooke: Yeah.

Tim Ferriss: I remember becoming very fascinated by memorizing numbers. I might be getting terminology wrong, please correct if I am. The sort of number consonant system where you're converting the numbers into consonants, you convert those into words, images, and that allows you to memorize long strings of digits. I would place these images around typically my surroundings. I think that might have been a weakness in my method. I would always wherever I happen to be as opposed to a pre-determined route. The only benefit to that method is that when I would play this game with people and I would typically have them pull out a 5, a single and a \$20 bill. I'd have them pull out bills of different denominations and I'd memorize the serial numbers on those different bills.

Ed Cooke: I'm sure you're the center of the party, Tim.

Tim Ferriss: Oh, yeah. I wasn't fast enough to make it really exciting. I was like, "Okay, cool. Give me five minutes." They're like, "What? Okay, this is really boring," but what was really fun about it is I would memorize these numbers. They would be like, "Oh, wow. It's amazing." I'd do them backwards. "Oh, my god. That's amazing." It only took really a week or two of practice to get to that point. I'm so confident that almost anyone can do that. What was fun about having the locations dependent on where I was sitting at the time is that very often I could bump into that person a

week later and say, "Hey, do you still have 5 or that single or that 20? I can give you the serial number and I could remember it because I had so many distinct locations," which was kind of a fun trick. It took a decent amount of effort to get good at that.

What I'm wondering is do you find that there are any particular mental exercises that have a high degree of carryover to other areas or that have more utility than others? There are so many different party tricks that you could develop, or competitive capabilities. If you had to pick one that you think people would get the most out of, is that even possible? Is that a good question? But I think about this because it does take time to maintain a high degree of proficiency with these things.

Ed Cooke:

Right. I wouldn't necessarily recommend to anybody with a rounded social life to get too deep into the number memorization stuff. For me, the interesting memory technique emerges out of a much more general interesting consciousness and sort of the curiosities of having a mind of the character that we have. To the question what is the most generalizable useful concept, not maybe requiring practice that one can draw out of the theory on sort of history of memory techniques. I think I could give two answers.

The first is you remember things which ignite your imagination. We all know this in our hearts. If you're really into soccer or football, as we call it here, you might be a pathetic at school but you might be able to remember something like if you actually added up 12,000 distinct football results, the equivalent of a medical degree in terms of scale of information, it's because you're interested in it. I think a lot of people are kind of embarrassed about the characteristics of their mind, about the things that they have a greater tendency to remember, the things which they feel they need to do to really wrap their mind around a topic. The first thing would just be the things which you find stimulating and interesting, all the things you remember and don't censor yourself in finding what those things are and allowing yourself to experience information in that way. I'll try and make that concrete.

I think that a lot of people will be reading some non-fiction book about economics and it will sort of ignite in the back of their mind the idea that this is actually a bit like their friend, Al, and how he behaves with their mate, Dan, but it's actually officially about US-China relations. That metaphor, that way of comprehending things, that very personal perhaps trivial manner of comprehending things through the filter of one's own

experience gets suppressed leading to boredom and a lack of emotional engagement with the subject matter. To say it succinctly, just back wherever your mind needs to go and endorse it. Ignite interest through imagination; that would be one thing. It's a very un-succinct piece of advice.

The second thing is more succinct, which is just when two things are in the same place either in your mind or on a diagram or in a semantic space, they will get confused with each other. I think the genius of the spatial techniques is the genius of having different context for different thoughts. You touched upon this actually with your own adventures with \$5 and \$10 bills which is where experiences and thoughts are separated. They stand alone, they don't interfere and they can persist through time, but where they are spatially connected in actual experience or spatially connected to within the mind where two concepts just feel very, very similar. When you're thinking about them, you're kind of thinking about them in the same way, they will tend to fuse with each other and then fail to be distinct entities in their own rights.

Just literally separating stuff out in space is incredible, as a general cognitive tip for brainstorming, for resolving arguments, for clarifying emotions in a relationship, anything. Because of this, I've discovered some quite interesting thing about how to design house parties.

I used to have these moments where you have an incredible house party. You talked to 25 really interesting people. It would be a super thing. At the time, you're just flushed with happiness. The next day, the whole thing would be in your mind. It would just be a kind of blur. You'd be like, "Yeah, I recall being in a kitchen and there were some people there. We chatted about stuff." But because all those memories are on top of each other because of the spatial constraints of a house party, you don't really remember all the things that happened. If you can take a house party . . . this is true to any kind of experience. It could be true of an evening out with friends. It's obviously true of road trips. It could be true even of a friendship or a romance or anything else.

If things are kind of spread out through space, if each context or experience has its own place, then they can all live by themselves and it gets a much richer level of autobiographic memory. With house parties specifically I recommend always having three or faces to a house party preferably with a different style, different kind of music, a different fundamental focus spatially, and narrativize [SP] the transitions between

them. Rather than just being like, there's a splurge or a house party and everyone is just getting drunk and trying to chat each other up, instead you have a face where you're being quite posh and drinking champagne and listening to French music. A bunch of people arrive and you're like, "We're now going to eat. We're going to eat on one leg." Then you have a bunch of time hopping around chewing on reindeer or whatever it is. Up onto the rave, it's a rave.

By creating an artificial structure, you end up with a much richer experience. That would be . . . [inaudible], Tim. Two pieces of advice: make stuff vivid and personally interesting and don't censor yourself. And then if you are relating to anything, it could be learning or even just personal experience, find individual spaces for each thing because then they'll survive by themselves and not just merge into the fog of similarity.

Tim Ferriss: Right, blending together into indistinguishability. It's funny when you start to think of the basic programming that we have. That of course has a lot of applications to dating as well. You did mention something in passing I wanted to come back to, which was clarifying your feelings about a relationship. I wanted to know how you think about that because this is a pain point for a lot of people at different points in their lives, or at least the source of anxiety. How do you try to, if this is even the objective, find objectivity when clarifying your feelings about a relationship? Maybe it's just getting a better understanding of your own subjectivity. I wanted to kind of dissect . . .

Ed Cooke: Am I in a challenge?

Tim Ferriss: I wanted to just unpack that a little bit. How do you think about clarifying feelings in a relationship?

Ed Cooke: It's actually quite funny because my girlfriend is called Clara, and your accent on "clarifying". I was like, "[Inaudible] clarifying my relationship. My relationship is with Clara." I'm not sure there's much more I can do. Anyway, I'm not a relationship guru but I'd be happy to freestyle on this because I think it is fascinating and it's a big source of pain. It's not just romantic relationships, it's also creative and personal relationships and relationships with friends. I've suddenly thought about this a bunch because one of the surprising features of adult life alongside not being competent as you always assume you're going to become competent or whatever, but you are actually going to become an adult. Obviously when

you're 18, it's a pretty abstract thing. Aging is a kind of comic encounter with something you can conceptually deny with certain futility.

Anyhow, relationships would be a thing where when you're looking at a person, in some sense you're experiencing the entire or at least that person is the undifferentiated focus of a whole incredibly complex tissue or fundamentally distinct emotions and judgments and attitudes. You find yourself in an argument and you come from an emotion. You come from an emotion which you probably don't perceive yourself thinking like, "I don't feel very happy about what's going on," sort of thing. The tendency is to map that against basically whatever springs into your mind or whatever the person is telling you or what the situation is. This is why someone's late to a restaurant and so you go absolutely mental about it. Of course, it's got nothing to do with being late to the restaurant; it's part of a whole load of other stuff which is not directly the same thing.

For instance, an argument that I've had which turned out to be amazingly stupid . . . now that I actually think about what this argument was about, I'm not sure your [inaudible].

Tim Ferriss: This is good. I want to hear about it.

Ed Cooke: You're going to have to cut this out of the final recording. I'm just going to have to pause and sort of . . . jumping to another topic, one of the fascinating things about language is that when you begin a sentence, even if you sort of have an intimation of how the sentence is going to end up, you've actually got no knowledge of what the sentence's particular formulation is going to be. As you initiate a sentence, you have kind of like, "Oh, there's something interesting to be said with a particular kind of internal mental urge." The words begin to come out and you kind of shepherd in a slightly chaotic fashion to the end of the piece of meaning you had implicitly wanted to emit at the beginning of a sentence but which is not like consciously before your eyes at the beginning. It's like a seed which becomes a tree. The seed contains a tree but the seed doesn't look like the tree or whatever.

Well, a similar thing with anecdotes, you think, "This is a really good anecdote. It's best to tell Tim about this anecdote." Actually the anecdote is not before your eyes. I have to take a quick timeout just to see whether this anecdote is actually good enough.

Tim Ferriss: No problem. If you'd like a respite or a pause, I can ask a few other . . . I might forget to come back to it, so we can also do that. I would like to

come back to it but I could hit you with a couple of rapid fire questions if that would take the pressure off.

Ed Cooke: Yeah.

Tim Ferriss: Okay. When you think of the word "successful", who is the first person that comes to mind and why?

Ed Cooke: I think of the German poet, Goethe, who . . . actually this is a good topic. I'm by the way very happy to return to the previous one because they're both interesting. I'm quite suspicious of the concept of merit. It seems to be like one of the guiding, if you would like, philosophical assumptions of . . . actually especially like Western American Californian culture, that merit is the correct thing to drive outcomes in humans' lives. So if you try hard and work your balls off and you're inherently really talented and you're not benefiting from inherited wealth or whatever, then the success and happiness and whatever else which I suppose are the emotions that is justified.

In fact, Tim, you write books in some sense and you're interested and you develop the concept of improving as a person, of finding powers and talents and possibilities within yourself. This is kind of inherently attractive idea. It's very difficult on the face of it to say actually there's a problem with this. I'm not saying there is, but merit is a fundamental assumption of goodness.

Tim Ferriss: The merit is associated with effort? I guess I just want to define merit.

Ed Cooke: I think the noble concept of merit is associated with effort. It's like if you do something really incredible and you tried really hard, that success is something you deserve. We think of that as morally justifiable, which is problematic for sociological reasons but also problematic for a [inaudible] being some people have the opportunity and situation to express their talents. It's also problematic because you just don't choose your merits and so you might say, "Okay, I don't choose my merits," but actually I do choose them because I trained really hard and I learned about how to improve myself and I express discipline. Again, the underlying capacities which allowed you to find the time to train hard and control your discipline, these aren't things you choose. Almost all of our culture of admiration for people who do really well is based on this implicit moral idea that people determine their own outcomes. Once you kind of begin digging into that, it's not really clear they do.

The second part of that is what are the categories and concepts with which we use to determine merit? I'm always really struck by the fact that for instance in our society there are people who have a level of genius for artistic expression and are the things which aren't commercially valued and therefore aren't really culturally valued except in extreme cases who are earning like £7 an hour working at a cafe. They have a mental world and range of learning and sophistication of perspective, which is enormously rich and obviously comparable and in many cases like superior to, according to a different perspective, someone who's really good at coding and commands \$200,000 a year and has high status and so on and so forth. In that case, there's a kind of capitalistic [SP] reason for ascribing merit to one person over another. You change the perspective even slightly and the merit flips completely. The whole concept of merit does depend on these background thoughts about what is valuable which is often problematic.

Tim Ferriss: How would you flip the perspective with the artistic barista versus the [inaudible]?

Ed Cooke: One different paradigm would be towards richness of experience. Which people's mental lows would make for a better novel? I'm not sure if that's something or whatever. You could say effect on the environment. Someone who's super dynamic and successful [inaudible] will tend to fly around and create capital and spend the capital and generally heat up the world economy which will generally heat up the world. We have no way of tracking the externalities of human action either in terms of karma, the emotions of people who are surrounding and coming into contact with them, or in terms of environmental impact. We can't track them and even if we could, we might not. These aren't metrics which we can tune into. Because they're metrics we can't tune into, we just assume they don't really exist and they have no real influence on A) changes in behavior, but B) what as a society or culture we find easy to admire.

Tim Ferriss: How did Goethe make you think of merit?

Ed Cooke: It's just like, "Jesus, man. I'm just asking a simple question and you go yattering on sort of a half-baked left-wing nonsense." Okay, Goethe was just like . . .

Tim Ferriss: I know you hate Ayn Rand, it's fine. What do you think of Goethe?

Ed Cooke: Goethe is really cool. As a teenager, he's sort of falling in love the entire time and writing poetry [inaudible] and so on. At the age of 25, he writes a

novel which is extraordinarily brilliant about the troubles of young Goethe. It's this wonderful story of a young man who falls in love and it doesn't really work out so well. As in the side, Goethe wrote this book by locking himself in a hotel room for three months, imagining his five best friends on different chairs and then discussing with his imaginary friends different possibilities of plot and so on and so forth, which is an example by the way of that spatial separation I was talking about. In one's own mind when it's somehow inherently boxed in and constricted and by imagining in different spatial locations different perspectives and then iterating an idea or novel, in this case, through perspectives he was able to give himself five perspectives separated out and give himself a multidimensional playground for creating a work of art, which by the way is an awesome technique.

Anyhow, he does that and then he starts writing the best poetries. He's already the best prose [inaudible] in the history of the German language. Generally that's how [inaudible]. He got appointed at the Weimar Republic as a kind of poet in residence but then just got really interested in those other stuff. He started redirecting the construction of the canal system and doing various other stuff, and doing lots of inventive things. Then he gets into basically administering human affairs, and he becomes very good at that. At the age of 39, he basically falls in love for the first time truly . . . maybe it was something before. Anyhow, he just disappears one day. He's got this very prestigious, important position. He's kind of like the mayor of Weimar effectively and then he just pisses off to Italy just leaving a small note.

Basically he runs around, falls in love with lots of beautiful people, writes some of the best sexual erotic poetry ever written. Meanwhile, he's becoming . . . comes back, becomes incredibly interested in Newton's theory of physics which he thinks is appalling and doesn't capture the mystery and beauty of color at all, so he writes a theory of color, which is still an amazing fount of incredible goodness for philosophers and stuff about the phenomenology of color perception and how shade and context and meaning influenced the character of color.

Meanwhile, he's writing Faust, the famous play, his greatest work. He completes that in his 50s but hasn't lost energy at all and goes through about three or four totally different styles of poetry. By the time he dies at the age of 82-ish, he has become really interested in Eastern culture.

Did I forget to mention that he has got this deep aesthetic vision of science and our relationship to nature? He comes up with basically what's the theory of evolution. He studies plants and human . . . there's this particular there which at the time justification for human's differences from the animals which I think was called the intermaxillary bone, some random bone in your jaw. It's amazing how we try and distinguish ourselves; opposable thumbs, language, humor, consciousness or intelligence. At that point, it was the intermaxillary bone and he actually did some dissections of animals and young humans to show that this bone was present in both. It fuses later in life, and therefore it's not the basis. Therefore it can be missed. But humans and animals are fundamentally the same. He talks about plants and the similarity of plants, the efflorescence of a flower with the way the human cranium bends around and links up with itself.

He's just cool. He's expressive. He's incredibly independent. When Napoleon invades, I think he was living in Frankfurt at the time. When Napoleon invades Frankfurt, everyone else is sheltering in their houses and he was wandering the fields looking for evidence about the color pink for his theory of colors. He's totally transcending the local context.

Anyway, he was interested in all this stuff. He's passionate and intuitive. He is a genius, which helps, but he produces a body of work and a set of perspectives which are just fundamentally life affirming in a way which carries through the ages. I actually got into Goethe...

I was travelling around, at the age of 18, the world, which is what people in England do between high school and University. In my coat I just had Goethe's aphorisms, his short little thoughts in my pocket. I read and reread this book.

It's actually had quite a fundamental perspective on my life because these are his little snippets of wisdom on almost any imaginable topic, and all of them are brilliant. There are things like the company of women is schooling in good manners, or boldness has genius, power and magic. Ones you don't remember in their precise form but which nonetheless acts as little micro filters for interpreting reality.

Anyway, he's a big influence on me. One of his quotes actually is something along the lines of, "There is nothing so depressing as someone who is heroic being praised by somebody who isn't, because when we praise people, we put ourselves on a level with them." I was actually just

trying to think of a quote which related to this situation and so here I am praising Goethe.

Actually as I'm describing Goethe, I'm kind of channeling a bit his general awesomeness and feeling a bit better about myself. By the way, just as a general concept, that phenomenon of how a memory can influence perception is the fundamental reason why I think it's still worth knowing things even though we can look them up. By looking everything up, we give away and divest of the central flow of our consciousness, genuine richness. It's by being able to recognize the difference between 20 different birds that you don't just perceive a bird, you perceive a particular variety of bird and what on earth is it doing around here at this time of year? It must be lost. Perhaps the migration pattern has been fucked up by global warming. It turns pure data into connection with the meaningful world, and that's what memory does. That will be my general justification for remembering things.

Tim Ferriss:

I like that. This is something that I also grapple with just as I strive to be the master of this tool that is technology and not the tool of the master [inaudible] technology.

You mentioned two things about Goethe that I wanted to dig into a little bit. You mentioned passion and intuition, and you can revise that, but those are two of the characteristics of Goethe that you pulled out. One of the reasons that I reached out to you very much at the 11th hour yesterday to see if you wanted to chat and catch up and just record because I thought it'd be fun for people to listen to is that I've been having a bit of a tough time with medical issues related to Lyme disease and other things, and have felt a little down, in a bit of a slump. I find that you always strike me as very . . . this could be an illusion, so feel free to disabuse me of this notion. In a very excited, very passionate, very energized . . .

I'm wondering if that is something that you feel you've always had intrinsically or if it's something you've developed. If the latter, and maybe it's a combination, how do you strive to encourage that type of state? What are the things that contribute to your better moments? There are a lot of fucking questions in one. I don't have alcohol as an excuse.

Ed Cooke:

I do for my slurring [SP] nonsense of this end of this Skype call. First of all, I'm sorry to hear about the medical stuff and the dip of enthusiasm. That's undoubtedly tough. Second thing, no I'm not always really happy about stuff. It's funny, like doing a company has been an amazing journey,

full of the highest highs and the most execrable horrifying lows. I guess it's just life really.

You start a company, everything starts like, "This is going to be absolutely incredible. Do something amazing. Everyone's going to love it and it's all going to be beautiful." And then it turns out to be just like a much more complex human process than that, and you have breakdowns in relationships with people you love, and you have decisions you make where you subsequently realize that they were the wrong decision and it caused a lot of people some pain. You have successes which are wonderful, but which are compromised by the fact that they weren't where they should have been.

Anyway, of course like anybody else, I have access to the full range of goodness and badness in the human experience obviously. I am quite keen on life though, Tim. I do . . .

Tim Ferriss: I can sense that. So I'm curious...

Ed Cooke: I suppose also I get my energy from the world and other people rather than internally. I'm very uninterested generally in supposedly scientific assessments of personality and so on and so forth. I think the reductive impulse is demeaning to humans. I'm also probably quite worried what I'd discover if I were to look into it. But I am an extrovert. I did read one thing in my studies of Cognitive Science, which struck me as fascinating piece of self-knowledge which is that introverted people tend to have a much higher internal level of energy, so that proactive interaction with their environment isn't so necessary to keep them rewarded and interested and... for richness. I am undoubtedly extroverted, so I absolutely love and gain huge energy from interacting with people and so on and so forth. That's kind of a personality thing.

Regarding passion, this might connect with a few interesting issues, but I think . . . I suppose I'm a dick and so I hate doing things which bore me.

Tim Ferriss: Wait. Did you say you're a dick?

Ed Cooke: Yeah. Almost everyone in life has to slop it up and just get on with things. I have a quite visceral [SP] emotional reaction against being bored. That does influence things. The other thing you touched upon there, which I think is such a good subject is intuition. Because the process of rationally justifying to yourself your action is incredibly slow. Full of grayness and complexity, and generally it's sort of 5% efficient process of moving

forward in one's ideas and beliefs. You're like, "Oh, we should really do this on Memrise," or, "I think this girl is the person I want to marry." If you allow rationality into this, you end up with a situation where all the energy is going in the wrong place. It's like, "But on the other hand, is she really going to get along with me in old age? What kind of person am I really looking to connect with?"

You could double question yourself to death on most things. When life is really, really good, one isn't pissing around going, "Should I turn left or right out of the door today?" You end up as existential boredom's [SP] ass stuck between a million possibilities and never really doing anything. Whereas when things are going really well, you're just like, "This feels right. It might be wrong. Don't give a shit. Let's go." That is so energetic.

This is actually something . . . I've really had a journey in this within Memrise because my intention with it actually isn't at all with helping people remember more effectively which is the kind of thing you might do to a computer chip. That is an element in something much more interesting which is like helping people feel like a genius or helping people love the world they're learning about or helping people just get pleasure out of their minds and the richness [SP] of their consciousness in learning. I think it's probably true in almost any profession. In a startup, you've got this thing where you've got the push and shove between what happens in one month's time and what happens in 12 months' time. A lot of the time you're like, "Yeah, this idea we've had would be absolutely incredible and would make people feel like geniuses, but on the other hand, it's not going to move any metrics for two months. It sounds a bit irresponsible.

In the early days, for instance, I had this idea of what we should . . . we're fundamentally like a language learning site. I had this idea that we should all get on a bus like a converted double decker bus and just go around Europe, a lot of coders, designers, the whole team, and just go on a fucking road trip around Europe. It would just be incredible. I just made the best idea ever or something. We'd have learned so much about language and it would have been incredibly fun, diverse, interesting experience. It would have been a wonderful way of getting PR and the rest of it, but on the other hand, and this is where rationality came in, what the hell are you doing? You're supposed to be doing your startup. You're in a bus. You're driving around Europe. Where are you going to sleep? Exactly what function does this have for the product? There are a million other things come in and you're like . . . that was an example of where intuition

was thwarted by kind of banal self-incriminating rationality resulting in, I'm almost certain, a less interesting product and less fun.

Tim Ferriss: You bring up a really interesting set of questions. This is something that at times I do better with, at times I do more poorly with. I've tried to, at various points in my life, increase the speed with which I make decisions. If a decision is reversible and non-fatal, then I find my life is generally much better when I just do exactly what you mentioned which is left/right, who gives a fuck? I'm going right, it'll be fine. If it's not, I'll figure it out later. Making these types of reversible decisions as quickly as possible so that you don't have a lot of cognitive burden and you're not so stuck up your own ass all the time.

In the case of the bus and the business, let's just say, how do you balance the intuition, which at times can be an irrational exuberance with the prefrontal cortex calculation?

PART 2

Ed Cooke: Yeah, yeah. Well that's the question. That is the question and it's not a question I have an answer to.

Tim Ferriss: Right.

Ed Cooke: But I assume it's something to do with the...

Tim Ferriss: Goddammit, Ed, why did I do this interview? I'm just kidding.

Ed Cooke: Yeah, it's pathetic, isn't it? By the way, before I suppose we're quite far into this. There are two things, by the way, we must come back to. One of which is how you think about merit. How you think about merit and the other one of which is Burning Man, because I went to that this year and it's the most perfect example of any institution I've ever seen. It's also a sublime exemplar of memory techniques put into the outside world. So anyway, so those are two little thoughts which we must come back to. But where were we?

We were, yeah, and so I've got no idea about the intuition thing, but I think, and I'm basically learning from my girlfriend who is a more spiritual-connected, intuitive person than I am by account of disposition and native structure, so to speak, who can come to a discussion, and this

might get back to our kind of point about relationships. Fundamentally we're like calm. Where normally your mind is like [makes noise]. That's normally mine.

Tim Ferriss: That's actually the best description of my mind I've ever heard. Right there.

Ed Cooke: Yeah, and it's kind of rubbish isn't it? You know, well, one wants to become a didgeridoo, like the [makes noise]. But unfortunately you're just like, "Oh, fuck. Oh, maybe I'm a loser. Oh, no. I should really," you know?

But by the way, so one thing I quite enjoy about our friendship, Tim, is that you're quite good at coming up to rational conclusions and implementing them, and I'm not. Earlier this week I was like, "Jesus Christ, I smoke the whole time, I drink lots of wine, I should [Inaudible] out. I'm going to start doing yoga." Even yoga's even something which I find fascinating and interesting, rich. I think it's like a fundamentally profound system of thought which connects autonomous rhythms with the body's capacity of movement and the mind. I don't have enough good things to say about yoga, but I never fucking do it. So I was like, "Okay, Jesus." I was like, "Jesus. I've got to go do something, I've got to, I need to be healthy." I said, "I think I'll do some yoga."

So I went down to the yoga thing and then I paid, they had this big, great deal -- Twenty-five pounds for 10 days of consecutive sessions. I was like, "Genius. This time I'm going to do 10 days of consecutive sessions." Went to the first one because I was there and did it. It was great, and felt fantastic, super pepped up and the rest of it. That was five days ago. I'm just inept. I don't know what kind of consistency or perspective is required to actually implement worthy plans like that.

Actually that's why I enjoy chatting and just generally brainstorming with you, because you seem to have a capacity to sort of come up to a conclusion like that. "Oh yeah, yoga. Really good. I should do some more yoga." Then actually do it. A capacity which I find mysterious and suspicious.

Tim Ferriss: Well, you know, it all comes down to black magic. You have to get a dead cat, preferably black. Swing it counter-clockwise over your head before midnight.

Ed Cooke: Right, yeah, yeah, yeah.

Tim Ferriss: No, honestly, I find it endlessly amusing how, particularly in some media pieces, I'm played up to be this sort of stalwart of self-discipline and systems thinking, and I function like Bishop from Aliens. I just have this incredible ability to execute, execute, execute. And at the end of the day, I'm just good at setting up incentives for myself that punish me and flog me if I don't do things. So the way that I would conquer the yoga has nothing to do with convincing yourself or rationalizing. I would take extremely unflattering photos of yourself in tighty-whities, front and center, give those to a friend who can keep an agreement, but who will also show no mercy, and just say, "If I don't prove to you as my judge, that I've gone to yoga for 10 days straight, these are going to go on the home page as a pop-up for the..." Or something like that, or on Facebook.

Ed Cooke: Yeah, you know what this connects with? This is a bit like Gerter [SP] and his friends in the room. It's like externalizing beyond yourself the sources of the things you need for yourself.

Tim Ferriss: Yeah.

Ed Cooke: A bit.

Tim Ferriss: Yeah, definitely.

Ed Cooke: I mean [Inaudible] what I'm saying obviously but...

Tim Ferriss: No, but I think, I think self-discipline is so overrated. If you break it down, you know, self-discipline is actually, it's kind of a poor label. It's poorly-defined, at least. It's overused to the extent that it's really lost any type of clarity and its meaning.

Ed Cooke: Yeah.

Tim Ferriss: So for me, self-discipline it's like no, we're like rats in a lab. Put us in a Skinner box, which is life, and we respond to inputs that are punishment and reward, and we adjust our behavior accordingly. So it's like all right, great, make that external. You're not going to punish or reward yourself typically, it's usually not enough, and it's too easily reneged. So you can externalize it. You can also put some money on the line, that's also very useful for people.

But how the hell did we get this far? So we're going to talk about Burning Man. We're going to come back to your discussion with your girlfriend which we left long ago, but we'll come back to that. Then merit. I'm still struggling with this, and I'm a bit of a semantic pain in the ass. Is merit

close to, in your mind, sort of the Roman, Arête, like this virtue? Or can it be boiled down to sort of deservedly winning? Is that...?

Ed Cooke:

Yes, so I think virtue, of which I have none, but virtue is like I think is the correct, is how we should think about merit. In some sense, the humanities [inaudible] have had this nailed for like 2,000 years what the fundamental tendencies of a good human being are: empathy, temperance, generosity, kind of non-egotism. We sort of know what good human beings have done for thousands of years, but that's not what we celebrate or immediately associate with merit, right?

So we tend to associate merit with tangible outcomes in life-path, which might include getting a Harvard Law degree or being Bill Gates or whatever. So the concept of improving one's self is obviously an excellent concept, regardless of how socially you perceive human action and existence. Because to improve yourself is to improve the world, it's to improve your interactions with others. It's not a lonely activity.

But at the same time, if you look at like Silicon Valley start-ups, which are, in some sense, the great drivers of human culture at the moment, besides like ISIS and whatever.

But anyway, the natural tendency in that way of thinking is to become personally more efficient. So it's to store files more effectively, get things done better, be quicker, optimize one's self, and this is a kind of merit thing in its way. But it's quite a selfish one. Goodness knows, for lots of subtle reasons, we're all selfish but you can imagine an alternative culture of creativity and power of the kind that Silicon Valley has which would all be focused on making communities better and institutions better, and hacking not one's self but the situations which comprise the world.

A great example about this, is you go to San Francisco, unbelievably cool town full of just the most magical people, so intellectually vibrant, open, fun, awesome, beautiful, and so rich. And there's fucking like homeless people everywhere. Shit, like seriously guys, that's Twitter HQ there. It's a \$15 billion company or whatever. Everyone inside is being paid more than \$100,000 a year and this happens on their doorstep? Do they have no conception, no like basic grasp over what happy existence is? Because your existence would be happier if you didn't have to, at a purely selfish level, walk past all these people who are clearly in a state of distress and maybe hassling you and whatever. Anyway, so I think that's one of the most interesting things about San Francisco.

And it's, to me, emblematic of a tendency of thought which looks to optimize the individual over the situations [inaudible] your like external stuff influencing the self, rather than the self-influencing the self, rather than external situations which are the things which actually make us happy, like the ability to play chess on the street, and giving people things and whatever other...

Tim Ferriss: Yep. No, I agree. I think that just to, not to take us down too much of a political rat hole, but I think that the part of what makes San Francisco very fascinating, and the Bay Area in general, is there are many divergent opinions on many different subjects. Some people think Bitcoin is a fraud, other people think it's the future, and there's everything in between for every conceivable subject. Some people believe in long-term monogamous relationships and then you have the whole poly-amorous community and there's everything in between. Simultaneously, for instance, I think that San Francisco could learn a lot as it relates to homeless people and other aspects of rejuvenating a city from New York City. I think Giuliani and Bloomberg have done just a phenomenal job with converting Manhattan into a pleasant place to walk.

Ed Cooke: Yeah.

Tim Ferriss: That was not, it wasn't in the distant past that it was terrifying to walk in areas that are now very popular. The challenge, I think, is that in San Francisco, among many other, there are many reasons for this, but one of the challenges is that I'm sure, well maybe you've heard the expression, "A liberal is someone who doesn't know to take his own side in a fight," that in San Francisco, there's such a divergence of opinions, no one can agree on fucking anything. That makes it very challenging to deal with systemic issues that involve a lot of people. But yeah, I agree with you.

Ed Cooke: I wonder if that's really right, Tim. There's lots of consensus in San Francisco in certain regions of life, right? So the whole entrepreneurial ecosystem is so fluid and dynamic, because everyone agrees how it should work. Either you've got venture capitalists, the entrepreneurs, the talented young guys, the angel investors, and there's very clear, shared sets of concepts about, and also a lot of generosity and consensus. Everyone is always helping everyone. There's no overt selfishness at all, really.

That was what I would describe as almost a perfect harmonious community, where people are doing amazing things, trying as hard as they can. But... [inaudible] sites to memorize in some sense, is a site called

Quizlet. I'm incredibly good mates with the CEO of Quizlet, this guy called Andrew Sutherland. He's a terrific character. It's so striking on meeting him. We see each other, we have a wonderful time together, we brainstorm together, and he helps me wherever he can. There's a sense of shared journey which defies any notion of normal competition.

That's the kind of thing which is going on in the entrepreneurial community, and yet there are these quite radical divisions between that and for instance, I don't understand the history of the homeless people, but it is striking that there are so many of them and that these two worlds coexist spatially, but have zero social or emotional or conceptual connection in a way.

Tim Ferriss: No, I agree. I think that it's very easy to succumb to the belief that SF is tech or that the Bay Area is tech, when in fact that perception is because of the prominence, in the media and otherwise, of outliers. The sort of sexiness and romance of building multi-billion-dollar companies in short periods of time has created a misperception, I think, of how much of the population benefits from being employed at tech companies.

But I think it brings up an interesting question, maybe we won't get into it right now, I want to talk about Burning Man a bit, but that there are a lot of people in Silicon Valley and in New York City and all over the world who struggle with the question of, "Should I give back now? Should I try to create positive karma in the world and benefit others now?" Or "Should I be completely selfish now so that I can be completely selfless later?"

So for instance, there are people I know, and this is going to sound crazy, who say, who would argue that Mother Theresa is a media hound, and she should not be looked at as a saint and that it would be better to look at someone like Bill Gates who is not exactly the nicest kid on the block when it came to competition and ruthless capitalism for a long period of time, but who now, with the stroke of a pen, can ostensibly wipe out malaria or polio. That we live in a culture where the former has been romanticized because it's easier, and perhaps this comes back to general mental functioning, it's easier for us to take this archetypal image of a saint in our mind, as opposed to the more complex narrative of somebody, like a Jobs for instance, who was kind of a son of a bitch if we really look at it objectively, who is now being deified. How do you...?

Ed Cooke: Yeah, it's tricky, isn't it? I mean, sorry to interrupt your question, but I think Gates is a really [Inaudible]...

Tim Ferriss: If that was a question that was the longest question of all time. I think it was just a rant, so go ahead.

Ed Cooke: I assume since it's probably past 3:00 PM in San Francisco that you've moved on to the gin and tonics and that's... But I think Gates is a good example, because Gates is deified, is considered a heroic figure because of this generosity after the fact of wealth accumulation. I had a quite big argument with some close friends about this, because there's one perspective which says, "A, Gates, through personal merit accrued \$60 billion and so deserves to be able to spend it." And "B, he's this hyper-competent character who's much better than some inept, internally strife-ridden charitable institution who aren't going to get anything done. This guy has got the competence and the rest of it to go and solve the world's problems unilaterally. He'll get it done really efficiently." I can see the merit in that type of perspective.

But here's another perspective which would be... so "Gates exploited, probably pretty illegally, monopolistic practices to accrue from the population of the world, immense undeserved wealth at the expense of their computing experience. Now as a unilateral actor, he now has the opportunity to spend it on whatever he feels is right, where in fact, it shouldn't be Bill Gates's decision what humanity's wealth gets spent on to sort our problems. That should be a democratic process."

That old phrase, "Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely." I think is fundamentally, psychologically real. That's kind of an aside, but I would like to see, as an alternative history of 1980 to 2010, I'd have liked to have seen Gates become very rich in the course of the '80s, and spend \$50 million on his local community, and a thousand people around the world or everyone around the world would have a much better computing experience. And a thousand or a million people around the world have the opportunity to divert their fraction of the great sum he has at his disposal, to the situations in their local communities or in the broader world which they judge to be meritorious, to merit this sort of spending.

The extreme way of saying that is Gates is basically the last person on Earth you want spending these kinds of resources, because he is, all right, I think he's quite a likable character, but because nobody should be spending \$60 billion. There should be 60 million people spending \$1000.

There's something fundamentally wrong with our institutional structure. Until the objection that it's just not as efficient as when you've got like a

big head honcho just calling the shots... that's probably true. But efficiency on both sides of the equation, either the charitable side and the wealth accumulation side, seems to be a very ambiguous good. Right? Being more efficient.

Tim Ferriss: Well, yeah. I don't want to beat the dead horse too long, but one of the ways my thinking has flipped in the last few years is related to judging, prioritizing intentions or outcomes. So what I mean by that is, as relevant to this conversation, is would you rather have someone who in their heart of hearts is pure, I was going to say, "As pure as gold." But that's not really, doesn't make much sense. But you get the idea, someone who is truly altruistic who has the greater good in mind with \$1 million, or someone who is at their core, Scrooge, but who out of guilt, to absolve themselves of guilt, is going to behave as if they are altruistic with a \$100 million? Which would you prefer if they're of equal intellectual capacity, right? So their ability to problem-solve is equal. Now I think I would probably opt, if I'm just focused on outcomes, fixing aspects of the educational system, fixing health care, global literacy, whatever it might be, I'm happy to take the extrinsically motivated rich guy as opposed to the intrinsically-motivated less-rich guy.

Ed Cooke: Yeah, yeah, yeah, that's a good point.

Tim Ferriss: You know what I mean? If I'm just looking for outcomes, because I used to, and that doesn't mean don't give back, I think there are many arguments that could be made, and I wrote a blog post for people interested called the "Karmic Capitalist" about my thinking on this. But let me ask you just to take us in a related but slightly different direction. Because I'm probably more, I'm not a Randian, exactly...

Ed Cooke: By the way, this is the moment to bring in Burning Man, by the way.

Tim Ferriss: Okay, bring it in. Bring it in. Can I ask you one other question and if it's going to be a long answer, we can come back to it?

Ed Cooke: Yeah, yeah.

Tim Ferriss: But I want to know what is financial security to you? Where does money fit into your life?

Ed Cooke: Well I think it's very difficult to starve in Northern Europe.

Tim Ferriss: Meaning it's unpleasant when you starve, or it's difficult to end up starving?

Ed Cooke: No, it's just like, "By 2014, people of the opinion that starving in Northern Europe was actually quite unpleasant, whereas in 2007, starving was great fun." No, I mean that, I suppose that we are blessed a bit with what the low bar is in terms of life outcomes. Starving doesn't really happen in Western countries, although of course there's lots of tricky kinds of situations which get close to that. But it's funny actually, because I actually am not sure if I have a totally honest internal perspective on this, Tim.

Tim Ferriss: All right, elaborate.

Ed Cooke: Part of me is like, to be honest, I'd be perfectly happy just schlepping around Europe chatting to people, having the odd espresso and just generally experiencing the world. But what I actually care about is conscious experience, understanding, and [makes noise]. But at the same time, I do enjoy a good party.

I [Inaudible] and I also quite enjoy like sitting, in front of... One of my dreams, it's funny, dreams, you have dreams all the time in your life, and when I was five, I wanted to be a carpenter. When I was six, I wanted to be Beethoven, whatever. Some of them stick with you. One of the ones that's just stuck with me is a mixture of exactly this blend between like, "I don't give a crap about money," and I basically want to live in the kind of Utopian situation which can only be sustained by enormous private wealth.

This dream, and I've had it since the age of 15 and it won't go away, it was just that my idea for what I really want to do in my life is to have a philosophical academy in Greece. Basically what I'm saying is like Mediterranean sunshine, beautiful people in white robes, people playing guitar on the beach, a network of pavilions. You'd sit in one for a while just contemplating the meaning of the color green for like six weeks, and then you kind of wander up the arcade of columns by the swimming pool with all of the beautiful people, and have scintillating intellectual conversation. You'd somehow be apart from the world of ambition and trying to sustain progress, and you'd be sitting back and contemplating the concepts which normally drive our intentions. You'd just basically be having a good old think about what the meaning of it all is. But also you'd be surrounded by beautiful people in great luxury and sunshine.

So it's like right here is a conflict. So certainly, I hold in contempt the idea of counting score in life through wealth. There's fairly small evidence to me, in fact, I just go with the accepted evidence that up to a certain point,

it's great to have some resources, because it allows a certain level of relaxation, comfort, and sustainable existence in the world. But beyond that, it's vanity and stupidity to pursue worldly resources.

But funny enough, random thing, Aristotle is really funny as a moral philosopher, and one of the reasons he's funny is that he doesn't really believe you can be happy if you're not beautiful, which is kind of probably true, but we don't dwell on it. Anyway, he's also got...

Tim Ferriss: Not a popular advertising campaign.

Ed Cooke: Yeah, exactly. He's also got a virtue which is only available to the rich. His virtue system is about poles. Like for every virtue, there's an extreme exaggeration of that virtue which becomes a sin or a vice, and there's a thing in the opposite direction, so [Inaudible].

One of his virtues only available to rich people is magnificence. So he thinks that the correct use of the energy that is wealth, is to be magnificent, which is to say to throw amazing festivals, build awesome buildings, and foster great artists, and do this kind of thing. Then that could go in its extreme form to ostentation and vanity, like the kinds of characters I think who are, you know, who occur wherever there's extreme wealth. Russian Oligarch being the classic contemporary example, or towards miserliness, where you have all of this wealth and you're not organizing any parties, what the fuck?

It's probably orthogonal but it's probably a quite good way of thinking about wealth, which is that there is a responsibility to create joy... and there's nothing inherently sinful about being wealthy.

But anyway, going back to this academy, to which by the way, Tim, you're going to be hugely welcome. I hope you're going to hang out there very often. I think it's going to be really cool. We're just going to sort of just hang about and chat about stuff.

Tim Ferriss: Yeah, green is also my favorite color, so I have a lot to ponder there.

Ed Cooke: Okay, very good. Yeah, interrogate yourself about that. You know, favorite...

Tim Ferriss: I think the rich, the use of riches is an interesting segue to Burning Man, because there's a lot of this discussion about this, of course. But tell me your impression of Burning Man. I'll leave it wide open since you wanted to, you brought it up.

Ed Cooke: Yeah, I did bring it up. I love parties and I wanted to go to the Burning Man for a while. My best friend Al is often at Burning Man and I said, "Well, we should go there together." We went to the Burning Man.

Burning Man is an absolute ordeal to get to, especially if you're coming from the U.K. So you've got to get to San Francisco, then there's all of this like you've got to purchase lots of objects and water and snacks and costumes and all of this stuff. Then you've got to do an eight-hour road trip. About four hours into the road trip, you're like, "Wow, this is getting pretty much into the middle of nowhere. Then you just keep on schlepping on, and you get there. Then you spend four hours in a queue in a dust storm or whatever, get to the gate, and then some like slightly sort of annoyingly kind of enlightened-looking character says like, "Welcome home." You're like, "Fuck off mate, I live in Hackney." I've come to a music festival.

In between that and leaving Burning Man, something happens where as you're leaving you're like, well he was right, this was my home. So what's happened in between? What's interesting is that I was not indoctrinated into the quite sophisticated kind of moral conceptual framework around Burning Man, all their principles and so on. I was just sort of going on for a good party.

But here's like my quick-fry theory about why Burning Man is the most brilliant institution I've encountered, and is the first evidence I've seen, not the first or whatever, but is a compelling case for why Silicon Valley is actually a culturally important place on a par with, say, the renaissance in Florence or something. Where if you look at the buildings in Silicon Valley, you're like, "Jesus, these guys may build good software companies but they sure don't know how to live." It's like the car park.

Anyway, so why is Burning Man so good? So there's no money which cuts out one fundamental aspect of your social relationship to the world. There's basically no time, because no one's got a watch on them and no one would care if they did. Although there is time, but it's a different quality of time. It's basically the rhythm of sun and night. Then there's no mobile phones, so no one is basically able to connect with their normal, unbelievably banal set of preoccupations.

As a result, people are stripped down. So you've got no money, no ambition, no obsession with what you're supposed to be doing, and there's basically no agenda whatsoever as regards what happens. It's long enough,

about a week, that unlike a U.K. Festival, of which there were many great ones including things like the Secret Garden Party. At the Secret Garden Party on a Saturday, you're aware that on Sunday, you're going to have to pack up and go home. But at Burning Man the temporal horizon is just long enough that basically it might as well be infinite. You're just like, "I am here."

That's the first thing. It's like you're stripped away of a lot of the tendencies of interaction which normally make you basically a fucking boring person. Then the second thing is that you bounce around Burning Man, and it operates, as far as I can tell, at four scales which interweave in this fractal way. So you've got camps. So you'll be in a Wild West Camp and you're there, and at one point, I found myself playing a piano naked in a Wild West Bar surrounded by Frenchmen singing the French National Anthem. This is basically a quite undistinguished way to be spending 20 minutes of your life. But anyway, you're in the Wild West and you're feeling like in the Wild West. And then, an [art 00:34:45] car goes past. You wander out and you get in the [art] car, and the art car buzzes you off somewhere else.

So the art car is kind of the second order of [inaudible]. You're in the Wild West, it feels like the Wild West. You're open because you're not thinking about money or time or what you're supposed to be doing or your career or how you really want to achieve this by next year, but unfortunately this is getting out of order. All of that's cleared out.

I did get on the art car and art car is one order of magnitude, scale-wise, down and the art car may be like a fish or a boat or whatever. You get on the boat and then you're living on a boat. The whole vibe is boat-ist, so you've entered a different world. Then you talk to a person on the boat, sort of third scale of spatial organization down, and the person does not have an agenda, because they have basically completely forgotten about all of the things which preoccupy them normally. And so you get further in about five minutes of conversation than you do with a flat mate in about a year because you're just like, "Oh, how are you feeling?" It's like, "Oh, not so good because of," the sort of thing which no one would ever tell you, I don't think.

"Where are you from?" Then because you're really open, because you're not thinking about your money, your time, or the things you have to do, you're like, "Oh, well actually, the fact that you're from Wisconsin and a little farm is interesting in a way which it wouldn't be according to my

normal filters." Of course none of this is rational, it's just a kind of intuitive flow.

You have very rich... and so people have their own worlds which you dive into. So you've had the camp, where you're like in a world, and then you've got the art car, which are basically like floating night clubs. But anyway, you get on an art car and that's kind of a world, then a person is the world.

Then it's got this gift economy where the gifts are themselves their own world. So sometimes it's like a little object which expresses some profound story about this person's life, or about the world or anything else. One person, and I should add since we're on record that I didn't indulge, was like, "This, my friend, is one of only 10 DMT inhalers in the entire world." So that would have been a world to dive into as a gift.

Anyway, because of the lack of temporal horizon, you bounce between these spatial levels. You're in a camp, you're talking to a person, you're like on an art car, or you're [makes noises]. You cease to kind of track how they relate to each other. So the whole thing becomes, has the character of an external hallucination where one fascinating piece of the world will pop up and dissolve into the next fascinating bit of the world. And there's no attachment and there's no nothing kind of thing. You're just bouncing around this extraordinary experience.

As a result of that, quite fundamental concepts change. Like your relationship to the distinction between a night club and a piece of art dissolves. Your concept of what a friend is and what someone you don't know is blurs, because everyone's kind of a friend. Of course, this all sounds quite pompous, but you're also having a terribly good time. This is really striking because I was not indoctrinated before going there.

Tim Ferriss: Right.

Ed Cooke: Within two days, I was living in this magical invented thing where what was so striking was that it was all based on giving, generosity, openness, and transient creativity.

The structure of the party, if that's what Burning Man is, is just of unbelievable genius. I was staggered. I love parties and I study them. I once tried to write a book about house parties, and it wasn't very good and I never completed it. But I love parties and I'd never imagined a party could be a dance in the brain of a philosopher or something like that.

It's a party which gives you insights into totally different ways of relating to yourself and the world. And I love the fact that it's transient. Because A, it means that only through the proactive participation of the people who are involved will it ever exist, but B, it means that the meaning has to go outside into the world in a way. So you don't go to Burning Man and then you have your isolated kingdom, like my philosophical academy in Greece for instance, where you're denying the world and then living your own private dream in an onanistic nonsense.

It's actually just like an opportunity to re-conceive stuff, and then go back to the world. Then think, "Oh, fuck. Well just like Burning Man, the world is a consequence of the actions of everybody who's in it. Just like Burning Man, any form of relationship is possible."

It's fundamentally a mind-expanding thing and then, although I have no knowledge of this whatsoever, it seems to me to be intuitively very plausible that the kind of genius of Silicon Valley, the fact that it's creating experiences and possibilities of life, which genuinely touch upon the transformation of humanity in subtle ways at the moment, and bit by bit and [inaudible] of course, I can only assume they are somehow connected.

Tim Ferriss: I have a challenge for you. Well the first is a recommendation. I think you'd really enjoy a book called "Spectacle" by David Rockwell and Bruce Mau, M-A-U. It's basically a visual compilation, essays and photographs that look at the phenomenon and history of massive public performances or events around the world, which is really just a phenomenal tome.

The challenge is, this is something I've thought about because I get – I wouldn't say agoraphobic, but because I'm intrinsically quite introverted, I've been to Burning Man twice, I enjoyed it, but I end up spending a lot of time in my own camp, partially just to recharge. If you were tasked with creating as much of the benefits that you derived from Burning Man with a group of 20 people on your own, so you're creating your own experience to provide many of the benefits of Burning Man for 20 people, what would you do? How would you do that?

Ed Cooke: That's a super question, okay. So of course, in some sense, I'm just going to make up whatever I say.

Tim Ferriss: Yeah, yeah, and no budgetary constraints.

Ed Cooke: But let's just sort of do it with my little theory there about why Burning Man is so good. Let's just apply that to 20 people. So a massive hero narrative road

trip to get wherever you're going. So you're like spatially and experientially separated from your boring life. No phones. No money. No motivation to talk about your intentions in the world, but more just sort of everything. A shared creative project where you, somehow spontaneously, democratically, come up with a cool way of making everyone else happy, perhaps collaboratively in this other space. Then enough time to not be worried that it's going to end tomorrow.

So just like riffing on this, just like thinking of it, you know what we should do, what we might do, is collect the crew. With 20 people, it'd be good if they were some unknown to each other, but it was a mixture of groups of friends or whatever. Agree on some random distant point, "Okay, we're going to go to a Hebridean island for a week. I'll see you there on the third of January next year." Whatever.

Tim Ferriss: Right.

Ed Cooke: It's miles away or what have you, and then yeah, just go there minus mobile phone, blah, blah, blah, and just rejoice, I guess, in the fact that people are so cool. Which I'd oddly rather forgotten before Burning Man. It's just that, "People are so annoying. They're always in the queue in front of me while waiting for the bus," and etc. But of course, this blends quite easily into cults.

Tim Ferriss: Right, right.

Ed Cooke: Which is why having a participatory, not driven by concepts experience is quite important. I suppose one of the powers of the Burning Man is that it is driven by concepts in a sense, like this concept of radical self-sufficiency and generosity and so on. But yeah, I've got a party in mind. You can hardly fail to have a good experience if you're with 20 generous, open people with loads of time away from your life and you're feeling great about yourself because you're in the middle of a hero narrative because you actually successfully got there. This could probably be done with two people, as well.

Tim Ferriss: So I've thought about this. I've thought about doing it in a wilderness setting. Primarily in my own head, sort of recreating the elements of...

Ed Cooke: Your head's not a wilderness, Tim.

Tim Ferriss: Yeah, of Burning Man. There's a project you might find interesting or people listening might find interesting called, well, the guy, "Station to Station"

and there's a guy named Doug Aitken, A-I-T-K-E-N and he basically packed this, I think it's 11 cars, I'm making up the numbers a bit, but 11 cars of a train full of musicians, artists, and all sorts of craziness. Think about it as sort of Burning Man on a train. It went from city to city doing these massive pop-up performance, or pop-up performances where they would take these abandoned buildings or old train stations and turn them into concerts for one night, then pack up and move on their way, which were called "nomadic happenings." Pretty cool stuff.

But how do you take the experience of Burning Man and create more of those peak experiences, if you want to call them that? What are other ways of pulling your head out of the mundane bullshit and doldrums that constitute the vast majority of most peoples' waking existences?

Ed Cooke: Great question, and not one I've really successfully answered for myself, but I'm more than happy to advice about it. I think it is a fundamental question, and I think that many of our kind of inherited cultural tendencies, are like this a bit.

Like one of the best parties I ever went to was like a moon celebration. And it was on a cliff and the sea was formidable and raging beneath, and it was all night. It was a full moon and the tide over the course of the night came up, and there were crazy, ritual dances to celebrate it. It was pretty eccentric. But I tell you what I came out of that with was I was kind of like, "Oh, fuck. The moon and the tide are connected." Of course I'd learned that as a five-year-old school boy and not understood it in the interesting way. The interesting way to understand it is to perceive the moon and perceive its pull on the sea in real-time, to actually like in your bones the connection between these two things.

Anyway, so that was a really cool thing, and I guess it gets back to our commonality, I guess, commonality between people, which is that being yourself is quite a fun thing. But it's not quite as nice as noticing that you are an instance of humanity, and that everyone else is basically the same, and actually so are the animals, and in fact it's all matter, and whatever. It's kind of a paradoxical thing, but when you perceive in your bones your own insignificance, you feel better.

Tim Ferriss: Yeah, that's a really good way, that's an astute way to put it. That's very true. When you're less concerned with all of the, just the minutia and bullshit in your life that is really at the end of the day very trivial in the span of history and the scale of the world, you feel a lot better about it.

Ed Cooke: It's the weirdest thing, isn't it? Actually I had this, when I was at school, like occasionally I would, I don't know, I would lose a debating competition or discover that I was a loser in a more general sense. And I had a, what I call in a way like a mind hack, which I'd be sitting on the loo or something and I'd just think about like, "Oh, everything feels terrible and awful. It's all gone to shit." Then I'd be like, "But if you think about it, the stars are really far away," then you try to imagine the world from the stars. And then you sort of zoom in and you'd be like, "Oh, there's this is tiny little character there for a fragment of time worrying about..." It's just like... just take a chill pill.

To your question, about how to put that into your life, I don't really know. It's really tricky. But I guess another thing is to, to try and draw this back, is to segment a little bit. To make sure there's one day a week where your mobile phone's off, and to make sure that with your best friends you find a time, whatever, once every three months to update them on just how stupid reality is, and to share that. If you're in a relationship where the struggle of existence is occluding the parallel magic of what could be happening there, you, at least, occasionally find the time to do that. Of course, there's, I suppose, the more fundamental suggestion would be to like stop trying so much.

Tim Ferriss: Right. Right.

Ed Cooke: Which, you know, I mean is tricky. You know?

Tim Ferriss: Yeah.

Ed Cooke: Because 'one's got such an interesting project!' You know?

But I've got this wonderful friend called Paul, he's one of the most intelligent people I've ever met. So when I was talking to him about the academy, the Greek idea of my imaginary possible future existence, he was like, "Well, why does it need to be in one place?" I was like, "Oh, it's true, it could just be in the world." He's like, "Why does it need to be with the same group of people?" I was like, "Oh, that's true." I'm thinking of people as quite good fun. And then he was like, "And why does it have to be in sunshine? Why can't it be in a mixture of things?" I was like, "That's true. Like rainstorms and Nordic climates and so on." Then he almost went further, just like, "Why does it even need to be outside of your life at all?"

He lives a life which is very humble in a way, but quite profound in another, where he travels. He works absolutely a minimal amount. He's so clever that he can do five hours of translation a week and survive. He learns languages, and he falls in love with people. He watches amazing music, and he has the most incredible network of friends. I feel he's one of my best friends, and he probably feels I'm one of about a hundred, because he spends 10 hours a day on friendship. Well in the middle of that conversation, I was like, "Oh, Jesus Christ," I'm just so guilty of grandiose fantasy, where the life I'm desiring through these concepts is actually just, it's right there. It's something which I could be living if I would only cease working 12 hours a day in a start-up.

Tim Ferriss: Yeah. It's very hard, that balance. I even hesitate to use the word "balance."

Ed Cooke: Yeah.

Tim Ferriss: It's challenging to balance the appreciation of the present moment with the drive to build things, because the people who tend to spend, and this I mean quite apart from that, we could debate the value of building different things, but the people who build the most very often have the least present state appreciation. And the people who have, are entirely in the present moment, don't build very much. So you could argue very strongly for both ends of the spectrum. But trying to borrow the best practices from both is challenging. Maybe the answer is that you oscillate between the two, I don't know.

Ed Cooke: Yeah. It's interesting. I think the question you alluded to is a very interesting one. Which is like... In some sense, both you and I are enthusiasts for building. So I've devoted the last five years of my life obsessively to memorize, and you know you produced a wonderful collection of books. I'm using rich perspectives which you've shared with other people, and you've enriched a lot of people's lives, no doubt. That seems inherently meritorious, right? It seems like that's got to be a good thing to be doing, to be trying to do something, right?

But on the other hand... if nobody was trying to do things, would that be so bad? Or if everyone tried to do a quarter as much... There's a great book by Bertrand Russell called "In Praise of Idleness."

Tim Ferriss: Oh, that's a great essay. Yeah.

Ed Cooke: Yeah he's got this great quote in there which is like, "Work is of two kinds. Moving objects at or near the Earth's surface or telling other people to do

so. The first is ill-paid and unpleasant, and the second is great fun and rather well-remunerated." Anyway, that kind of concept of moving objects at or near the Earth's surface, you'd have to update to the present day to like moving information at or near the Earth's surface.

Tim Ferriss: Yeah.

Ed Cooke: Anyway, in that essay, he's like, a kind of classic economic insight, I guess, which is, "We can make stuff twice as efficient and work half as much or we can make stuff twice as efficient and work the same amount and make..." It's not clear to me that making stuff twice as efficient and then working the same amount is the correct response.

Tim Ferriss: Agreed, agreed. Well, Ed, I'd love to ask you a couple of bite-sized questions. I want to let you get to your proper Friday evening, since I've kind of got you under lock and key here in the office. I'd like to unleash you upon the world, but I'd love to ask you a couple of fast questions, and you can feel free to elaborate, but I'd love to hit you with a couple of these before we come to a close.

The first is one I don't usually ask, but I have to ask because you've used the words "press-up" which is "push-up" for you Yanks listening, and other things, for instance. What is the one stereotypically British thing that Americans should really appreciate or might get enjoyment of?

Ed Cooke: That's a good question. I think...

Tim Ferriss: I love the "ka-ching" was that a toaster?

Ed Cooke: Oh, that's a new subscription to me.

Tim Ferriss: Oh, nice. All right, congratulations.

Ed Cooke: Thanks, yeah. But yeah, it's quite common in the office. I think, because I've lived a bunch in Boston when I did textiles there, and [inaudible] America, and the thing which always really impresses and amazes me about Americans, and which by contrast is different in the British people, is that British people are like fundamentally embarrassed about the expression of intention. That it's almost like there's something like fundamentally vulgar in human, in British life. I suppose human life is British life.

It's like America calling baseball the World Series. But anyway, there's something fundamentally embarrassing about stating intentions. What's so liberating about going to America is that that embarrassment doesn't exist,

but at the same time going back to Britain, it's a terribly beautiful thing. And I think it's connected a lot to British humor, which is this basic consciousness of the absurdity of trying, combined with actually still trying.

Tim Ferriss: What is a good gateway drug for British comedy? For real dyed-in-the-wool Americans who perhaps... because I've seen some British humor I have a lot of trouble with. I just can't quite figure it out. Then there's other British humor, or British-ish humor, like Shaun of the Dead which I find completely hilarious. So what is a good gateway drug if you had to pick one entry point?

Ed Cooke: Gateway. Why are you asking me about a gateway? Can't you just ask me what I think is pure genius?

Tim Ferriss: Sure. Okay. All right, all right, all right. I'll let you upgrade my question. What is pure genius? I just don't want it to be pearls before swine. I want it to educate and I'm throwing myself in that same group.

Ed Cooke: Does the thick of it exist in America, sort of an American version of it? Well, my favorite comedian is a guy called Armando Iannucci. So Armando, and then Iannucci is I-A-N-N-U-C-C-I. He had this show called the Armando Iannucci Show which I think was a failure even on British TV. So this man would be brilliant for a [inaudible]. I think part of the reason for that is personally he's not a terribly charismatic performer. He's just an absolutely brilliant writer and conceiver of comedy. But the Armando Iannucci Show had a brief appearance on British TV and somehow captured both a wicked love of life and an absolute horror at everything which is going on, through a completely and coherently absurdist humor.

So for instance, I'm trying to think of a good example. But for instance there's this one sketch which involves a guy driving his car really fast where a very, very specific miles per hour, about 157 miles an hour, he enters into a flawless state of perfect meditative perfection where he doesn't have to make any decisions. He just avoids all pedestrians and just disappears. But then has to get back down to zero miles an hour without killing people.

Another one begins with a cityscape, where you see all the lights coming on in the morning, and with each light you hear the audio of the person screaming about the futility of their existence as the narrator says, "This man designs bacon packaging for a living. This person is in charge of

Bedford's Water Supply. "Oh, god!" This is the manager of Bewitched. "Bastards, I hate it!" You know, this is...

Tim Ferriss: Yeah, it's very like Kierkegaard.

Ed Cooke: Yeah, that's such a poor advertisement for a genius filmmaker.

Tim Ferriss: Yeah, yeah. No, no.

Ed Cooke: Yeah. But it's always a victory. But I would recommend, to your original question, "What's a good gateway?" I think Monty Python's a great gateway still, because you can't help but be delighted by their cheeky enthusiasm even as you're just tuning in to the humor. Then in contemporary things, there's a thing called "Alan Partridge" which is sort of written by Armando Iannucci as well, which is the story of a radio DJ from Norfolk who is... actually it has shadows of David Brent from The Office, but in a kind of richer more amusing fashion. It's his trials and tribulations. So Alan Partridge would be my gateway drug.

Tim Ferriss: Perfect.

Ed Cooke: You were looking at me, you were really looking for a one-line answer there, weren't you?

Tim Ferriss: No, no. I love it, you have one of the most colorful vocabularies and cadences of anyone I know. I loved your emails. I was going to actually read the sequence of emails that you had recently where you introduced me to one of your friends, now a mutual friend. Where most people are like, "Joe meet John, John meet Joe. Take it from here," you create these wonderfully, I'm not going to say, they're not antiquated, that's not the word that I'm looking for, but they read like a Civil War love letter or something. They're so eloquent and I'm like, "Goddamn, this guy..." I wonder if the amount of effort you expend on that is the amount of effort that I would have to expend to create such a thing, because you're very prosaic, and very entertaining in that way.

What did your parents do? If you don't mind me asking, professionally.

Ed Cooke: So my dad was a coder, actually. He refused to teach me to code by the way because he thought I should play in the garden, which I still vaguely resent, but you know, I did enjoy playing in the garden. My mum was a teacher. I guess I did have an interesting education, because I was in, we lived near Oxford and I ended up going to a school which had lots of Oxford Academics children in it, and I was part of a class, maybe I was

quite good at my subjects, I was part of a class where the other people at this class were these amazingly colorful bunch of precociously intellectual characters. So I guess I did have a bit of... I still laugh about the situation that represented, because it was in many respects quite unhealthy.

Tim Ferriss: Why was that unhealthy?

Ed Cooke: Well, I don't think it's good to peak intellectually at the age of 13. I think that...

Tim Ferriss: Do you think a lot of them did, or do you think that it was...?

Ed Cooke: Well, I think that they... it was actually quite a magical time, and it was, and I think that it's quite rare in life to be surrounded by people who challenge you and who like you.

Tim Ferriss: Yeah. Yeah. For sure.

Ed Cooke: So it's quite a great experience. It's a wonderful experience to have. But I think a lot of the people who are in that situation in the school, then went off to other schools, a variety of other schools, where that didn't exist, and so they ended up being quite, all of us ended up in some sense being quite nostalgic at the age of 14. So just to give you an example our favorite film as a group in our teenage years was "Withnail and I." I don't know if you've seen Withnail and I, but it's a...

Tim Ferriss: What was it? Say that again?

Ed Cooke: Have you seen the film Withnail and I?

Tim Ferriss: No. Withnail? With, space, N-A-I-L?

Ed Cooke: No, it's actually, it's all one word. "Withnail," it's the name of a character in this film. So this is your gateway drug to British humor.

Tim Ferriss: All right, all right.

Ed Cooke: Watch Withnail and I. So it's basically a film about some washed up actors, but full of passion, struggling their way on a kind of comedy road trip in their late 20s.

Tim Ferriss: I feel like every, like Netflix description of British comedy just makes me want to slit my wrists before I even get started. It's so bad. Oh my God. But yes, Withnail and I.

Ed Cooke: Withnail. Please watch Withnail and I, because it's basically a film made out of fragments of insanely quotable bits and bobs. It's intensely funny,

incredibly romantic, and like a profound narrative I guess, about what it's like to have high hopes for life, and then discover that it's not quite as easy as you think, kind of... It's so charming, and so anyway it's about friendship and life, so it's a really wonderful film. Anyway, but it's also very nostalgic. Really, it's not healthy at the age of 14, it's like, "Oh, gosh. I remember when I was 13. Everything was so good." We used to use words like 'portentous,' but now we just say 'spoon.'

Tim Ferriss: It sounds like you had an intellectually stimulating schooling experience at that point. Can you think of a specific defining moment of your childhood? Is there anything that stands out in terms of forming you into the person you are today?

Ed Cooke: I can't think of something which I could honestly report as like a cause or factor, but I do have a couple of favorite childhood memories.

Tim Ferriss: Okay.

Ed Cooke: Well, one of which was... This memory is something which I would, if I was held hostage and someone was about to delete this memory, I would pay, if I had them, hundreds of thousands of dollars to not delete, because it was a moment in my childhood, maybe I was five, in the garden looking out at some trees in the distance. And for whatever reason with my dad, I was discussing basically visual perception, but seeing.

He was saying, we must have been going, I must have been commenting on, or I don't know how it began but he was saying, "Oh, the light bounces off the trees and goes into your eyes." I found this incredibly confusing, and I was like, "No, no, no. But my eyes go out and touch the trees. My vision goes out and touches the trees." He was like, "No, no, no. Your eye, either the photons bounce at the trees or from the sun and they enter your eye and that's how you come up with a picture." I was like, I remember just intensely the weirdness and the confusion. I remember getting to a point where I was happy to accept that my vision reached out to the halfway point to meet the light in between me and the trees. But I just couldn't even conceive of how perception could be passive.

Anyway, I bumped into this thing years later when studying psychology where a lecturer mentioned the theory of an Arabic psychologist and philosopher called, oh my goodness, I'm not sure I can remember his name, but Al Haseen I think his name is. Al Haseen was a guy who in the 12th century or something disproved the theory of exteroception, which apparently was really popular until like the year 1200, the theory that your

eye went out and met the world, rather than your eye just sits there passively and receives information.

Then the second thing which amplified this memory, beyond the family connection and just the preciousness of the virgin perspective on the world, was that when I got intensely into the philosophy of perception as an undergraduate, I got into this guy called Maurice Merleau-Ponty who is a kind of poetic, super-cool, cigarette smoking French philosopher who writes beautiful prose.

He has this theory of perception where the activity is given back to perception, not because vision goes out spatially, but because perception is this active, probing, question-asking activity involving a profound resonance between you and the world. It was just so far away from neuroscience, as it's normally thought of, where it's all input, processing, representation, and experience. This was really much more beautiful, and I'll come back to this in a second, but much more true to experience theory of perception, which is that we're in this kind of dialogue or resonance with the world where our brains and the world [inaudible] a resonance, which means that our brain changes and then the meaning of the stuff in the world is altered, and it's a bit like dancing with somebody. There's input, there's output, but it's the pattern between you which makes the most sense in the end, which is what's actually happening.

So to wheel that back... the core memory is incredible, because it describes a naivety of perception which you can never get back. You can never perceive the world with such a stupid idea of how perception works. But at the same time you can never actually experience perception devoid of the concepts we have for what's happening to it. The second thing is that it's true. That's what it feels like to perceive, and we suppress that. So that's my favorite childhood memory. I recall it actually became significant later on, but I love it.

Tim Ferriss: But let me touch on some of the aspects of perception that you brought up. I think you and I, if you're not comfortable talking about this, let me know, but I believe you and I were chatting when we had some wine many moons ago in San Francisco about, effectively, augmented synesthesia, so using hardware, if I'm mixing people up let me know, but using hardware to see smells or have this type of co-mingling of the senses and perception. Could you talk about that for a second? I don't know where that went or where it was, but if you could explain what you were doing, I think, people would find it very interesting.

Ed Cooke: Well, yeah. I'll go... I'll be as quick as possible here, but I went to study under a guy called Kevin O'Regan in Paris. Kevin O'Regan I had encountered when I was right up to my final exams at university. I was in this intense period of study partly because I'd been drunk most of the rest of the time, and so I had to really ram it in. So all of these kinds of ideas were new in my mind and they were fusing together.

I discovered this paper by this guy Kevin O'Regan, which was in Behavioral and Brain Sciences and was called "A Sensorimotor Theory of Visual Perception." In it he quoted a series of the most wonderful, obscure experiments from psychology. One of which was this tactile visual substitution device created by a guy called Paul Bach-y-Rita. "Bach" like the composer, "Y" like "and" in Spanish, "Rita" like "Lovely Rita," Paul Bach-Y-Rita. He was building devices for the blind to see through touch.

So the tactile visual stimulation system, TVSS, basically would take a camera on your glasses and would transform that visual input into basically a highly-pixelated sort of 100 by 100 array of vibrating pins to hold against your back, your thigh, your leg, or wherever there was a nice surface on your body to touch.

The fascinating thing about this device is if someone else is holding the camera and you have this, it just feels like random totally pattern-less scratching. When you are wearing the glasses and you first touch it to your skin, it also feels like that. But when you move around, you begin to track the correspondences between movement and sensation, and to cut a long story short, eventually you end up short-circuiting all the noise and you actually perceive through touch a visual-like experience of space before you. So you feel looming objects. You see things going past the side. You feel things approaching as you go to them, and you have a feeling of space.

The feeling of space is based not on input which, is now like a totally different form of input, but on the patterns and connections between your movement and the sensations which arise. So this is like an incredibly profound thing about the nature of consciousness, which is roughly speaking, Kevin's theory, which I basically roughly believe is that the quality of experience is like the pattern of movements you're able to make, and the expected consequences of those movements. So his metaphor was... if you're holding a bottle of wine in your hand, as I am now by the way, and I've nearly finished it. If you're holding a bottle of wine, you have your eyes closed, you're only touching part of the bottle of wine. But

you kind of feel the rest of it even though you're not feeling it. You know that if you move your hand upwards, it's not like, it couldn't be a tube or just like a little blocky sphere or something, even though the touch would be the same. Your perceptual experience extends beyond the current input, and it's based on expectation.

Okay. Sorry, that's the preamble. As a result of that, I ended up doing a PhD, trying to do a PhD in philosophy of perception, where the [alpha] that year was to consider what the difference between color and smell is. To do that, I did what... that tactile vision substitution system, in a way describes the difference between touch and vision because it says, "Touch feels totally different." But actually, if touch is given the same sensory motor patterns as vision, it begins to feel like vision. So you can experience vision through touch by the patterns of interaction.

So I tried to come up with a theory of how color and smell feel like they do, and my God they feel mysterious. You smell cinnamon. What connection does that have with reality? You see any color, and particularly a beautiful, rich color, the azure blue of a morning sky or green whatever of a rainforest canopy, and it feels inherently weird. Like what is the connection between your experience, this rich, intangible emotion in a way, and reality? It's very easy with vision, because you're like, "Oh, the glass looks round. It is round." It's a very kind of military connection.

But with color you're like, "Wow, that orange." I'm just looking at kind of the blinking light of an orange computer here. Actually you tune into the orange and it's like, "What the hell fucking relationship does that have to atoms bumping around space?" It seems like a totally different kind of [inaudible]. So anyway, I couldn't tell [inaudible] any longer. Sorry, Tim. Sorry, listeners. But if anyone's still here, it's been about seven hours... But anyway, so the...

Tim Ferriss: If anyone is still listening, I'm just going to interrupt, this is something that Kevin Rose, a buddy of mine, pulled on me. If anyone is still listening to this podcast, please let us know what you think. Shoot me or Ed a note on Twitter and put #EdEdGoodGood. This is an inside joke from a long time ago to let us know, but Ed, please continue.

Ed Cooke: @TedCooke on Twitter by the way.

Tim Ferriss: Yeah.

Ed Cooke:

So, and so the thought experiment I came up with, was like let's imagine you see in black and white. So your basic vision is black and white. Then when you look at what is in fact in reality a green object, you experience a particular smell, say the smell of whatever, leaves. Then you look at what is a blue object and you experience whatever, the smell of a fresh sea wind, or something like that. So arbitrary connections particularly, but the first question was, "Could you experience those as qualities of the object?" The answer I came up with was basically, "Well, of course you would." Because when I currently look at an orange object, I'm just spatially looking at it and then I'm having the experience of orange and I look away and I cease having the experience of orange. I look back and I have the experience of orange.

So if that orange was being put into my head by an evil goblin who just gave me the orange feeling every time I looked at the, in fact, orange [inaudible], which I'm seeing in black and white, but then I will experience that color as being, which the color is just in fact a smell or a sound, it could be on the object.

So the connection between movement, I address with my perceptual organs. I look at the hammock and suddenly it's going "Ching, ching, ching." Look away, it ceases to do that. I look back at it, "Ching, ching, ching." I look away it ceases to do that. After like doing that a million times, you wouldn't think that the sound was coming from any other place than the surface of the object.

Tim Ferriss: Right.

Ed Cooke: I'm still of the somewhat smug completely incoherent opinion that this is actually quite a fundamental insight into the mystery of sensations. Which is that we attribute to the cause of the sensation everything which comes with it, emotionally and [makes noise] and we kind of project those, project is actually a poor word, but it's an easy one to relate to. We kind of project those onto the surface of the object when in some sense they come from us. It's just that when we look at the object, they're there.

In a way this kind of goes back to the chats we were having earlier about our relationships with other people, and even situations and aspects of ourselves. Which is that when we think about a particular thing, if all the things that evokes in us are only evoked by that thing, we think that is a characteristic of the thing, not of our interaction with the thing or person.

Tim Ferriss: No, I love this. I want to ask you, have you experimented with removing different types of sensory input? Going a period of time without sight. Going a period of time without hearing. Anything like that?

Ed Cooke: I have occasionally done, yeah, little games like that. Not to the heroic extent of a mathematician called Seymour Papert, who trained himself to look through mirrors so the world was up-down reversed for like months at a time.

Tim Ferriss: Oh, gosh.

Ed Cooke: So that it kind of righted itself. But anyway I have had an experiment. I have done experiments with friends where you walk around town blindfolded, led by another person, and that is so cool. So you just get a good friend, someone you trust, and say, "I'm going to be blindfolded or you're going to be blindfolded, and I'm just going to lead you around town." That's magic, because you can have the experience of perceiving the world, not visually, but just through sound, and it's fun in the obvious sense, but it's also like, "Oh, wow. I actually can perceive the world through sound. And what's more, I perceive it in a different, but in many ways, richer fashion."

Since occasionally you're citing some cool books, there's a book called "Touching the Rock," by... I'm not sure if I quite remember the guy's name, but by John something or other, Holt perhaps, John Holt, but "Touching the Rock," good lit. It's the story of a guy who goes blind very, very gradually for 20 years and then finally becomes completely blind. Many interesting things about it, one of which is that he says that the difference between having a tiny crack of indeterminate light and nothing was as big as the difference between indeterminate light and full vision, because suddenly he was just in the abyss.

Tim Ferriss: Right.

Ed Cooke: There was just no visual connection. But the second thing is that, he's a kind of theologian, but he has these wonderful reflections on how he came to enjoy the world being blind. And one go-to example is that rain is the best thing for blind people, because you can hear the world in three dimensions. Because the pattering of the rain drops on the roofs, the pavement, the lamp posts, and the buildings, gives you because of the echo and because of the particular, it gives you a sense of 3D space, where most of the time your 3D space only goes like a couple of yards in front of you, and otherwise is just the void. Stuff like that which are cool games for enjoying your senses generally.

Tim Ferriss: So fascinating. Yeah. I'm sorry, go ahead.

Ed Cooke: So I was just thinking that for anyone who's endured this long, that would be kind of a valuable recommendation. It's like just drawing a few things together. Next time there's due to be a rainstorm, rather than thinking like, "Oh, no. I'm not going to be able to go to Santa Cruz and sun myself," or something, think like, get one of your best friends, go out in the rain, blindfold them, and allow them to perceive through the magic of hearing, the world in all its mysterious awesomeness, via audition.

Tim Ferriss: Oh, that's a brilliant suggestion. I also wonder, at what point will we see, and it could be done a couple of different ways technologically, but people using, let's just say blind people using something like an Oculus Rift. Or it wouldn't necessarily be an Oculus Rift, it could just be some type of device that's attached where you can upload very accurate, to the centimeter mapping, 3D mapping of the world around them, let's just say in a 10-mile radius. Or there could be some device for sensing all of this that provides them with auditory feedback or other types of feedback that tells them exactly where they are.

What this makes me think of, one of my favorite articles I've read in the last 10 years is an article in Men's Journal. I just looked it up, people can Google "The blind man who taught himself to see," and it's about Daniel Kish, K-I-S-H, and he's been sightless since he was a year old.

He can mountain bike. He can navigate the wilderness alone. He can recognize a building as far away as a thousand feet. I'm just kind of reading the subtitle here. But he does it through echolocation the same way that bats find their way around. He has the ability to click in a very, very methodical, precise way to determine exactly where things are and where he is. I'll just give people a teaser with the first paragraph, because this entire piece blew my mind.

And the first paragraph is, "The first thing Dan-" This is the author speaking, Michael Finkel, "The first thing Daniel Kish does when I pull up to his tidy gray bungalow in Long Beach, California is make fun of my driving. "You're going to leave it that far from the curb?" he asks. He's standing on his stoop, a good 10 paces from my car. I glance behind me as I walk up. I am, indeed, parked about a foot and a half from the curb." It's just so amazing.

Ed Cooke: Yeah.

Tim Ferriss: It also raises questions for me about when you just mentioned "Touching the Rock" and the difference between having just a glimmer of light perception and none, how much of a phase-shift it is, often for people who will use psychedelics, for instance or mushrooms, the difference between the normal resolution at which we view the world, and then the one-step-removed, moving upwards where we have almost an enhanced HD perception of the world, and how significantly that changes your perception of everything.

You're seeing everything with new eyes, even though it's really just one click of the dial in terms of resolution. So fascinating. Well, we have a lot to talk about. I want to let you get to your night. You've been very generous with your time and I always enjoy rapping with you.

Ed Cooke: Yeah, it's a pleasure, Tim. Really fun. On that point, by the way, just to sort of pile up the reading list, Alan Watts, who's quite a cheerful, wide-ranging, and amusing 20th century philosopher hallucinogen-taker, but I think he described himself as a spiritual entertainer. He wrote an essay called, "The Joyous Cosmology," which examines, in quite fascinating ways, a little bit, I guess what you call the phenomenology of hallucination, where he talks about exactly that. Like how it's even possible that perception can become much higher-resolution, and what it means that it is possible. I, for instance, as anyone else, I think, considers the resolution of my perception to be a function of my perceptual organs and brain. It's not an easily accessible idea that I could perceive at twice the resolution basically by paying more attention.

So anyway he's quite magic on this subject, and he talks about hallucination as a terrible term for the phenomenon, because hallucination implies distortion and unreality, whereas this is hyper-reality as he describes it. Anyway, so that's well worth the read, "The Joyous Cosmology," by Alan Watts.

Tim Ferriss: I love it. Ed, where can people find more about you, what you're up to, on the internets or otherwise?

Ed Cooke: Well, in Hackney, in the non-internet, I hang out. So come to Hackney and then [inaudible]. But yeah, memrise.com is worth a look. We have a website and an app and we're trying to make learning joyful.

If you're really into the questions about phenomenology and stuff, about the quality of experience, there's an article which can be found online called "Is Trilled Smell Possible?"

Tim Ferriss: Is what smell possible?

Ed Cooke: Trilled, in the sense of the musical note going [makes sounds].

Tim Ferriss: Right. "Is Trilled Smell Possible?"

Ed Cooke: Which is definitely, like, it's probably one of the worst, most incoherent pieces ever published in a philosophy journal, but it's quite good. Yeah, I'm @TedCooke on Twitter.

Tim Ferriss: That is Ed Cooke with an E at the end, for exceptional. Is that right?

Ed Cooke: That's exactly right. Although on Twitter I'm TedCooke because some twat had taken EdCooke.

Tim Ferriss: You're @TedCooke? Really? With a T in the beginning?

Ed Cooke: @TedCooke. Yeah. Tim, are you not following me? Jesus Christ.

Tim Ferriss: I know. I should be following you. I have all of this goodness.

Ed Cooke: Yeah.

Tim Ferriss: I'm in a bit of a social media malaise. I have a bit of digital fatigue, so I've been taking a break, of sorts, to the extent that I do. But Ed, I will let you get to your evening and your weekend. Thanks so much for jumping on.

Ed Cooke: Yeah, this has been a pleasure, Tim.

Tim Ferriss: Really fun, so we will grab some wine and get into some trouble next time you're in San Francisco.

Ed Cooke: Impeccable. See you soon, Tim.

Tim Ferriss: All right. Thanks, Ed. Bye.